

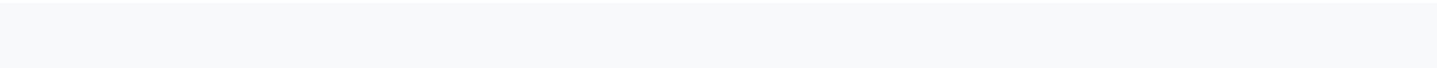
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# contents

## Articles

- Olanshile Muideen Adeyanju*  
OBJECTIVITY, SOCIAL SCIENCES, AND THE CHARGE OF INFERIORITY **9**
- Georges Alahou*  
THEMATIC ANALYSIS AND ITS INTERDISCIPLINARY INTEREST: AN  
ADVANTAGE OR A DISADVANTAGE FOR HOLTON'S PURPOSE? **29**
- Babalola Joseph Balogun*  
HOW NOT TO UNDERSTAND COMMUNITY: A CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT  
WITH R. BELLAH **55**
- Jacob Andrew Bell*  
THE REINSTATEMENT AND ONTOLOGY OF MEANING **77**
- Dejan Donev, and Denko Skalovski*  
RESPONSIBILITY IN THE TIME OF CRISIS **87**
- Dylan Futter*  
LEAR ON IRONY AND SOCRATIC METHOD **111**
- Panagiotis Kallinikos*  
POLITICAL REALISM IN THE CHINESE WARRING STATES PERIOD AND THE  
EUROPEAN RENAISSANCE: HAN FEI AND MACHIAVELLI **127**
- Željko Kaluđerović*  
EMPEDOCLES ON ENSOULED BEINGS **167**
- Stavros Karageorgakis, and Konstantina Lyrou*  
THE ESSENCE OF NATURE AND DIALECTICAL NATURALISM **185**
- Pavlos Kavouras*  
BETWEEN AND BETWIXT THE OTHER THEATRE AND THE THEATRE OF  
THE OTHER: PERFORMATIVITY AS (RE)PRESENTING, SHOW AND SELF-  
AWARENESS IN THE MYTH OF BARBA **201**
- Ndukaku Okorie*  
THE POSSIBILITIES, LIMITS, AND COMPLEXITIES OF TRIAGE IN COVID-19  
REGIME **233**

<i>Fereniki Panagopoulou-Koutnatzi, and Georgios Arabatzis</i> THE PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND AND THE ADVENTURES OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES: THE CASE OF GREECE	<b>251</b>
<i>Thiago Pinho</i> SIX STEPS TOWARDS AN OBJECT-ORIENTED SOCIAL THEORY (O.O.S.T)	<b>263</b>
<i>Uros Prokic</i> CONTEMPORARY EPISTEMOLOGY OF NATIONALISM: FALTERING FOUNDATIONALISM CONTRASTED WITH HOLISTIC COHERENTISM	<b>285</b>
<i>Georgios Steiris</i> CONFUCIUS' ONTOLOGICAL ETHICS	<b>303</b>
<b>Book reviews</b>	
<i>George Peter Bifis, Phaedra Giannopoulou, and Angeliki-Maria Argyrou</i> CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS. THE GREEK IMAGINARY: FROM HOMER TO HERACLITUS. EDITED BY E. ESCOBAR, M. GONDICAS, AND P. VERNAY. TRANSLATED BY J. V. GARNER, AND M.-C. GARRIDO SIERRALTA. EDINBURGH: EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2023	<b>325</b>
<i>Despina Vertzagia</i> ANTHONY A. LONG. SELFHOOD AND RATIONALITY IN ANCIENT GREEK PHILOSOPHY: FROM HERACLITUS TO PLOTINUS. NEW YORK: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2022	<b>339</b>



**articles**



# Objectivity, Social Sciences, and the Charge of Inferiority

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## **Abstract**

*This paper challenges the charge of inferiority, on the basis of objectivity, against the social sciences. The idea of objectivity is that facts about the state of the world and entities in it are observed or studied without a taint of personal bias, value judgement or particular perspective. The social sciences are accused of falling short of the requirements of objectivity hence they are considered inferior to the natural sciences which are claimed to merit the requirements. This paper argues that the idea of objectivity has been misleadingly conceived as a method exclusive only to the natural sciences. The paper maintains that if the concept of objectivity is conceptually analysed and conceived in a strict sense, the ideals and requirements of objectivity would be outside the ken of both the natural sciences and the social sciences. However, if the concept of objectivity is conceived in a moderate sense, the social sciences would merit being called objective as much as the natural sciences. Thus, a conceptual analysis will show that both the natural sciences and social sciences are at par on the threshold of objectivity. Thus, the paper submits that the social sciences are not inferior to the natural sciences on the basis of objectivity.*

**Keywords:** *fact; humanism; naturalism; natural science; objectivity; scientific method; social science; value judgement*

## I. Introduction

Every discipline or field of knowledge has its own objects of study. The objects of study of each discipline define the nature, method and characterisation of such discipline. Generally, most, if not all, fields of knowledge are termed the “science of” their subject matters. Hence, there are the sciences of natural phenomena such as physics,

chemistry, geology, biology and so on and there are also the sciences of social phenomena such as history, sociology, economics and so on. However, the term “science” has assumed a skewed definition and tag so as to refer only to those disciplines that are concerned with the study of natural phenomena. “Science is a process of assembling an interconnected structure of descriptive claims about nature.”<sup>1</sup> Science is the study of the physical and natural world based on a systematic method that rely on facts obtainable through experimentation and empirical observation. It would be noticed that these definitions of the term “science” already give leverage to the study of the natural phenomena. It already pronounces the fields of knowledge concerned with natural phenomena as the “sciences.” In this sense, any field of knowledge that is not concerned with natural phenomena is not considered “science.” It may, however, not be surprising that many scholars, philosophers and natural scientists, have considered physics, a field of knowledge concerned with natural phenomena, as the science par excellence.<sup>2</sup>

Every field of knowledge has the methods it applies in the study of its subject matter. A method is a way to achieve an end. Historically, the methods adopted by fields of knowledge concerned with natural phenomena have yielded positive results and advancement such that these methods are considered as the yardsticks for academic and research success. The methods of the fields of knowledge concerned with natural phenomena include observations, measurements, tests and experimentation. These methods are background and procedures for knowledge claim in these fields of knowledge. Given the relative success of the fields of knowledge concerned with natural phenomena, these fields of knowledge are termed the “sciences” and the method they adopt “scientific method.” Any other field of study devoid of these methods is deemed unscientific. The field of knowledge concerned with social phenomena is, in this light, termed unscientific. Objectivity – the freedom from personal bias, value judgement and perspective – is a characteristic of scientific methods and results and it is seen as an enviable virtue instantiated by the field of knowledge concerned with natural phenomena but lacking in the field of knowledge concerned with social phenomena.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Kosso, *A Summary of Scientific Method* (London: Springer, 2011), 39.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Hitchcock, “Introduction: What is the Philosophy of Science,” in *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Science*, ed. Christopher Hitchcock, 1-19 (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 10.

On this note, the field of knowledge concerned with social phenomena is deemed inferior to that concerned with natural phenomena. For ease of understanding, by ‘field of knowledge concerned with social phenomena,’ I mean the social sciences. Also, by ‘field of knowledge concerned with natural phenomena,’ I mean the natural sciences. The aim of this paper is to challenge the charge of inferiority against the social sciences. To achieve this, this paper is divided into two major sections. In the first section, I examine the ideal of objectivity and consider its desirability. On this point, it is important to note that some humanist scholars have maintained that the aim and goal of the social sciences is distinct from that of the natural sciences, hence, objectivity is not a character that the social sciences must necessarily have. However, I shall argue for the desirability of objectivity as a characteristic of enquiry. In the second section (and the subsections that follow), I shall engage in a conceptual analysis of objectivity in connection with how the natural sciences and the social sciences plausibly fit into this analysis. Here, I present arguments to show that the ideals and requirements of objectivity, in the strict sense, are too strong for the natural sciences to merit being exclusively tagged objective. I also argue that the social sciences satisfy the grounds upon which the natural sciences are tagged as objective.

## II. Why Objectivity is Desirable

The basic idea of the concept of objectivity is that facts about the state of the world and its entities are evaluated independent of the preferences, prejudices and perspective of the evaluator. Objectivity implies realism – the idea that the world exists independently of the observer’s mind or action. Two implications, both metaphysical and epistemological, follow from this. One, the idea of independent existence implies that the facts about the state of the world and its entities exist whether we know them or not. Second, these facts can be known and one can find out the truth about the laws that govern them.<sup>3</sup> If this is the case then it becomes an epistemic virtue to observe facts about the state of the world independent of personal or group bias and present the truth value of these facts as they actually are.

Some scholars attribute the gulf between objectivity in the natural sciences and objectivity in the social sciences to the differences in

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<sup>3</sup> Arthur Fine, “Scientific Realism and Antirealism,” in *The Shorter Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig, 950-953 (New York: Routledge, 2005), 950.

the objects of study. Natural phenomena are such that are factually presented and physically accessible. They exist independent of what we think of them. The task of the natural sciences is to discover the natural laws that govern these phenomena so as to produce results that are backed by the fundamentals of these laws. In this sense, it is assumed that the natural scientist can be objective about his/her object of study since his/her research is underlay by scientific methods. On the other hand, the social sciences seek to understand social phenomena which are complex, contingent and value-laden. It is assumed that the characteristics of the objects of study in the social sciences cannot give room for an objective observation. The nature of the object of study of the social sciences, it is argued, cannot be divorced from value judgement, hence the lack of objectivity. As earlier stated, some humanists maintain that attaining objectivity is not necessarily the business of the social sciences. The social sciences are conceived as a different field of knowledge both in method and subject matter from the natural sciences. As a result, the characteristics of the methods of the social sciences need not be similar to that of the natural sciences. However, naturalists argue that the ideals of objectivity are attainable and must be pursued by the social sciences too.

It is, thus, important to address the issue of the desirability of objectivity. Is objectivity worthy of being pursued in a field of knowledge? An affirmative answer is in order here. One reason for the desirability of objectivity in the study of facts about the world is trust. Trust is both a moral and epistemic virtue. Morally, people are inclined to have faith in a scientist whose stock-in-trade is objectivity in the study of natural phenomena. Epistemically, people would justifiably believe in the findings that result from objective research. For instance, the results of the research in the natural sciences are held as true and the recommendations are considered reliable because of the character of objectivity involved in the research. The same does not apply to the results from the researches in the social sciences where it is assumed that the researcher's bias colour his/her findings. Some people may likely disagree with the results of a research in the social sciences if they observe a difference in religious or racial affiliation with the researcher. This may render the results and recommendations from the researches in the social sciences useless and the question of the importance of embarking on such researches is likely to arise. If trust is a virtue and it is derivable from objectivity in research, then objectivity is desirable.

Since the natural sciences and social sciences are fields of knowledge which offer us knowledge about the world, then it is

important to make our study about the world independent of our opinions and prejudices. Objectivity helps to substantiate evidence and organise theories that challenge our beliefs. Objectivity helps in providing the true nature of the world which in turn underlies our sense of justification for actions. Objectivity allows for intellectual criticism and rational debate in decision making which informs empirical success in the field of knowledge it is characteristic of. Objectivity also serves as a ground for epistemic authority. In the business of producing knowledge, a field of knowledge that is objective assumes a position of authority with regards to the knowledge it produces in terms of reliability and also applicability. On a larger scale, it is believed that objectivity provides the ground for a basic distinction between fact and value. This distinction between fact and value “has proven its utility for enlightenment and emancipation by providing a powerful tool for exposing ideological distortion and political manipulation.”<sup>4</sup>

These reasons, among others, define why objectivity is a worthy and desirable characteristic of research. The presence of objectivity signifies scientism while the lack of it implies unscientificness. Eleonora Montuschi has this in mind when she says:

A paradigm of objective knowledge is fixed – i.e. natural science – and by claiming that there is only one way to be objective (the way of natural science), social scientific knowledge then becomes objective only if it follows the method and procedures of natural science. ‘Being scientific’ according to the model of science purportedly instantiated by natural science – is treated as the ideal to be emulated by any discipline that seeks to produce reliable information about its object of inquiry. ‘Scientific knowledge,’ on this view, is considered to be the highest ranked type of knowledge which a field of inquiry should aim at.<sup>5</sup>

The social sciences are, on the basis of this understanding of objectivity, considered inferior to the natural science. I intend to challenge this claim by embarking on a conceptual analysis of the concept of objectivity to argue that the social sciences are not inferior to the natural science.

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<sup>4</sup> Gerald Doppelt, “The Value Ladenness of Scientific Knowledge,” in *Value-Free Science? Ideals or Illusions*, eds. Harold Kincaid, John Dupré, and Alison Wylie, 188-217 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 188.

<sup>5</sup> Eleonora Montuschi, *The Objects of Social Science* (London: Continuum, 2003), 1.

### III. Conceptualising Objectivity

As the term “science” has been restricted in application to the natural sciences, so also is the idea of objectivity. Objectivity is assessed based on its scientific application. This, alongside other reasons, is why the natural sciences are considered objective and superior to the social sciences. In what follows, I shall try to engage some conceptualisations of the term, “objectivity.”

#### a. Helen Longino on the Conception of Objectivity

According to Helen Longino, objectivity is conceived in two ways. First, it is conceived in relation to scientific realism. Second, it is conceived in relation to mode of inquiry. In the first conception, any field of knowledge that provides an accurate description of the facts about the state of the world as they are is termed objective. In the second conception, a field of knowledge is termed objective when the view provided by it “is achieved by reliance upon nonarbitrary and non-subjective criteria for developing, accepting, and rejecting hypotheses and theories that make up the view.”<sup>6</sup> On these two conceptions, the tag of objectivity fits the natural sciences. Longino maintains that criticisms from alternative point of view and the subjection of hypothesis to critical scrutiny are required for objectivity.<sup>7</sup> These two seem to be incompatible in understanding objectivity. Longino, however, argues that they must be seen as two poles of a continuum that are engaged in constant dialogue. She therefore conceives objectivity as a matter of degree.

On this account, Longino states that “a method of inquiry is objective to the degree that it permits *transformative* criticism.”<sup>8</sup> She lists four criteria that are necessary for the achievement of transformative criticism. They are: recognised avenue for criticism, shared standards by critics, community response to such criticism and equality of intellectual authority.<sup>9</sup> If one agrees with Longino on the conception of objectivity as a matter of degree based on those criteria, then the social sciences are in no way inferior to the natural sciences. Social findings are subjected to criticism in public forums such as peer-review journal and conferences. Critics in the social sciences have shared standards such as empirical adequacy and relevance to social needs that inform the formulation of

<sup>6</sup> Helen E. Longino, *Science as Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 62.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

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

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-79.



their criticisms. The social community develops trust in the social findings that have undergone thorough critique. Alternative views possess equal intellectual authority and are allowed to thrive. These criteria can be found, for instance, in the social inquiry into the phenomenon of segregation.

I consider Longino's conception of objectivity inadequate because it conceives objectivity by what it does and how it works and not by what it actually is. Longino's position that to be objective is to be permissive of transformative criticism implies that objectivity is to be understood by what it does in a method of inquiry. This does not give a true account of what objectivity actually is that makes it desirable and a yardstick of apportioning the superiority-inferiority tag to fields of knowledge.

#### b. Lorraine Daston on the Conception of Objectivity

For Lorraine Daston, the concept of objectivity is neither monolithic nor immutable.<sup>10</sup> This is because the meaning of objectivity is a combination of different understandings. Daston maintains that there are historical conceptions of objectivity which are linked to the history of scientific practices and ideals. This is to say that the conception of objectivity changes with development in the sciences. In the late eighteenth century, the conception of objectivity is ontological, and it concerns the ultimate structure of reality. Citing examples from writings on ontology by philosophers such as Rene Descartes and George Berkeley, Daston argues that the idea of objectivity is conceived as it concerns a fit between theory and the world.<sup>11</sup> Talking about perception, Berkeley states that the real and objective nature are the same where objective refers to what is perceived.<sup>12</sup> Descartes also talks about objective reality in arguing for an indubitable knowledge.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the conception of the term is related to ontological concerns.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, there is the mechanical conception of objectivity which is about suppressing the universal human propensity to judge. This "forbids interpretation in reporting and picturing scientific results."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Lorraine Daston, "Objectivity and the Escape from Perspective," *Social Studies of Science* 22, no. 4 (1992): 597.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 600-601.

<sup>12</sup> George Berkeley, *Siris*, Section 292, quoted in the *Oxford English Dictionary* article "Objective" as quoted in Daston, "Objectivity and the Escape from Perspective," 601.

<sup>13</sup> Rene Descartes, "Meditation III," *Meditationes de prima philosophia* (1641), quoted in Daston, 600.

<sup>14</sup> Daston, 600-602.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 597.

For Daston, the third historical conception is aperspectival which is imported into the sciences as a result of interdisciplinary communication among disciplines. It is concerned with the elimination of individual or group idiosyncrasies. It is conceived as a means of de-individualising research to achieve a universal sort of knowledge – a knowledge devoid of personal bias colouration.<sup>16</sup> For her, this third conception of objectivity does not constitute the whole of objectivity but it has become dominant in current usage of the term. How well do the social sciences fit into the aperspectival conception of objectivity, that is, the idea of eliminating individual or group idiosyncrasies?

To answer this question, I would like to rephrase it thus: how well do the natural sciences and the social sciences fit into aperspectival conception of objectivity? In other words, do researches in the natural sciences and the social sciences depend on personal preferences and idiosyncratic experiences? I think there are two ways of addressing the question. With the view of eliminating individual or group idiosyncrasies in research, one must consider the choice of what to research in and the outcome or result of the research. Considering the choice of what to research, no science is completely free from the peculiarity and distinctiveness of its object of study. In carrying out research on a particular phenomenon, a physicist is conditioned, as much as an economist is, by the peculiarities of his/her field of knowledge. Considering the outcome or result of the research, the social sciences are as objective as the natural sciences in de-individualising research with the aim of achieving a universal sort of knowledge. One concern that may be raised with regards to findings in the social sciences is that the findings are contingent and value-laden. But the contingency of social findings is not a result of personal colouration but that of the nature of the social phenomena. Hence, it still goes to say that social scientists report the findings of their research as they are presented. On this basis then, the social sciences are not inferior to the natural sciences.

### c. Heather Douglas on the Conception of Objectivity

The aperspectival conception of objectivity is rejected by Heather Douglas in the sense that it does not suit an operationalisable definition of objectivity “that can be applied to deciding whether something is actually objective.”<sup>17</sup> Douglas states that the aperspectival conception

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 613.

<sup>17</sup> Heather Douglas, “Rejecting the Ideal of Value-Free Science,” in *Value-Free Science? Ideals*

is a metaphysical notion of objectivity and it does not play a helpful role in evaluating the objectivity of the fields of knowledge.<sup>18</sup> Douglas' rejection of the aperspectival conception of objectivity is based on his conviction that the conception entails the notion of value-freedom. The idea of value-freedom is the freedom of scientific (or social science) claims and practices from political, moral and social values. For him, it is possible to conceive objectivity in a sense separable from the idea of value freedom and this can be done in seven different ways.

The first two conceptions of objectivity, according to Douglas, are focused on human interaction with the world. One is manipulable objectivity and the second is convergent objectivity. In the first conception, a case where the findings of a field of knowledge can be used to intervene in the world and such intervention proves successful, such field of knowledge is manipulably objective. In the second conception, when different and independent studies are carried out with regards to a particular phenomenon and the same results occur in all studies, then such results are reliably objective in a convergent sense.<sup>19</sup>

The third and fourth conceptions focus on individual thought process. Douglas states that the value-free conception of objectivity is mistaken to be a conception under this category but it is to be rejected and replaced with detached objectivity and value-neutrality objectivity. Detached objectivity is the sense in which the use of value in place of evidence is prohibited. A researcher's value judgement should not becloud the true nature of his/her findings. Value-neutrality objectivity implies a mid-range position in any debate without taking a strong stance in influencing judgement. Douglas, however, states that the value-neutrality sense of objectivity has limited applicability and is not always desirable.<sup>20</sup>

Douglas' last three conceptions of objectivity are related to social processes, namely *procedural*, *concordant*, and *interactive* conceptions of objectivity. Procedural objectivity "occurs when a process is set up such that regardless of who is performing that process, the same outcome is always produced."<sup>21</sup> Concordant objectivity "occurs when a group of people all agree on an outcome, be it a description of an

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or *Illusions*, eds. Harold Kincaid, John Dupré, and Alison Wylie, 120-139 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 131.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 132-133.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 133-134.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 134.

observation or a judgment of an event.”<sup>22</sup> The agreement here is not arrived at through a rigid process but by the mere nature of the fact agreed upon. Interactive objectivity “occurs when an appropriately constituted group of people meet and discuss what the outcome should be.”<sup>23</sup> On the last conception of objectivity, Douglas raises questions that may prove problematic for interactive objectivity. They include,

What is an appropriately constituted group? How diverse and with what expertise? How are the discussions to be framed? And what counts as agreement reached among the members of the group?<sup>24</sup>

These questions are problematic and they bear on the concept of objectivity itself. The questions demand for the *objective* criteria for setting standards for objectivity. In other words, we want to assess objectivity by some standards but we need these standards to be objective in their own right too. More so, I find the interactive conception of objectivity as rather begging the question. Are natural scientists and social scientists to meet and discuss what the outcome of a study should be or discuss what the outcome is? If objectivity implies realism, then objectivity requires that we report findings about the state of the world as they are not as we think they should be.

The concordant conception of objectivity recognises this distinction and is in line with the fact that objectivity is about being true-to-nature, that is, finding the truth about the state of the world as it actually is. I doubt the general applicability of the procedural conception of objectivity. It requires that objectivity obtains when the same result is always produced from a performing a process regardless of who is performing it. It is evident in the history of the natural sciences that previously held positions give way for a superior position with regards to study of a particular phenomenon. In astronomy for instance, heliocentrism replaced geocentrism when it was discovered that a different outcome was produced in the process of studying the solar system. The procedural conception of objectivity is too strong for the natural sciences to always merit and the contingent nature of social phenomena makes it difficult for the social sciences to merit the conception too. However, if concordant objectivity is to be loosely conceived to mean having the same outcome until a major change occurs then the social sciences as well as the natural sciences can count as objective.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Contrary to Douglas' claim that an aperspectival conception of objectivity connotes value-freedom and should be rejected,<sup>25</sup> I think an aperspectival conception of objectivity shares similarity with detached objectivity which he claims is devoid of the notion of value-freedom. Detached objectivity prohibits using values in the place of evidence. It requires that value-judgement should not becloud the outcome of result. This is in no way different from the idea of eliminating personal idiosyncrasies from research and its outcome. These two conceptions of objectivity involve "distancing" the researcher from the results of research. In this case, I maintain that the same line of reasoning that affects the aperspectival conception of objectivity also applies to the detached conception of objectivity.

Findings in some fields of the social sciences have been used to predict future occurrences and intervene in solving problems in the world. In economics, the forces of demand and supply can be used to control prices of commodity. Although, this is not with a complete dose of accuracy. But if objectivity is based on the sense of manipulability, where objects are sufficiently understood to be applied in intervening in states of the world, then the social sciences share the same success and failure rates as the natural sciences. This is so especially if one connects this understanding of objectivity with another basis of comparison between the social sciences and the natural sciences, that is, predictability of future events. According to Fritz Machlup, the only advantage that the natural sciences have over the social sciences is that predictability in the natural sciences is mostly controlled and derivable from laboratory experiments. When it comes to issues in the real world, the manipulable objectivity of the natural sciences is called to question.<sup>26</sup> The demand of manipulable objectivity is therefore too high for the natural sciences to meet or understood to accommodate some token of failure rate. On the latter consideration, both the social sciences and the natural sciences can be tagged as objective in the manipulable sense.

#### d. Julian Reiss and Jan Sprenger on the Conception of Objectivity

For Julian Reiss and Jan Sprenger, there are two broad categories of understanding the concept of objectivity.<sup>27</sup> One is product objectivity

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>26</sup> Fritz Machlup, "Are the Social Sciences Really Inferior?" in *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science*, eds. Michael Martin, and Lee C. McIntyre, 5-19 (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994), 13-14.

<sup>27</sup> Julian Reiss, and Jan Sprenger, "Scientific Objectivity," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2017 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/scientific-objectivity>.

which states that a field of knowledge is objective in that its products – theories, laws, experimental results and observations – constitute accurate representations of the world. The second is process objectivity which states that a field of knowledge is objective in that the processes and methods that characterise it neither depend on contingent social and ethical values nor on the individual bias of a researcher.<sup>28</sup> It is important to state that Reiss and Sprenger define objectivity with relation to the term “science” and the term as it is used refers to the natural sciences. Since my aim in this paper to argue that objectivity is not an exclusive characteristic of the natural sciences, I reformulated the definitions in a more general way to include any field of study. Another important thing to note about these broad categories of understanding objectivity is that they overlap with Douglas’ conceptions of objectivity and the aperspectival conception.<sup>29</sup>

Under the two broad categories of understanding objectivity, Reiss and Sprenger further classify objectivity into three conceptions. These are; objectivity as faithfulness to facts, objectivity as absence of normative commitment and value-freedom, and objectivity as absence of personal bias.<sup>30</sup> To begin with, the conception of objectivity as faithfulness to facts implies scientific realism. It implies that facts exist independent of human mind.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the field of knowledge that faithfully describes these facts the way they are is objective. Put differently, a field of knowledge that successfully describes facts about the state of the world merits the ideal of objectivity. In this regard, the natural sciences are assumed to record more success than the social sciences.

For one, the natural sciences are believed to postulate that the properties of things in the world exist independent of our perceptions and this suggests that there is a true nature of things. Secondly, the natural sciences are believed to postulate, analyse, systematise and theorise the true nature of these things or facts. The social sciences, by nature of the objects of their study, are believed to be disadvantaged because of the value ladenness of the objects of their study. The social scientists’ study is mostly hitched to morality, religion and other social phenomena that are value-laden. Hence, the social sciences are considered not faithful to fact and consequently not objective. The

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> These broad categories of understanding objectivity share some common features with Douglas’ six conceptions of objectivity and also the aperspectival conception of objectivity.

<sup>30</sup> Reiss, and Sprenger.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

questions one should ask in analysing this conception of objectivity are: What are facts? What are values? Are values completely separable from facts? Simply and loosely defined, fact means being the case, being truly in existence.<sup>32</sup> Value, on the other hand, means the quality that renders something desirable. “Facts are often taken as something objective, values as subjective.”<sup>33</sup> The natural sciences take pride in dealing with facts hence objective, while the social sciences which are value-laden are termed subjective.

However, the distinction between fact and value is not crystal clear. Some scholars have maintained that facts and values are social constructs which depend on the subjective interests or needs of people rather than being independent of the world of nature or morality.<sup>34</sup> This point of view is antirealism. It implies, contrary to realism, that nothing exists independent of the human mind. This view holds that human beings or societies bring into existence, through the use of language and other social apparatuses, natural and social objects for various human purposes. The basis of what these objects express or embody is the dictate of the people or society. This antirealist point of view surely provides another angle of assessing the fact-value distinction but its plausibility is easily called to question with the realisation of the existence of real objects. The objects depend on language not for their reality but for their description.

For Ernest Nagel, a preliminary distinction in the nature of value/value-judgement is important in drawing a distinction between facts and values. There is appraising value judgement which expresses approval or disapproval in a thing. This is normative and is not in tandem with factuality. There is also characterising value judgement which assesses whether entities possess certain properties. This is descriptive and a part of factual claims. For Nagel, these two views of value judgement are subsumable but it is not impossible to separate them in our expression about entities in the world.<sup>35</sup> Thus, there is a sense of value judgement which is in line with making factual claims, a pointer to the fact that there is no complete separability between facts and values. On the conception of objectivity as faithfulness to facts, it is intelligible to

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<sup>32</sup> A conceptual discussion of the term “fact” will yield more contested definitions and critical characterisation.

<sup>33</sup> Ray Lepley, “The Verifiability of Facts and Values,” *Philosophy of Science* 5, no. 3 (1938): 310.

<sup>34</sup> Doppelt, 188-189.

<sup>35</sup> Ernest Nagel, *The Structure of Science: Problems in the Logic of Scientific Explanation* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961), 490-494.

argue that the value-ladenness of the social sciences is not an aversion to making factual claims. If the natural sciences can be termed as objective on this ground, I hold that the social sciences too merit being termed as objective.

The discussion so far has been on the adherence of a field of knowledge to fact as opposed to value. On a converse note, there is a manner in which the sciences, especially natural sciences are also conceived as value-laden. The natural sciences are not completely value-free as some scholars would want us to believe. According to Helen Longino, the idea of value-freedom in the natural sciences is misconstrued due to a conflation between two conceptions of values, namely constitutive and contextual values. For her, “scientific practice is governed by norms and values generated from an understanding of the goals of scientific inquiry.”<sup>36</sup> These values are generated from the satisfaction of the criteria of truth, accuracy, simplicity and predictability. These are constitutive values which determine what constitutes acceptable scientific practice. These values are inseparable from any science and they are to be distinguished from contextual values which are personal, social and cultural oriented values that influence research. Contextual values are what any field of knowledge that is to be properly called objective must be independent from.<sup>37</sup>

From the foregoing, it is clear that to conceive objectivity as faithfulness to fact raises conceptual concerns that suggest that facts and values are not completely separable and that the social sciences are not averse to making factual claims or describing facts in or about the world as they are. Conversely, if objectivity is conceived as avoidance of value, then the natural sciences would be devoid of objectivity. But if the idea of value is clearly distinguished, as done by Longino,<sup>38</sup> it becomes clear that the natural sciences, just like the social sciences, are not completely value-free. It is, thus, important to state that the natural sciences are *constitutive value-laden* as much as the social sciences and the social sciences are *contextual value-free* as much as the natural sciences.

The second conception of objectivity as classified by Reiss and Sprenger is objectivity as absence of normative commitment and the value-free ideal.<sup>39</sup> Objectivity requires that a field of knowledge should

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<sup>36</sup> Longino, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 4-7.

<sup>39</sup> Reiss, and Sprenger.



be value-free. But as observed earlier, it is almost impossible to have a completely value-free field of knowledge. As argued by Longino, there are two conceptions of values and it is the contextual values that an objective field of knowledge must be free from.<sup>40</sup>

Some natural scientists agree that values affect some stages of research in the natural sciences such as in the choice of a scientific research problem and the application of scientific research results. For instance, a natural scientist or a funding group or a government make the choice of a research problem and decide on the application of its result. This is usually underlined by normative commitments. Whether it is research into the cure of Ebola, Lassa Fever or COVID- 19, the choice depends on the agent of research which in turn is informed by other factors. These factors may be personal for an individual (maybe a family member of such individual is suffering from a disease). It may be for financial reward in the case a funding group and it may be for the political reason to remain in power for a sponsoring government. However, there are core stages of research in the natural sciences which natural scientists claim the factor of value cannot penetrate. These are the stages of gathering evidence and accepting scientific theories. These stages, as claimed by the natural scientists, are part of what makes the natural sciences merit objectivity and the social sciences do not.

There are two ways to respond to this claim. One is by upholding a strict adherence to the idea of objectivity in gathering evidence and accepting scientific or social theories. Another way is maintaining a moderate adherence to the idea of objectivity. By strict adherence, I mean a total commitment to the idea of value-freedom in those stages of research. How possible is this total commitment in the natural sciences? This invokes a consideration of the relationship between evidence and theory. A body of evidence often informs the theoretical account of a research problem. However, there are cases of missing gaps in using evidence to determine theory. In such cases, values set in.

Let us consider the case of pain and the scientific research into the cure of pain. A group of scientists (pharmacists) who wants to produce a medicine for the cure of pain, say heartburn, cannot correctly ascertain if the medication produced will yield positive result if they had not experienced heartburn themselves before or encountered someone who has. Pain is relative and what pain is like for an individual is different from what it is like for another individual even if the descriptions are similar. It is almost impossible for the natural scientists to refrain

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<sup>40</sup> Longino, 4.

completely from using their own personal experiences in collecting data to substantiate or refute their hypotheses. Personal preferences for scientific goals such as accuracy or simplicity set in. Simplicity may not imply accuracy and vice versa. Thus, maintaining a strict adherence to value-freedom in the core stages of research in the natural sciences seems impossible. In this sense, the ideals of objectivity would prove too strong for the natural sciences to merit.

Moderate adherence to value-freedom in the core stages of research is permissive of values in the case of a gap between evidence and theory, but these values must be scientific values which are not opposed to the goals of science. Here, the social sciences would merit the requirements of objectivity as much as the natural sciences. The impossibility of having a total commitment to the idea of value-freedom might have influenced Heather Douglas to hold that objectivity can be understood in a sense separable from the idea of value-freedom.<sup>41</sup> An understanding of objectivity delinked from value-freedom, as espoused by Douglas and as earlier discussed, still shows that the social sciences merit the ideals of objectivity.

The third conception of objectivity as classified by Reiss and Sprenger is “the idea of absence of personal bias.”<sup>42</sup> That is, personal biases are absent from scientific reasoning. This does not apply to the choice of scientific research or the application of scientific results but to results, outcomes of scientific research. The natural sciences are claimed to trump the social sciences in this regard because of the nature of the object of study of the social sciences. For instance, the study of human actions or other social phenomena that are products of human actions such as rape, racism or political apathy are such that a social scientist’s views tend to influence the result of the research into such phenomena. A social scientist’s moral or religious leanings or political views are said to affect outcome of research into cases of rape or political apathy. Hence, value in the social sciences taints evidence.

I think this is not always the case in the social sciences. For instance, John Dupré argues that the separation of evidence from values is deeply ingrained in economics. He states that there are two branches of economics, namely normative economics and positive economics. Normative economics is the aspect of economics that deals with the evaluation of the benefits of economic factors to the society. Positive economics, which he claims is the more prestigious branch, is the aspect that maintains that there is a set of economic facts and laws that

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<sup>41</sup> Douglas, 121.

<sup>42</sup> Reiss, and Sprenger.

economists are concerned in discovering and studying. These facts and laws are out there independent of an economist's bias.<sup>43</sup> Max Weber, who holds that the social sciences are value-laden, posits that the role of value in the social sciences need not extend to the outcomes of the research.<sup>44</sup> Thus, conceiving objectivity as an absence of personal bias, the social sciences ticked the box of objectivity since a researcher's bias is separated from his/her research outcomes. It is important to note that all the conceptions of objectivity are not exhausted here. But it is instructive to also state that most conceptions of objectivity are largely subsumable in one another, thereby indicative of the fact that most conceptions of objectivity overlap.

#### IV. Conclusion

In the discussion above, I have tried to examine different ways in which objectivity has been conceived with relation to how the social sciences fare on the scale of objectivity assessment. As argued, a conceptual analysis of the concept of objectivity shows that the social sciences also merited the ideals of objectivity just like the natural sciences. Contrary to the charge of inferiority against the social sciences based on the basis of objectivity, I submitted that the social sciences are not inferior to the natural sciences. There is another dimension to the argument that deserves a significant mention. It is the humanist-naturalist debate. "The 'naturalist' view which holds that social science involves no essential differences from the natural sciences, and the 'humanist' view which holds that social life cannot adequately be studied 'scientifically.'"<sup>45</sup>

Naturalism as an approach in the social sciences is informed by two things. First and majorly is its position that all entities in the universe are natural or can be understood as part of nature. In understanding nature, there are the principles of unity, regularity and wholeness which all signify objective laws. Second is the idea of unity of science. The idea that all the natural sciences, and by extension the social sciences, must be unified into a unified science of singular enquiry about nature. More so, the evident success of the natural sciences, especially physics, in understanding the world and producing theories for solving many

<sup>43</sup> John Dupré, "Fact and Value," in *Value-Free Science? Ideals or Illusions*, eds. Harold Kincaid, John Dupré, and Alison Wylie, 27-41 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 35.

<sup>44</sup> Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, trans. and eds. Edward Shils, and Henry Finch (New York: Free Press, 1968).

<sup>45</sup> Brian Fay, and Donald J. Moon, "What Would an Adequate Philosophy of Social Science Look Like?" *Philosophy of Social Science* 7, no. 3 (1977): 209.

problems has also informed the attempt to incorporate into the social sciences the methods of the natural sciences. Thus, the crux of the naturalist approach in the social sciences is that social phenomena are natural and can be explained and understood using the methods of the natural sciences.

Some of the problems associated with the naturalist position (which I do not intend to engage here) include the question of whether it is everything in nature that is empirically accessible or understood in a “physicalist” manner. Also, what is the nature of the unity of science to be? Is it to be one of collaboration (among all natural sciences and social sciences), logical inference (of issues in the sciences) or reduction of one science into the other? As regard these questions, some have argued that the objects of study in some particular sciences are uniquely different and deserve a unique approach different from that of the natural sciences. This view is shared by the humanists in the social sciences. It is believed that social phenomena such as human actions and behaviours are uniquely different from natural phenomena and cannot be studied the same way the natural phenomena are studied. Humanism in the social sciences is given to interpreting the meanings of aspects of the social life, understanding them within their own terms.<sup>46</sup> The concern of the social sciences is conceivably different from that of the natural sciences and this is enough reason that the method of enquiry does not necessarily have to be the same.

This debate on the approach to the enquiry into social phenomena has a connection to the idea of objectivity. As earlier observed, the natural sciences are held as the Paradigm for objective knowledge and the claim that the only way to be objective is to follow the methods and procedures of the natural sciences indicates that the naturalist approach in the social sciences is geared towards objectivity while the humanist approach steers away from it.<sup>47</sup> Is this actually the case? Given the arguments I have examined so far, my answer is in the negative. The notion of objectivity is skewedly defined in a way that is exclusively instantiated by the natural sciences. A conceptual analysis of objectivity, as done above, has shown that the natural sciences do not necessarily and exclusively instantiate objectivity. In different ways in which objectivity can be conceived, the social sciences are shown to merit it as much as the natural sciences do. The concern here is not about which is more adequate approach between humanism and naturalism in the social sciences. The concern is about how these

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>47</sup> Montuschi, 1.

two approaches to the enquiry of social phenomena can actually be constructed in a way as to merit the ideals of objectivity as much as the natural sciences. Hence, the social sciences are not inferior to the natural sciences on the basis of objectivity.

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# Thematic Analysis and its Interdisciplinary Interest: An Advantage or a Disadvantage for Holton's Purpose?\*

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## Abstract

*The term “thematic analysis” abounds in research articles and appears in the titles of books, without the authors of these writings being primarily concerned with defining what thematic analysis is. Thematic analysis is present in the current vocabulary of several disciplines and is presented as a working method of choice in psychology, sociology, or linguistics, to name but a few. This article seeks to situate thematic analysis in the thinking of Holton Gerald, who introduced it into the philosophy of science as a rational approach that can account for scientific discovery and progress. The aim of this article is to see whether the attested interdisciplinary interest nature of thematic analysis argues in favour or against Holton's claim of making it a credible and acceptable tool in philosophy of science.*

**Keywords:** *thematic analysis; interdisciplinary interest; themata; Holton; method*

## I. Introduction

Gerald James Holton has devoted much of his research in philosophy and history of science to themata.<sup>1</sup> He highlighted the importance of their role in scientific research and established thematic analysis as a way of accessing the mechanism of scientific

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<sup>1</sup> Most of Holton's publications are now openly available at this address: [https://dash.harvard.edu/discover?rpp=10&etal=0&group\\_by=none&page=1&filtertype\\_0=author&filter\\_relational\\_operator\\_0=contains&filter\\_0=Gerald+Holton](https://dash.harvard.edu/discover?rpp=10&etal=0&group_by=none&page=1&filtertype_0=author&filter_relational_operator_0=contains&filter_0=Gerald+Holton).

\* This article is an edited chapter from the author's PhD Thesis. Quotations from works originally written in French are the author's translations.

invention. What is thematic analysis? When do its origins go back to? What are its characteristics and what are its areas of application? If we truly want to comprehend what thematic analysis is as Holton meant it to be, another question that is just as important as the two previous questions must be answered. Indeed, should we view this relationship as advantageous or disadvantageous for Holton's purposes, given that it is clear from works on thematic analysis that one has a close relationship with a number of fields, including sociology, history, and psychology? This essay focuses almost entirely on providing answers to these various questions. That being said, we will only briefly discuss themata and assume that their effectiveness in the field of research is already a fact. The guiding idea of this article is as follows: answering the questions posed above will allow us to specify, enrich and render persuasive the key role that thematic analysis plays in the field of the philosophy of science. This is undoubtedly the challenge we must meet to give thematic analysis its credibility and its value as a rational method to the explanation of scientific research.

### I. What is thematic analysis? What are its origins?

To answer these questions, it is appropriate to be more precise, from the outset, about the terms "analysis" and "thematic." The word "analysis" should be understood here as a method of discovering and explaining elements of discourse (oral or written) or events, laws or principles that are likely to present various aspects precisely because of their complexity. As for the word "thematic," it should be noted that for the common sense, it is understood as the study of themes – a theme being sometimes: (i) what a work of art deals with, in opposition to the representation that the work makes of it;<sup>2</sup> (ii) the practice of translating from one's mother tongue into another language;<sup>3</sup> (iii) the idea developed in a speech, an article, a work, etc.;<sup>4</sup> (iv) "a unity of content (of a discourse, of a text) which can be isolated or identified by lexical means and which corresponds to constants of the imagination, of the symbolism."<sup>5</sup> But, here, the word "thematic" is rather related to what Holton calls themata. Through this concept of Greek origin

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Marie Schaeffer, "Thème," in *Encyclopédie Philosophique (M-Z): Les Notions Philosophiques. Tome 2* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990), 2583.

<sup>3</sup> "Thème," in *Dictionnaire Français*, 2021, <https://www.linternaute.fr/dictionnaire/fr/definition/theme/>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> "Thème," in *Dictionnaire de La Langue Française* (Paris : Le Robert, 2005).



(*thema* in the singular, conception, what is posed, what is put forward), he designates the nourishing themes of thought that motivate as much as they restrain both the generation of ideas and the advancement of concepts. Themata turn out to be the preferred themes of an author, a scholar, or a philosopher, sometimes even taking on the appearance of an unconscious obsession that often has its roots in childhood.

Holton relies on themata, because of the importance of their function in the creative activity of science, to remind those who want to consider only “demonstrative reason” to explain scientific research that human thought is heterogeneous.<sup>6</sup> As is the case, Holton offers themata as a compelling argument that forces scientists to reckon with the “creative unconscious” or “creative imagination” when considering innovation and scientific progress. Holton makes this idea explicit by symbolising, in the first instance, by the two orthogonal (x and y) axes of a plane (xy) “the propositions concerning empirical facts” and “those concerning logic and mathematics” which form the basis of the usual scientific discourse. Subsequently, he points out that this representation is insufficient to account for scientific research unless the xy-plane is associated with the orthogonal z-axis of thematic content.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Holton counts, in the field of physics, about fifty themata, and estimates that, throughout history, in all of science, their number would not exceed one hundred. The rise of a new *thema* is extremely rare, as is the withdrawal of a *thema* from the field of knowledge. Following Holton’s work, this observation leads us to regard themata as generally stable structures, constants of the scientific imagination, preconceived ideas or presuppositions (sometimes of a metaphysical nature) that operate in scientific research either in the shape of concepts (e.g. *simplicity*, *continuity-discontinuity*), or as a working method or as hypothetical propositions that guide scientists in their research activities. Now that the definition of the word “themata” has been clarified, what about the thematic analysis that emanates from themata and from which it is inseparable?

Thematic analysis is in fact related to analysis in general. A precise definition of thematic analysis can only be derived from our fundamental knowledge of analysis. And from an elementary point of view, analysis in general is a method (a process of dissecting a whole into its components and determining their connections). Thematic analysis is regarded as a method used in many academic fields, including

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<sup>6</sup> Ivana Marková, “Themata in Science and in Common Sense,” *Kairos* 19, no. 1 (2017): 68-92.

<sup>7</sup> Gerald Holton, *Einstein, History, and Other Passions: The Rebellion Against Science at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 158.

sociology and musicology. More specifically, thematic analysis is used as a method of detecting central terms in order to understand what hides their frequency or their importance in the structuring or construction of a work, a text or a discourse. Here, the term “discourse” refers to discursive reasoning that is transmitted verbally or in writing. According to Holton, thematic analysis goes back, historically, to the very origins of science: “The method of dealing with complex entities by resolution or reduction found its use in science itself very early.”<sup>8</sup> It was the founding father of science among the Greeks, Thales, that insisted – after all – that a single entity explains everything! But before Holton gave thematic analysis its rightful place in the study of scientific activity in the 1970s and 80s, it had already begun to prove itself in other fields such as linguistics and cultural anthropology.

The use of thematic analysis with Holton is limited to the history and philosophy of science, meaning that it was practised independently of Holton or before Holton. This being the case, thematic analysis presented in this way, at first glance, is obviously similar to literary criticism, and it is easy to understand why an author like Jean-Paul Weber makes it an element of the “new criticism.”<sup>9</sup> This notion of “new criticism” is one of the most significant metamorphoses of literary criticism. It emerged in the French academic world and had as its leader Roland Barthes and as its symbol or starting point the publication of Barthes’ essay on Racine in 1963. The proponents of this approach stemming from structuralism advocate a set of innovative orientations, among others, the understanding of *the context of the emergence of the work and of the finished work*, in order to supplant “traditional criticism, obsessed with the text, closed to the horizons and depths of the thought that is expressed in it.”<sup>10</sup> Thematic analysis has, in its singularity, the vocation of meeting this deficiency of the traditional criticism. We therefore believe that by following the convergent efforts of Holton and Weber we will be able to shed some light on what thematic analysis is.

Finding the “specific terms” that make up the work under consideration is the goal of thematic analysis. The purpose of such an inquiry is to reveal these terms as “indicators” pertaining to the conditions of thought production and to rely on them in order to arrive at the unanticipated method of generating the knowledge that an

<sup>8</sup> Gerald Holton, *The Scientific Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1998), 6.

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Paul Weber, “L’analyse thématique: hier, aujourd’hui, demain,” *Études françaises* 2, no. 1 (1966) 29-72.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

author conveys. From this vantage point, thematic analysis goes beyond what Foucault's conception of hermeneutics in the field of literature means, namely to interpret and make understandable what the text says. By "specific terms" and "indicators" we mean the accumulation of words and/or ideas that the author or scientist who conceives a work or a theory cannot do without to the point of betraying a certain obsession. To understand what can motivate such commitments, a search in the author's or scientist's childhood is often evoked. We find an idea in favour of this thesis in the writings of Matthieu Quidu, who, in recent research on the themata of Holton with the focus on the academic works of STAPS<sup>11</sup> lecturers, puts forward the hypothesis that "a scientist would go for a given thematic option because it allows him to invest intimate meanings and values in reference to his singular history."<sup>12</sup>

The thesis expressed above as well as the specificity of the thematic analysis, which is to determine a term (or the terms) that dominates (dominate) or supports (support) the whole work of an author, of a scientist, to reach the source that resulted in the work, are well present in the work of Weber. Three considerations allow us to be aware of this. First of all, Weber identifies in the work of Edgar Poe, thanks to the thematic analysis, what he calls "an unconscious horological obsession," which causes all the works of the illustrious American writer of the 19th century to be marked by the question of time or by the representation of the clock.<sup>13</sup> This fact which "had not been pointed out by any of the many commentators of the poetic work"<sup>14</sup> and which Weber describes as "thematic obsession"<sup>15</sup> consequently attests that thematic analysis is not reducible to mere literary criticism. It is important to underline this insofar as, the essence of the thematic approach,

is the search, on the one hand, for images in the broadest sense of the word, on the other hand, for structures, explicit or implicit, pertaining to the haunting of which the lexicological surveys still only provide us with an aerial and imperfect view.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Sciences and Techniques of Sports and Physical Activities.

<sup>12</sup> Matthieu Quidu, "Les thémata dans la recherche en STAPS: motivations et modalités d'intervention," *STAPS* 84, no. 2 (2009): 7-25.

<sup>13</sup> Weber, 36-38.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

In other words, the detection of recurring lexicology in an author is not enough to speak of “haunting” linked to the feeder *term* of his thought. Metaphors, aesthetic judgment and other subtleties used by the author must corroborate and clarify the thematic interpretation.<sup>17</sup>

With the above remarks, it is easy to understand why, in his publications, when dealing with themata, Holton brings out everything that is likely to affect private science and to reveal traits of the personality of scholars – this point is perceived and well highlighted by Paul Scheurer in his preface to one of the books through which Holton is known in the French-speaking world<sup>18</sup> and Marková.<sup>19</sup> This underlined attention proves the importance of the personal context of discovery in the orientation of the so-called scientific work and underlines, moreover, how much, in order to be understood, scientific work needs in return the light shed by the context of the emergence of thought. Hence, for Holton, the themata that structure the thought of a scientist characterize him and the study of his works makes it possible to identify and refine his thematic map. Scientist and themata mutually reveal each other in a certain way. He therefore calls the themata of a scientist “his fingerprints.”<sup>20</sup>

And, still in this direction, emerges from the works of Holton, the idea that it is also by an anchoring of an aesthetic order, deeply rooted in the psyche,<sup>21</sup> that one can manage to link with confidence and without difficulty a scientist to such and such themata – Galileo, Einstein, and Bohr, can be cited here as examples.<sup>22</sup> Also in this sense, we must understand that, apart from the clue constituted by a recurring lexicology, the implicit or explicit use of symbols and analogies comes into play in the deciphering of what one might call the thematic core of a scholar.

The words or language, as they are written or spoken, do not seem to play any role in my mechanism of thought. The psychical entities which seem to serve as elements in

<sup>17</sup> Holton, *The Rebellion Against Science*, 131-132.

<sup>18</sup> Gerald Holton, *L'invention scientifique: Thémata et interprétation*, trans. Paul Scheurer (Paris: Gallimard, 1982).

<sup>19</sup> Marková, 68-92.

<sup>20</sup> Holton, *The Rebellion Against Science*, 159.

<sup>21</sup> Gerald Holton, *Thematic Origins of Scientific Thought: Kepler to Einstein* (Cambridge, MA, and London), 26.

<sup>22</sup> Holton, *The Rebellion against Science*, 119-157.

thought are certain signs and more or less clear images which can be voluntarily produced and combined.<sup>23</sup>

The fact that a scientist such as Einstein could not develop theories and establish his thought without resorting to diagrams, to what is visual, is not a trivial fact in the case of this scientist, but a revealing element of his attachment to the thema of realism.

Then, extending his study to several other authors, Weber notices that the French poets Vigny and Racine share with Poe the same “horological obsession.” In their works, the words or ideas of hour, moment, instant, day, time, dial, hand, circle, swing, and many others of the same kind are omnipresent.<sup>24</sup> This enumeration, from which emerges a lexicological consistency, clarifies what we said above about the “specific terms” and “indicators” that thematic analysis flushes out and discerns to reach what would be the “obsession” of an author, that is, the generic term, surprisingly flexible and capable of designating and assuming the unity of the various uses of the author’s terminological system. When it comes to clarifying his thoughts, lending vigour or picturesqueness to his ideas, beliefs, or intuitions, an author will often turn to his favourite term or his thematic anchoring, which acts as a kind of universe of reference.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, the discovery, among Poe’s childhood memories, of the terror inspired in the author by a gigantic clock and mournful bells confirmed Weber in his conviction that thematic haunting must have its roots in the early life experiences of scholars, authors and artists.<sup>26</sup> Subsequently, he was led to the idea that “the act of literary creation can be identified and formulated with precision and rigor”<sup>27</sup> in the light of a theme – and why not this unique one?<sup>28</sup> – hidden in the recesses of the author’s childhood. “The theme that illuminates the works and lives of so many men of genius, in literature, arts, sciences, politics, undoubtedly shines deep in the unconscious of each of us.”<sup>29</sup> In this respect, isn’t thematic analysis reducible to psychoanalysis? Weber expressly rejected such a claim. For him, indeed, even if the

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>24</sup> Weber, 44.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

words consciousness and unconsciousness, traumas and personal reminiscences, commonly accepted as being those of psychoanalysis,<sup>30</sup> enter the lexicon of thematic analysis, they do not as much make of this a discipline analogous to psychoanalysis. “Thematic analysis is something else entirely: an objective, rigorous discipline, capable of progress, capable of being deepened and amended [...] in short, a science.”<sup>31</sup>

If the author initially put the two into perspective, it is because on the one hand, some of his detractors, notably Raymond Picard,<sup>32</sup> did not see any difference between the two and, on the other hand, it is for the purpose of demonstrating that in no case psychoanalysis can be superimposed on thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis is not psychoanalysis because it denies pansexuality and the death instincts, censorship, repression, the id, the ego and the superego, the symbolic code, the traditional complexes of Oedipus, of castration, of Electra, etc.; just as it denies Adler’s inferiority complex, in its generality; and, absolutely, Jung’s racial archetypes.<sup>33</sup>

It is the same refutation that he pursues when he points out: *firstly*, that Bergson has shown, in a very convincing way, that philosophical systems start from an “intuition” elaborated into a “system;”<sup>34</sup> *secondly*, that “the intuition of a system is nothing other than the *theme* of the philosopher.”<sup>35</sup> This is, the author hopes, an unassailable deduction to support the notion that thematic analysis, in its approach as well as in its aim, only affixes itself to the term (nurturer of thought), to its structures and modulations and to nothing else,<sup>36</sup> thus to the *themata* as Holton would say, to shed light on the way knowledge is generated.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 40.

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

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 39-40.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>36</sup> This point, which may seem paradoxical or ambiguous, is clarified by Jean-Paul Weber in these terms: “However, if the theme is always unique, [...] it can be offered according to an already complex structure, albeit a single one. In Vigny’s case, [we have] discerned a thematic structure, a thematic constellation, a thematic system where the Clock, a unique theme, is nuanced [presents a succession of faces or phases],” in Weber, “L’analyse thématique,” 65.

These observations on the possible convergence and the necessary distancing of thematic analysis and psychoanalysis are very much in line with the idea that Holton explores, in his approach, the factors of invention without discarding the psychological determinations of knowledge and without either falling into psychologism. And as Einstein observed, “science as coming into being, as a design, is as subjective and psychologically conditioned as any other human activity.”<sup>37</sup> Therefore, the understanding of the logic of invention, if it can exist, cannot avoid the path of psychology. From this point of view, Reichenbach<sup>38</sup> and Popper<sup>39</sup> are right. If thematic analysis rates as a method or an epistemological approach, it is because it does not fail to fulfil “by its own means” the psychological assistance considered essential for the task it makes use for. Thus, the claim that thematic analysis can rationally explain and account for science invention based on themata finds its legitimacy. Indeed, it turns out that thematic analysis can address this issue in a novel manner without resorting to psychologism. By “proper means” of thematic analysis, we mean its method. We will be more explicit about this in the following.

Furthermore, Holton’s presentation of Bohr’s option for the principle of complementarity in the quantum debate, going so far as to reveal its historical roots in Bohr’s childhood, is a perfect illustration of the link, in reality merely superficial, that thematic analysis and psychology weave without actually having one. Be that as it may, “All psychology is of a piece with metaphysical postulates;”<sup>40</sup> and Holton’s quest aims only at these assumptions. In this respect, we should simply point out here that a close examination of the Bohr case with regard to *the principle of complementarity* provides a better understanding of how the attachment to themata as an intellectual framework dictated by the creative imagination can, in certain cases, stem from an indelible imprint left, from the childhood, on the unconscious and the memory of the scientist.

Already, our progress in the field of thematic analysis allows us to retain that, particularly in philosophy of science, thematic analysis presents itself as a philosophical method, worthy of being one which sets itself the task of going back to the presuppositions on which science

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<sup>37</sup> Text quoted by Holton in his book *L’invention scientifique*, 12.

<sup>38</sup> Hans Reichenbach, *Experience and Prediction: An Analysis of the Foundations and the Structure of Knowledge* (Chicago, and London: Phoenix Books, The University of Chicago, 1938), 6-7.

<sup>39</sup> Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (London, and New York: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>40</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Philosophy of No: A Philosophy of the New Scientific Mind*, trans. G. C. Waterston (New York: The Orion Press, 1968), 11.

is grounded (themata) to increase our understanding of the process of bringing about scientific theories. From now on, it is quite natural to note that thematic analysis has moved imperceptibly from the literary domain to the domain of knowledge, of science. This successful transfer initiated by Holton – whose first works were presented to the general public in 1962<sup>41</sup> – proves that thematic analysis is an approach that is in no way arbitrary or psychologising. Even if the themata, regarded as active and necessary for scientific thought, turn out to be occult or are entities hidden by the researchers, it can be said that the relevance of the results that thematic analysis has already achieved in philosophy of science on the question of the mechanism of research contributes greatly to its reliability.<sup>42</sup>

In fact, thematic analysis is a scientific discipline, equipped with a set of rigorous methods. These methods, as we shall see later in this paper, are based, in a singular way, on the study of historical cases, but also current ones (“the process”) with the aim of researching and identifying general themes, structures generally stable (themata), which are found in the preoccupation of different scholars (those by whom science is made) and in the field of research in general. In addition to this goal, thematic analysis, as a tool for apprehending terms deemed capable of regulating scientific activity, has the effect of identifying the role of these themes in the progress of science. Thematic analysis, writes Holton,

is in the first instance the identification of the particular map of the various themata which, like fingerprints, can characterize an individual scientist, or a part of the scientific community, at a given time.<sup>43</sup>

By indicating that the scientific work has a background that provides it with its principle of intelligibility, thematic analysis implies, above all, the recognition that sciences have a hidden side and a history. By tracing this history, it serves as a tool to identify the complex entities (themata, nourishing themes of thought) which influence, in the form of constraints, the work of the scientist to the point of being decisive in the direction of possible discoveries or constitute a factor in the failure of the research.

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<sup>41</sup> Gerald Holton, “Über die Hypothesen, welche der Naturwissenschaft zu Grunde liegen,” *Erano-Jahrbuch* 31 (1963): 351-425.

<sup>42</sup> Holton, *Thematic Origins of Scientific Thought*, 57.

<sup>43</sup> Holton, *The Rebellion Against Science*, 159.



## II. Thematic analysis: Its characteristics and fields of application

Thematic analysis, which aims to be an intra-disciplinary method, has found a place in the realm of philosophy as a scientific process, because it has a method (which covers a series of processes) and an object (a goal to be reached). Its method, within the singular framework of philosophy, is based on a very large amount of information collected in the “private science” from *texts, testimonies, letters, laboratory notebooks* and, if necessary, *by observing through the keyhole in laboratories*. If the thematic analysis is intra-disciplinary, it is also, in a certain sense, interdisciplinary interest this explains why it is sometimes confused with literary criticism, sometimes with psychoanalysis, sometimes with anthropology and so on. Indeed, it is stressed that the task of investigation assigned to thematic analysis by Holton “is part of a genetic epistemology, concerned with the psychological – and social – determinations of our knowledge, based on a meticulous undertaking of historical criticism.”<sup>44</sup> If the thematic analysis studies “private science” as the outcome of several processes, it is to achieve a satisfactory understanding of the mechanism of research, the way the human mind proceeds to invent, to discover new ideas, and to generate science. Ultimately, one can say that thematic analysis has as its *target* the understanding of scientific work in its nascent state<sup>45</sup> and as a *method* to achieve this, investigation, which consists of questioning science in its past, and always in its fundamental elements – in search of what science conceals that is unacknowledged or unavowable in the face of the demands of logic. The difficulty, but especially the interest of such an enterprise did not escape Einstein. The latter, according to Holton, repeatedly stressed that the study of the nascent state of science is one of those we should allow ourselves to undertake.<sup>46</sup>

Based on views held to be fundamental, thematic analysis takes up the challenge and, in so doing, contrasts with a certain philosophical trend which conceives of science as a method of investigation that must transcend the historical and cultural order in order to remain pure. Thematic analysis invalidates such a conception and addresses the scientific work from a genetic perspective by questioning, as we have underlined, “private science,” in accordance with its aim, which

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<sup>44</sup> Gerald Holton, *L'imagination scientifique*, trans. Jean-François Roberts (Paris: Gallimard, 1981).

<sup>45</sup> Holton, *Thematic Origins of Scientific Thought*, 17; Holton, *The Scientific Imagination*, 4.

<sup>46</sup> Holton, *Thematic Origins of Scientific Thought*, 17.

is to account for the current practice of the scientist. In this logic, thematic analysis provides, to those who write the history of science, the means to focus more on laboratory work, by being attentive to the “unconfessed or unconscious guiding presupposition a scientist adopts *without* being forced to do so by either data or current theory,”<sup>47</sup> but it also shapes mentalities, that of the researcher and that of the scientific community.

We must, before going further, emphasise that for thematic analysis, the important thing lies in the examination of the sources and the ways allowing the discovery of new knowledge. Thus, if the thematic analysis is interested in the question of discovery, of scientific invention, it is to access all the creative resources that the researcher mobilises, consciously or unconsciously, to come up with knowledge, *a priori*, without any direct concern for logic or rigor – these only formally entering into consideration *a posteriori* for justification. In fact, the approach of thematic analysis takes the form of an investigation to have a closer look at the fundamental concepts or *themata* on which science is based and which are supposed to be the instance of explanation of the mechanism of invention.

Thematic analysis, as an approach that focuses more on *themata* than on the scientific community and its rules (rules in the sense of standards that govern scientific publications), has been used a lot for some time in disciplines such as *ethology*, *ethnology*, *anthropology*, *art criticism*, *musicology*, but also in *chemistry* as in *biology*, specifies the one (Holton) who introduced it in epistemology to study science, beginning with the science he practises, i.e. physics. If one uses thematic analysis in different disciplines and in the historiographical approach as far as science is concerned, it is because it has certain advantages. This approach, which we owe in epistemology to Holton, has registered to its account the outstanding achievement of bringing us into a radically new conception of the nature of science. It renders illusory the neo-positivist idea (shared by Popper) which leads one to believe that knowledge established by science could be analysed without relating it to the practices and presuppositions that make it possible and envelop it.

The realization of the thematic origins of scientific thought has corrected an appealing but simplistic notion about scientific method that was current in earlier times, and still infects some pedagogic presentations– the notion that the

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<sup>47</sup> Holton, *The Rebellion Against Science*, 118.

individual scientist always must, and can, start out utterly free from all preconceptions.<sup>48</sup>

In fact, as we will see in the next step of our work, it is the process of producing scientific knowledge itself, which takes on a very different and much more open face than the image of science given by logical positivism.

It should be noted that the broad scope of application of thematic analysis cannot be the only argument put forward to give credit to this approach. For it remains that the recognition of its relevance in epistemology depends as much on the convincing results it has produced as on the rationality of its method.

As a good physicist and historian, Holton practices a rigorous method, which is to put forward nothing that is not supported by a text or a document, which are themselves well committed to the context.<sup>49</sup>

Thematic analysis, as Holton asserts, is neither an ideology, nor a metaphysical school, nor a plea for irrationality.<sup>50</sup> Concerned with elucidating the mechanism put into play by researchers in the development of theories, it claims its scientific character by virtue of its rigorous approach which results in the conscientious and impartial study of the sources of research, of the nascent phase of science. As an approach geared towards screening for the presence of preconceptions of the creative imagination, thematic analysis postulates that all science rests on a limited number of general themes, often implicit, the so-called *themata*.<sup>51</sup> We have already mentioned earlier, in the rapid presentation made of the *themata* in this paper, their number with precision.

Thematic analysis thus perceived henceforth, while being an approach in its own right in the disciplines it invests – including philosophy of science – is, basically, the ninth tool for analysing a scientific work in the Holtonian historiography where any “product

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>49</sup> Paul Scheurer, “Preface to Holton,” in *L'invention scientifique: Themata et interprétation*, trans. P. Scheurer (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), 8.

<sup>50</sup> Holton, *Thematic Origins of Scientific Thought*, 44.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

of scientific work”<sup>52</sup> is considered as “an event.”<sup>53</sup> It is therefore important to proceed with an exploration or at least an evocation of these components which, according to Holton, make it possible to identify all aspects of a scientific work.<sup>54</sup> By means of this exploration, research as such (and not directly the concept of thematic analysis, which has already been clarified) can – and this is what we are aiming for – receive additional precision.

So in addition to thematic analysis, we owe to Holton the idea which consists in considering that the review of a scientific work, in order to be complete, i.e. providing “the list of active forces present in the creation of any work of scholarship, of literature, or of art,”<sup>55</sup> must include: (1) an inventory that takes stock of the state of the scientific content of the event at a given time, in common terms at that time as much as in the terms that are now ours; (2) a study of the time trajectory of the state of public (“shared”) scientific knowledge that leads, to the extent possible, to the time chosen for the event, or even beyond; (3) a study of the personal aspects, perhaps even unappreciated or ignored by the person concerned, in any case less institutional, more ephemeral of the E activity at a given time *t* (the aim is to retrace the context of discovery); (4) here, “private science” is involved and a presentation, as for “public science,” of the temporal trajectory of personal scientific activity under study is established; (5) the work consists here in remaining in the “private science” and in examining in a specific way the psychobibliographical evolution of the scientist studied. Much is made of the “relationship between a person’s scientific work and his intimate lifestyle;” (6) a sociological study to identify the issues and influences (induced for example by the education system on the training of scientists) that drive the researcher to embark on research; (7) a consideration of the cultural and political factors that influence the work of scientists; (8) where relevant, for clarification on the scientific work, an analysis of its philosophical component, in particular the epistemological assumptions and the logical structure of the work studied.<sup>56</sup>

Obviously, in the enumeration made, it is the aspect (3) which is *significant* for our topic. We highlight “significant” for two reasons.

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<sup>52</sup> The terminology refers to: published dissertation, laboratory notes, transcript of an interview, exchange of correspondence. See Holton, *L’imagination scientifique*, 21.

<sup>53</sup> Holton, *The Rebellion Against Science*, 109.

<sup>54</sup> Holton, *Thematic Origins of Scientific Thought*, 37.

<sup>55</sup> Holton, *The Rebellion Against Science*, 107.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 108-121.

The first is the need to avoid having the word “significant” construed as something it is not, i.e. “exclusive” or the only thing to do. The second reason is to make it clear that while this aspect (3) makes thematic analysis a theory that focuses on the “personal struggle”<sup>57</sup> that leads to discovery, thematic analysis in turn postulates that scientific discovery as dependent on the social or cultural context of the research. In the same dynamic, we should also note that the study of scientific activity involves taking into account such diverse issues that one individual cannot display sufficient competence to overcome them all.<sup>58</sup> “It is unlikely that all nine can be described at once or by the same person engaged in the study of [a] case.”<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, we are entitled to note that these different components listed by Holton reveal more clearly that the reflection on thematic analysis and that on a philosophy of interdisciplinarity cannot be separated. Also, it is appropriate to examine thematic analysis from this angle in order to further clarify its specificity and the relative autonomy it has in relation, in particular, to psychology, sociology and history.

### III. At the heart of the nerve centre of thematic analysis: Multidisciplinarity

The thematic analysis is presented as “[an] investigation [which] is in line with a genetic epistemology, concerned with the psychological – and social – determinations of our knowledge, based on a meticulous undertaking of historical criticism.”<sup>60</sup> This characterization of thematic analysis has the advantage of situating it in the network of sciences to which it is related in a certain way or from which it borrows results in order to achieve its goal, namely, to make scientific discovery intelligible. Under these conditions, the term “discovery” cannot seem self-evident. Only, in this context where it was necessary to prove the legitimacy of a logic of discovery in order to give our present study a certain credibility, it was more a question of giving reason for this logic denied by the logical positivists and Popper. If, on occasion, we have nevertheless tried to define what a “scientific discovery” is, we must note, however, that the different definition approaches mentioned remain deficient in an aspect whose relevance becomes obvious once

<sup>57</sup> Holton, *The Scientific Imagination*, 4; Holton, *Thematic Origins of Scientific Thought*, 17.

<sup>58</sup> Anne-Françoise Schmid, and Jean-Marie Legary, *Philosophie de l'interdisciplinarité* (Paris: Petra, 2004), 227.

<sup>59</sup> Holton, *The Rebellion Against Science*, 107.

<sup>60</sup> Holton, *L'imagination scientifique*.

underlined the risk of wrongly confusing “discovery and other possible categorizations, such as learning, replication, plagiarism, presentation of the self-evident, fraud, fantasy, and so on.”<sup>61</sup>

The risk thus underlined is not only to be feared; it does indeed exist. The book written by science journalists William Broad and Nicholas Wade titled *Betrayers of the Truth: Fraud and Deceit in the Halls of Science*<sup>62</sup> provides the best illustration of this, ranking, among many other examples, the oil droplet experiment that won Millikan the Nobel Prize in Physics among the cases of scientific fraud. While it is true that by mentioning this specific case, we are at odds with the point of view of the two journalists-authors,<sup>63</sup> it is not excluded that there may also be good reasons for taking a discovery to be either a fraud or a fiction, without this being an error of appreciation or an ill-intentioned reading of the cases examined.<sup>64</sup> In fact, the clarification of the criteria (moreover, tacit) which justify the attribution of the term “discovery” to an “event E” enters into the set of preliminary notions necessary for the study of the particular issue addressed by thematic analysis – *that is scientific discovery*. Looking closely at these criteria also becomes imperative if we take into account this warning that Holton gives about thematic analysis, where the risk of confusion pointed out by Brannigan (above) is not excluded either:

The investigation of preconceptions in and concerning science connects rather directly with a number of other modern studies, including that of human cognition and perception, learning, motivation, and even career selection.<sup>65</sup>

According to Brannigan, the task of elucidation that would avoid unfortunate confusions in the work of scientists falls within the scope of a systematic sociological analysis of scientific discourse. Also, starting from the common meaning of “discovery,” he identifies the fundamental criteria that underlie the definition as well as the claim

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<sup>61</sup> Augustine Brannigan, *The Social Basis of Scientific Discoveries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 9.

<sup>62</sup> William J. Broad, and Wade Nicholas, *Betrayers of the Truth: Fraud and Deceit in the Halls of Science* (London: Century Publishing, 1983).

<sup>63</sup> Both authors use Holton’s study of the Millikan-Ehrenhaft controversy as a pretext to label Millikan’s work a fraud. This inference does not correspond to what Holton wanted to show.

<sup>64</sup> Philippe Alfonsi, *Au Nom de La Science* (Paris: Bernard Barrault, 1989).

<sup>65</sup> Holton, *The Scientific Imagination*, 10.

and the constitution of discoveries. The criteria are four in all: “namely, the feasibility of a knowledge-claim, its validity, the kind of motivation involved, and the degree of originality,” notifies Michel Mulkey in the preface to.<sup>66</sup> From this point on, we can understand that if thematic analysis is linked to sociology, it is above all insofar as it serves as a support in the constitution of the corpus of discoveries likely to be analysed, that is, those meeting the criteria of a scientific discovery. This support from sociology becomes essential when it comes to applying thematic analysis to the activities of a scientist *in situ* (i.e., in the very place where the phenomenon is examined) or to researches that are not yet marked by time and recorded in the historiography as part of the recognized discoveries.

We should not lose sight of the fact that the cases studied by Holton are all of this latter category, that is, recognized discoveries. And if, nevertheless, he speaks of the nascent phase of theories as the primary object of thematic analysis, it is precisely because of the possible recourse that historiography offers to reach the various types of documents (protocols of experience in the raw state [with errors] and laboratory reports, letters, etc. often concealed in public science), where are recorded the trial and error, the hesitations, the fruitless and fruitful attempts that testify to the practices by which scientists elaborate theories and achieve discoveries. As a result, the link between thematic analysis and history is the most unassailable: it passes through historiography and allows the “thematic analyst”<sup>67</sup> to grasp the processes of reasoning by which ideas are originally generated, that is, what scientists actually did in formulating new theories, whether the endeavour was successful or not.

In this respect, thematic analysis “seems,” *a priori*, to fall under two major challenges formulated by Brannigan in his conception of the study of scientific discovery. What exactly is the content of these two reservations? Before presenting this content, it is important to observe that by using “seems” or even *a priori*, we are in the dynamics of a hypothesis that remains to be verified. In this sense, we have reasons to argue that if we do not open the debate with Brannigan to clarify the relevance of his reservations, not for themselves nor in general, but in a specific way in relation to the work of Holton, they risk discrediting thematic analysis as an epistemological approach to discovery. Indeed, the author affirms that if his comments directly concern “the explanations of discovery offered by several prominent

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<sup>66</sup> Brannigan, 9.

<sup>67</sup> One who makes a thematic analysis.

writers: Norwood Russell Hanson and Richard Blackwell, Thomas S. Kuhn, and Arthur Koestler,<sup>68</sup> these writers, mentioned by name, “are only representatives of a much larger class of writers.”<sup>69</sup> However, following him in the presentation of his thesis, there is an *elementary criterion* which makes inclusion in this list likely: it is about the “rejection” of Reichenbach’s doctrine (the sharp separation between “context of discovery” and “context of justification”) and, the *fact* of making oneself, by this means, “guilty” of seeking to describe the means by which scientists concretely made their historic discoveries.<sup>70</sup>

Let us note, before continuing, that if we describe the aforementioned inclusion *criterion* as *elementary*, it is to signify that it is to be taken, with reference to the language of logic, not as a *sufficient condition*, but as a *necessary condition*. The question then is whether the second list opened by the author, with the *minima* thus laid down to find one’s way around, includes Holton. This crucial concern for our paper finds its answer in the elucidation of the content of the two challenges mentioned above and which remain to be stated in their formulation. Thus, we are brought back to the question left in abeyance to deal with it.

In fact, the first thesis to be discussed in Brannigan’s paper can be grasped as follows: an approach to discovery that consists of taking examples of discoveries in history is mentalist. According to the author, a mentalist is any presentation that explains “discoveries by showing how, as a result of interaction with the environment, new ideas get into the researcher’s head.”<sup>71</sup> In other words, such an approach can only provide psychological explanations for the discovery<sup>72</sup> and, for this reason, will necessarily be reductionist, that is, will “equate the task of explaining discovery with the task of explaining how an idea gets into an individual’s mind.”<sup>73</sup> In a nutshell, the authors of these attempts think they are explaining the reason for the discovery, but what they are proposing does not correspond to what they intend to do. And the author concludes that their inability to account for discovery is their major *flaw*.<sup>74</sup> Added to this defect in their enterprise,

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<sup>68</sup> Brannigan, 12.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 12, 33-45.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 34.



according to Brannigan, is another which justifies the lack of interest accorded to the context of discovery by authors inclined towards the rationality of scientific work.<sup>75</sup> The flaw that is being emphasised here is the mistake of considering any psychological approach as a description of a scientific finding when it explains how a person comes up with a novel concept.<sup>76</sup>

In view of this presentation, it is apparent that the premise, namely “an approach to discovery that is to take examples of discoveries in history,” brings Holton into the list opened by Brannigan. On the other hand, the conclusion he draws from this premise does not apply to Holton’s thematic analysis. Indeed, the link between thematic analysis and psychology has been discussed enough above and all the observations made in the context of this discussion invalidate Brannigan’s inference. Without going back here on this development, it seems to us sufficient to mention, to complete – and to reinforce or nuance in the sense of making clearer – what has been said, that Holton believes that the contribution of psychology is likely to be valuable in the context of thematic analysis. It is therefore appropriate to let him speak:

We need to know more about the origins of themata. It is rather clear to me that an approach stressing the connections between cognitive psychology and individual scientific work is a proper starting point.<sup>77</sup>

Another statement from Holton going into this direction, and which deserves to be heard here, is the one that follows – formulated as a guideline to be adopted in using the study of the results of psychological research to illuminate questions which affect science from a socio-psychological point of view: “Emile Durkheim warned, ‘[e]very time that a social phenomenon is explained by a psychological phenomenon, we may be sure that the explanation is false.’”<sup>78</sup>

Clearly, Holton’s thematic analysis stands out from psychology. This is, all things considered, only an adjuvant whose contribution – to be taken with caution by the analyst – is perceived as an element left as a promise of insertion in the construction of a more evolved repertoire of all the themata working in science.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Holton, *The Scientific Imagination*, 22-23.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 240.

What about Brannigan's second thesis compared to Holton's thematic analysis? According to the second thesis, which in fact extends the previous one, an approach that applies *indiscriminately to successes and failures or scientific errors*, exposes to two risks. First of all, in either case, the choice can only be made in history. And therefore, in the case of historically recognized specimens, – that is to say – successful cases, the risk to be feared would be, according to Brannigan, that of being influenced by a whole range of methodological biases. For example, in the study of the successful company, the specificity of the researcher will be highlighted to explain his success where others failed.<sup>79</sup> However, by proceeding in this way, the backlash, adds the author, is that we falsify the very idea of discovery by “assigning its origins to whatever other singularity is associated with the event or the individual.”<sup>80</sup> With regard to an unsuccessful undertaking, i.e. in the case of failure or scientific error, the examination becomes an inspection of the psychological forces that produced it, and the tendency, according to Brannigan, is to focus on the *pathological* aspect of faulty or bizarre scientific work.<sup>81</sup> In the end, the danger highlighted by the author around his second thesis is above all that of the objectivity of the study. Behind this nodal point of this second position of Brannigan, three questions deserve to be raised and treated with regard to the arguments of the author. The first is this: apart from the psychological aspect that it brings back, how can this thesis be perceived as a reservation against Holton's thematic analysis as well? Is this reservation admissible? This is the second question. It stems from the previous one indeed and can prove to be fundamental depending on the answer that will be given to the first one. Finally, the third question may be the following: are the terms in which the problem of objectivity is posed here valid for the analysis? Holton's theme?

The answer to the first question leads us to one of Holton's warnings about themata and his thematic analysis:

The study of the role of themata in the work of scientists can be equally interesting whether the work led to “success”

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<sup>79</sup> Brannigan, 39-40.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 39. It should be noted that if the author is opposed to the idea that the successful researcher possesses a specificity, it is because, according to the sociological analysis which seems to him to better account for the discovery, “genius is an inoperative contingency to scientific success.” Discoveries are more the result of the evolution of culture than of the individual genius of a man. Ibid., 47.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 40.

or to “failure” – the commitment to a set of themata does not make a scientist necessarily right or wrong.<sup>82</sup>

There is therefore no doubt that thematic analysis applies to both successes and failures to account for “scientific discovery.” From this point of view, we can say that it is concerned with Brannigan’s discourse and, as a result, the second question that we have formulated takes on its full meaning and, at the same time, a fundamental character for the status of thematic analysis. However, and above all, a question arises: if the explanation of scientific discovery is not based on the successes and failures that punctuate the history of science, what then would be the use of the standards of admissibility of a discovery or the standards of scientificity conveyed by the four criteria that Brannigan himself uses to characterize a discovery? In a word, isn’t the validity of the attempt to explain scientific discovery, in itself, subordinated to the quality of the matter which is the object of the study, a quality to be understood in the sense of discoveries that have acquired the status of discovery? Is it not by taking an interest in these discoveries that those who undertake to unravel the “mystery” of the discovery are led towards the research that can claim this title, but which has not succeeded in finding the reasons for the failure? Successes and failures seem to us to be able to mutually shed some light on each other, or at least on the research itself.

In fact, the clarification of the terminology “scientific discovery” with Brannigan seems to us to be the primary question to be addressed insofar as it constitutes the focus of light that illuminates with its beams the second reserve expressed by this author. Moreover, he does not hesitate to bring back, as we have underlined above, the debate which occupies us at this level of elucidation of concepts, by positing the conception of discovery as being one of the main causes of the error of taking the description of how an idea arises in the mind of an individual as the explanation of the discovery. The discussion that we are opening here can only achieve its objectives (allowing us to follow Brannigan in his understanding of scientific discovery in order to be able to answer our questions) if we conduct it in relation to the four criteria discussed above and to which we should return.<sup>83</sup>

For Brannigan, discovery is inseparable from its social foundation. He therefore specifies that the scientist’s discovery

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<sup>82</sup> Holton, *The Scientific Imagination*, 22.

<sup>83</sup> See page 45 of this paper.

must be inspected not for its content or psychological origins, but for the context which makes it a possibility or a candidate in the first place. This candidacy status of events is what I mean by the social basis of discovery.<sup>84</sup>

If the discovery is to be taken as an event, it is a question, on the one hand, of it belonging to “kind of events which could be the outcome of a motivated course of action designed for their attainment”<sup>85</sup> and, on the other hand, of it being an original, i.e. new and not a mere reproduction. The novelty required for a discovery makes it possible to distinguish it from mere learning or plagiarism as long as it prevents people from “knowingly discover what others already have reported as true.”<sup>86</sup>

The notion of discovery, as Brannigan understands it, can be seen to have a double aspect (which we share): institutional and cognitive. It is these two aspects that, together, justify about a discovery which has the status of discovery, the possibility of a claim to knowledge, its validity, the type of motivation it brings into play and its degree of originality (we recognize Brannigan’s four criteria here). Consequently, these four criteria constitute the procedures for legitimizing and promoting discoveries which allow, in the context of science, the results of a research to cross, in law if not in fact, the barrier that separates what is a discovery and what is not. In fact, we can logically only speak of discovery after the fact (post hoc) and of research at all stages of the process leading to a discovery. Under these conditions, it is surprising that Brannigan rejects any post hoc approach to the question of discovery on the pretext that by proceeding in this way “the status of an event as a discovery is already settled before the question of how it occurs is announced.”<sup>87</sup>

Such reasoning gives the impression that for the author, what is at stake in the study of scientific discovery is to set out into unknown territory like an explorer with a specific objective that can be summed up as follows: not to have the only means in the field other than criteria, to retain what seems to meet one’s criteria and share the judgment that one makes of it. In this perspective, the explanation of discovery turns into solipsism with the risk of relativism that often

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<sup>84</sup> Brannigan, 66.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 40.

follows. We therefore believe that the position taken by Brannigan is not only open to criticism, but also untenable. And we can therefore draw the conclusion that the reservation of Brannigan's second thesis cannot, even less, invalidate thematic analysis as a rational approach to scientific discovery. The second question we asked ourselves at the outset of our analysis of Brannigan's second thesis thus finds its answer. What about the third and final question that the thesis raised?

We must remember that Brannigan's second thesis questioned the objectivity of the post hoc study of the discovery. And the question is whether this suspicion is justified. In this respect, two observations seem necessary to us, to clarify our answer to this question. The first observation is the following: the terms in which the author poses the problem of objectivity are oriented differently than those by which we want to apprehend objectivity. His concern relates to the objectivity of the approach to account for the discovery, whereas we situate our questioning at the very level of the science itself. However, all things considered, and this is where our second observation comes in, these various questions about objectivity do not only pinpoint the absence of an absolute guarantee or the fallibility and human nature of scientific work. Moreover, they plead for a better understanding of scientific activity, and therefore against the perfect images that textbooks give us of science and which are only a narrow and mechanical vision of scientific work. Further to these considerations on the scientific work, we have no better answer to give to the question of objectivity raised by Brannigan, than these relevant remarks of Popper, speaking of the rigor of the physicist: "we cannot remove at the same time his humanity. Likewise, we cannot forbid or infer his value judgments without destroying him both as a man and *as a man of science*."<sup>88</sup>

#### IV. Conclusion

At the end of this presentation, which was opened by the question: "Thematic analysis and interdisciplinary interest: an advantage or a disadvantage for Holton's purpose?" are we in a position to give an unequivocal answer? It appears we are. Indeed, there is no doubt that the interdisciplinary interest in which thematic analysis is immersed is an asset (the results of other sciences are used for its cause) and also a disadvantage (thematic analysis can easily be mistaken for a psychological approach, which it is not in the frame in which Holton places it).

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<sup>88</sup> Theodor Adorno, and Karl Popper, *De Vienne à Francfort: la querelle allemande des sciences sociales* (Brussels: Complexe, 1979), 84.

Thus, with regard to thematic analysis, presented as a tool for accessing the mechanism of scientific research, we are now assured that it is not a psychological approach to scientific discovery, but does actually constitute a credible tool in the field of philosophy of science. In this respect, we retain that the thematic analysis has the specific purpose of laying bare what the act of invention is basically reduced to, namely: the primacy of the action, often imperceptible and unacknowledged, of a researcher's themata over the principles of rationality in the ingenious work of the creative imagination. And in fact, thematic analysis reaches the first breeding ground of scientific activity where it becomes possible to explain the rise of discoveries and theories. If science displays a certain rationality, it nevertheless remains a work of the imagination and thematic analysis, without advocating psychologism in the philosophy of science, makes it possible to elucidate the act by which a theory comes to light. This is the conclusion that emerges at the end of this article.

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# How Not to Understand Community: A Critical Engagement with R. Bellah

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## **Abstract**

*Robert Bellah's article "Community Properly Understood..." is critical of the conventional conception of community as a product of consensus established by shared values and goals among people of common social reality. The need for such a critical approach is arguably encouraged by the rather imprecise deployment of the notion of community in the vast communitarian literature, a deployment which truly raises issues of concern over what the term 'community' really means. Bellah's article is one of the numerous responses to this quest. This paper challenges Bellah's view on community and offers some arguments to demonstrate why his conception of community may not be adequate. While the uniqueness of his argument is not in doubt, the paper argues that Bellah commits a straw man fallacy by conflating a normative question, "what ought we to do to achieve a working and progressive community?" with the descriptive question, "what is community?" The paper argues that an adequate conception of community must be such that its conception is acceptable to both the liberals and the communitarians. To achieve this, the paper introduces the notion of shared spaces to the conceptualization of the concept of community, and thereby arrives at the definition of community in terms with which both sides of the debate can relate. The paper concludes that with an appropriate concept of community, it would be obvious, contrary to the popular opinion, that liberals and communitarians are both committed to the survival of the community, and that they only differ in their respective approaches to achieving this common goal.*

**Keywords:** *community; Robert Bellah; communitarianism; liberalism; shared space*

## I. Introduction: Some background acknowledgements

The publication of John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* in 1971 triggered a variety of advancements within political philosophy among which the need to review the notion of right to freedom by liberals and a search for an alternative political theory in which this is appropriately addressed are most central. In some scholars' opinion, Rawls showcases liberal ideology in an intolerable proportion.<sup>1</sup> The over-glorification of the individual's liberty in the liberal tradition led to the suspicion that liberalism has a tendency of destroying the moral cord that binds us together as human beings. Specifically, there were worries about the welfare of community in an atmosphere characterized by "inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override."<sup>2</sup> According to Brian Orend,

These criticisms focus on the conviction that there is a dark side to respecting individual human rights. The dark side deals with the glorification of the self at the expense of the social connections to families and churches, neighborhoods and nations. This detachment, communitarians say, has led to isolated and alienated individuals; increased greed; drug, alcohol, and gambling addictions; the growth of secularism and even nihilism, historically high divorced rates; historically low voter turn-outs; and the shriveling up of civil society, and indeed, of even basic aspects of etiquette.<sup>3</sup>

The above results in a growing concern for the establishment of a non-liberal tradition which does not *necessarily* take away the liberty of the individual, but which, unlike liberalism, has as the centerpiece of its social thinking the protection of the community, the only *thing* we truly share in common. The ensuing theory is what is known as 'Communitarianism,' deriving its name chiefly from its opposition to liberalism. One of the positive roots of contemporary communitarianism, therefore, concerns

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the scholars that hold this position include Alasdair Macintyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007); Alasdair Macintyre, *Is Patriotism a Virtue?* (Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1984); Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Michael Walzer, *Sphere of Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); and others.

<sup>2</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Brian Orend, "Communitarianism and Community," in *Encyclopedia of Human Rights*, ed. David P. Forsythe, 377-386 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 377.

the substantial and sustaining role that communities play in human development and human lives generally.<sup>4</sup>

According to Daniel Bell, “in retrospect, it seems obvious that communitarian critics of liberalism may have been motivated not so much by philosophical concerns as by certain pressing political concerns, namely, the negative social and psychological effects related to the atomistic tendencies of modern liberal societies.”<sup>5</sup> A great deal of communitarian critique against liberal/libertarian political ideology focuses on its failure to acknowledge the sanctity of human community to the individuals, a failure which ultimately leads to a wrong positioning of the individual, rather than the community, at the center of political life of the state. If community is prior or morally superior to the individual, communitarians think, it will be morally obligatory to safeguard the interests of the community against the personal interests of socially unhindered individual populating the state. “Communitarians maintain that there is a common good or community interest which is greater than individual goods or interests, and that the state should uphold this common good rather than remain neutral.”<sup>6</sup>

For the communitarian argument to be worth its salt, there is a need for the notion of community to be clarified. “What is community?” is an interesting question because, essentially, the substance of the disagreement between liberals and communitarians consists in determining the primary locus of political allegiance. Liberals opt for individual liberty and rights over and above community common good, while communitarians opt for community over and above individual liberty and rights. It cannot therefore be the case that the liberals do not have the notion of community nor do the communitarians lack the concepts of liberty and rights. That is, given that the crux of the liberal-communitarian debate is either accepting community and otherwise rejecting liberty and rights as the primary locus of political allegiance, or vice-versa, then there must be some agreement between liberals and communitarians on what these terms (i.e., community, liberty and rights) really mean. In other words, whatever meaning one gives to these terms must be one that both sides of the debate accept, for there to be a genuine disagreement between them.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Bell, “Communitarianism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2022 Edition), eds. Edward N. Zalta, and Uri Nodelman, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/communitarianism/>.

<sup>6</sup> David Morrice, “The Liberal – Communitarian Debate in Contemporary Political Philosophy and Its Significance for International Relations,” *Review of International Studies* 26, no. 2 (2000): 237.

More specifically, an adequate response to the question “what is a community?” helps to properly understand the communitarian political theory and moral obligations on the one hand, and, on the other, the limits of the individual’s liberty in relation to the community. Arriving at this plausible notion of community has, however, become elusive for the communitarians. Communitarians simply do not seem to agree on what exactly constitutes a community. Perhaps, one reason for this could be the fact that there are different kinds of community,<sup>7</sup> such as political community, cultural community, national community, even international community, etc.; and communitarians don’t seem to agree on which is most essential to their theory.<sup>8</sup> Robert Bellah’s “Community Properly Understood...” is one of the communitarian attempts at filling this conceptual gap.

The present paper is a critique of Bellah’s notion of community. It argues that Bellah’s explication is a response to a normative question, “How ought we to live to realize a functional or an ideal community?” rather than the conceptual question, “What is a community?” The paper argues that in responding to the latter question one is required to state some essential properties that all actual human communities have in common and by virtue of which they are called communities. This does not include specification of certain attitudes elicited by members of a community in order to realize a morally desirable end for the community. In other words, all that is needed is the description of some empirical features present anywhere there is a community, rather than a prescription of attitudes leading to the realization of ‘a good community.’ One problem with Bellah’s normative approach to defining community lies in the fact that not only are there good communities that do not conform to Bellah’s standard (which Bellah would readily dismiss as not good communities), there are communities whose essence cannot be realized within the normative framework provided by Bellah. The paper concludes that, given its normative intent, Bellah’s article is guilty of a straw man fallacy.

Issues discussed in this paper are divided in four sections. Following the first section, the ongoing introduction to the background to Bellah’s paper, the second section seeks to respond to the probe whether community is an ideal or a physical entity. In doing this, the paper employs the philosophical methodology of ordinary language philosophy and finds out that the question, “what is a community?” requires a descriptive analysis rather than

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<sup>7</sup> See Amitai Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community* (New York: Crown Publishers Inc., 1993), 32.

<sup>8</sup> See Sandel, “Liberalism;” Macintyre, “Patriotism;” Walzer, *Sphere of Justice*; Charles Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

normative analysis. The third section *reveals* the normative implication of Bellah's notion of the community, thereby showing his commitment to prescriptivist enquiry rather than the descriptive question that sets his inquiry on course. The paper attempts to correct this error by conceptualizing community in terms of the concept of shared spaces. It is argued that the term community belongs to a family of concepts such as state, nation, neighborhood, etc., and that what unifies them is the concept of shared spaces. It is concluded that Bellah's paper leaves unanswered the question that necessitates its probe into the meaning of "community."

## II. Is community an ideal?

The question of whether or not community is an ideal is an offshoot of the debate on the appropriate methodological approach to issues in contemporary political philosophy. Two sides of the debate have been identified as ideal method and non-ideal method in the works of Merceta,<sup>9</sup> Valentini,<sup>10</sup> Stemplowska,<sup>11</sup> among others. Using Rawls as a paradigm example of the ideal method, Lagerlof characterizes ideal method as one in which the goal of the enquiry is to construct a model of social life and relations, where each component of the society is well appropriated and attuned to one another in bringing about a desirable social state of affairs.<sup>12</sup> The ideal method is characterized by its specification of certain principles, which, if fully compliant with, guarantee the reality of the desired society. Societies are desirable because they are just, fair, good, etc.<sup>13</sup> Non-ideal method is the exact opposite of ideal theory. It favors the study of actual social state of affairs with all its historical challenges. The non-ideal method does not aim at construction of how a society ought to be, but is a descriptive analysis of what actually obtains within the social milieu.

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<sup>9</sup> Jesper A. Merceta, "Ideal and Non-ideal Theory in Political Philosophy," January 16, 2019, <https://jahlinmarceta.com/2019/01/16/ideal-and-non-ideal-theory-in-political-philosophy/>.

<sup>10</sup> Laura Valentini, "Ideal vs. Non-ideal Theory: A Conceptual Map," *Philosophy Compass* 7, no. 9 (2012): 654-664.

<sup>11</sup> Zofia Stemplowska, "What's Ideal About Ideal Theory?" *Social Theory and Practice* 34, no. 3 (2008): 319-340.

<sup>12</sup> Julius Lagerlof, *Ideal or Non-ideal Theory: The Challenge of Charles W. Mills* (PhD diss., Uppsala University, 2021).

<sup>13</sup> Plato's *The Republic* and John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* present two of the most influential ideal theories in which attempts are made to envision a just society. Plato thinks that a just society is achieved when the three components of the society do what they are naturally made for, while Rawls' theory of justice is founded on the supposition of fairness based on the liberty of the moral agent.

The question, “what is a community?” can be situated within the above theoretical distinction between ideal and non-ideal theories. One crucial confusion to clear is whether ‘community’ is an ideal or a non-ideal concept. To say that community is either of these is to acquiesce to answering the question in a particular way. For instance, to conceive community as an ideal is to conceive community in terms of its realizability, since ideals are often set as standards to which things are expected to conform. In *Community and the Economy: the Theory of Public Cooperation*, Jonathan Boswell sets out to “investigate community as an ideal, a phenomenon which struggles to express itself in the most unlikely places, and as an object of action in modern times.”<sup>14</sup> There are ample evidences that Bellah is greatly influenced by this idealistic conception of community by Boswell, as he himself writes that his conception of “democratic communitarianism,” a product of his “properly understood community,” is a borrowing from Boswell.<sup>15</sup>

The question about the meaning of community may be explored by examining the nature of ideals in general. Charles Mills has distinguished four senses of the term “ideal,” viz., ideal-as-normative, ideal-as-model, ideal-as-descriptive-model, and ideal-as-idealized-model.<sup>16</sup> The sense of ideal directly relevant to our discussion is the sense in which it means ideal-as-normative. Thinking about ideal-as-normative, Mills writes:

Since ethics deals by definition with normative/prescriptive/evaluative issues, as against factual/descriptive issues, and so involves the appeal to values and ideals, it is obviously ideal theory in that generic sense, regardless of any divergence in approaches taken.<sup>17</sup>

The sense of ideal here contrasts with factualness, or descriptiveness. To relate it to the ongoing discourse, it is the sense in which community is revealed as it ought to be, rather than as it is. Conceived this way, community could be seen an abstract model to which actual human social associations are expected to conform. Hence, considering

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<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Boswell, *Community and the Economy: The Theory of Public Cooperation* (London: Routledge, 2005), 1.

<sup>15</sup> Robert N. Bellah, “Community Properly Understood: A Defense of ‘Democratic Communitarianism,’” in *The Essential Communitarian Reader*, ed. Amitai Etzioni, 15-19 (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 18.

<sup>16</sup> Charles W. Mills, “Ideal Theory as Ideology,” *Hypatia* 20, no. 3 (2005): 165-183.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

community as an ideal entails that one specifies particular standards to be met before a concrete human society can be properly so referred. The implication of this is that, depending on whether or not an actual human society meets up to these standards, there can either be a community or a non-community. Bellah's conception of community aligns with this theoretical framework. For example, Bellah writes:

A good community is one in which there is argument, even conflict, about the meaning of the shared values and goals, and certainly about how they will be actualized in everyday life. Community is not about silent consensus; it is a form of intelligent, reflective life, in which there is indeed consensus, but where the consensus can be challenged and changed – often gradually, sometimes radically – over time.<sup>18</sup>

Obviously, the above, that is the argument/conflict about the meaning and how the shared values and goals are to be actualized, cannot constitute the essential property of a community because it would mean that all communities have it as a matter of fact. But this is not the case, since, as it will be shortly shown, not all communities have their essence realized in that way (i.e., through disagreement about their shared values and goals). This is not a denial of the fact that arguments or conflict may feature as part of a community, but as far as it does not constitute the essence of all communities, it fails as a core defining property for properly conceiving communities.

Besides the so-called “silent consensus,” Bellah argues that it is an inherent part of the concept of community to often get involved in arguments and conflicts about what the shared values are, and the best way to realize them. We may take Bellah as saying that arguments and conflicts about shared values and goals characterize the essence of community. It may further be taken that this property must be present in every human association that aspires to be a community. Rawls has anticipated this kind of definition of human society where he argues that justice is the first virtue of human society as truth is to the system of thoughts.<sup>19</sup> Rawls concludes that “laws and institutions, no matter how efficient and well-arranged, must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust.”<sup>20</sup> We may, thus, take justice as the essence of the Rawlsian

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<sup>18</sup> Bellah, 16.

<sup>19</sup> Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 3.

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

human society. However, much as one is tempted to argue that Rawls' position equates all human societies with justice, this does not seem to represent Rawls' point. Rawls concedes to the possibility of unjust societies; else the imperative to reform, or, should reformation fail, to abolish. Thus, Rawls is interested specifically in an ideal state, not the actual ones.

In like manner, Bellah specifies arguments/conflicts on shared value and goals as the essential feature of community. Bellah may, in response to charges against the normativity of his conception of community, therefore insist that his interest does not lie in all human groups. Of course, there are human groups in which this essential feature of community is missing, but such groups will not qualify for a community, properly understood, so long as they lack what guarantees their being good human groups. Hence, it may be argued that it does not really make much sense to criticize Bellah's normative argument because it falls short of embracing all descriptive cases; a normative account sorts out only descriptive cases that meet normative criteria.<sup>21</sup> Bellah's criterion of a good human group (i.e. a community) is that, beside the consensus on values and goals of the group, there must be occasional debates, arguments or conflicts on what these values are, as well as the best way to bring them about.

However, while this is true of some communities, it is not true of all communities. There are human groups whose essences are realized only through unwavering consensus on shared values and goals. Consider a community of road users. They share the value of road safety in common (although there are cases where this is not realized) while their goal is the safe arrival at their respective destinations. Besides the fact that no arguments/conflicts arise from defining what this value is, there are really no alternatives to observing road safety rules in the realization of the goal. This point is further reinforced because even when a member leaves his/her local community for another, say a community where road users observe different traffic rules, s/he will have to learn afresh the rules in the new community to forestall dangers that his/her presence on the road may pose to other members of the community. This ritual is not optional to a new member, with no possibility of review in view, even if s/he thinks that his/her local community has a better set of traffic rules. Hence, contrary to Bellah, this kind of community does not need argument and conflict to realize its ideal self within its own system.

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<sup>21</sup> This line of argument was suggested to me by one of the anonymous reviewers of the first draft of this paper, to whom I am very grateful.



Also, Bellah's argument-oriented standard of community does not apply to religious communities, which thrive chiefly on perfect and unquestioned obedience to religious injunctions as laid down by the founder of each religion. Contrary to Bellah's position, progress is achieved in religious communities through non-argumentative, silent consensus. For instance, members of the Christian religious community are forbidden to question the authority of the holy bible either on the values of Christian conception of good life on earth or the goal of making heaven. The periodic review from citizens that Bellah believes characterizes the ideal community does not obtain within the religious community.<sup>22</sup> In fact, religions such as Christianity and Islam will explain the social ills currently experienced in the world as a result of the deviation of members of their communities from the standards laid down by God. Hence, in religious communities, conflicts brew polarization rather than the cooperation and growth Bellah's criterion anticipates. Even Jesus says, "if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand."<sup>23</sup>

However, the fact that there is no reason for arguments in the cases cited above does not mean that there cannot be divergent opinions on the justification for obligation to obey or otherwise. In a community of road users, for instance, some may have a consequentialist justification for observing traffic rules, namely that it leads to the avoidance of an accident that may have taken place had the rules not been strictly adhered to. A thorough consequentialist may see no reason to obey the rule when the expected goal, namely safety, is already realized. This may be without considerations for personal safety. Sometimes, as a driver, one wonders what use is one's obeying traffic rules if by violating them one poses no danger to another person, including oneself. That reminds one of Mill's Harm Principle which says, "people should be free to act however they wish unless their actions cause harm to somebody else."<sup>24</sup> In other words, an agent's moral commitment to obeying traffic rules may not necessarily bind one from sometimes violating them when safety, the *telos*, is already realized.

On the other hand, one may justify unconditional observance of all moral codes (traffic rules are moral codes) by appealing to the

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<sup>22</sup> Under no circumstance should this be taken to mean that some members of the religious communities are not desirous of change, either radical or gradual, through disagreements among their members. There are ancient landmarks across religions that must not be crossed. Disagreements on these fundamentals do not strengthen religious communities; they weaken and divide them.

<sup>23</sup> Mark 3: 25.

<sup>24</sup> The Ethics Centre, "What Is the Harm Principle? Ethics Explainer by the Ethics Centre," accessed December 22, 2021, <https://ethics.org.au/ethics-explainer-the-harm-principle/>.

strictness, necessity and universality that living morally requires from rational agents. Such attitude demands an ‘at all times-ness’ that is not tied to the situations under which the act is performed. In respect to our example above, a person may argue that the unconditional observance of traffic rules is not justified by the realization of safety on the road, but rather by the fact that obedience to all moral rules is good in itself. This is a deontologist position which states that “the basic criterion of right and wrong conduct cannot be the consequence of such conduct, but rather an *a priori* imperative which flows from the agent’s exercise of his practical reason.”<sup>25</sup> Here, rules are obeyed as a matter of duty, regardless of their consequence. However, the presence of divergent opinions on the justification to obey rules does not constitute conflicts or disagreements over the shared value of safety or the goal of arriving to destinations unscathed. It only shows that members of the community have compelling reasons not to disagree with one another on the quality of their shared value and goals.

The discussion so far has shown the error involved in contemplating community as an ideal. The other option left is to conceive community not as something achievable as a result of its members possessing certain moral properties, a strategy which surely fences off some actual human associations as non-communities. The question “what is a community?” is a simple question that does not require specifications for some social standards that must be upheld for an actual human association to exist. On the contrary, community should be properly understood as a factual entity, whose meaning can be specified purely on a descriptive conceptual framework.

### III. What, then, is a community?

As a social and political concept, community belongs to the class of concepts such as state, country, nation, neighbourhood, even city, town, village and family.<sup>26</sup> Like these concepts, community cannot be completely understood without the concept of shared space. Shared space, as it will be used in this paper, refers to an umbrella under which each individual in the society is able to fulfill his or her sociality, and, ultimately, humanity. Shared space is characterized by its interactiveness, dynamism and populated by individuals with different

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<sup>25</sup> Moses Oke, and Idoreyin F. Esikot, *Elementary Ethics* (Lagos, Uyo, Eket: Minder International Publishers, 1999), 111.

<sup>26</sup> These should be distinguished from other similar concepts such as tribe, race, or people in that, while state, country, etc., are physical concepts because of their space-relatedness, tribe, race, etc., are attitude-related concepts, and they are not space-bound.

dreams and aspirations. As a concept, 'shared space' is not limited to physical space alone, as this will restrict the meaning of community to its traditional sense in which the concept only applies to common locations and areas. For example, Sutton and Kolaja define community traditionally, as "a number of families residing in a *relatively small area* within which they have developed a more or less complete socio-cultural definitions imbued with collective identifications and by means of which they resolve problems arising from *the sharing of an area*"<sup>27</sup> (emphasis mine). A similar sense of community can be found in Robert Stebbins' definition of community as "a social group with a *common territorial base*; those in the group share interests and have a sense of belonging to the group"<sup>28</sup> (emphasis mine).

However, the complexities of the contemporary world, especially those inspired by technology, have introduced variety of dimensions to the concept of community that makes common location or areas, as gleaned in the above definitions, less fashionable than they used to be. Shared space has now assumed a more robust conceptual signification than geographical or territorial delineations. It now makes sense within the new conceptual framework to talk about non-physical shared spaces such as virtual, academic, cultural, religious, etc. spaces, corresponding to various kinds of community. To have a Yoruba community in the United Kingdom, for example, it is not required that all Yoruba people in the country should be packed together in a specific location in Great Britain. Members of the community may not share the same physical space, yet, they share a cultural space, which distinguishes them as members of a community. A similar remark can be made for academic community or virtual community, among others. Either physical or not, however, the shared spaces relevant to the concept of community create an interactive platform for members to fulfil their sociality and humanity.

Notwithstanding the conceptual boundaries shared by members of the category of concepts highlighted above i.e. state, country, etc., a closer look suggests that the concept 'community' is more complex than others in that category. Bellah's view that "community leads a double life"<sup>29</sup> is only correct to the extent that community is taken out of its ordinary use. Bellah takes 'community' out of its ordinary use by

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<sup>27</sup> Willis A. Sutton, and Jiri Kolaja as quoted in Colin Bell, and Howard Newby, *Community Studies: An Introduction to the Sociology of the Local Community* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1975), 31.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Stebbins, *Sociology: The Study of Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 534.

<sup>29</sup> Bellah, 15.

thinking that “if the term ‘community’ is to be useful,” it must mean *more* than “small-scale, face-to-face groups like the family, the congregation and the small town – what the Germans call *Gemeinschaft*.”<sup>30</sup> This is because, according to Bellah, it raises the suspicion that community implies the abandonment of ethical universalism and the withdrawal into particularistic loyalty, and sometimes leads to ethnic cleansing.<sup>31</sup> Elsewhere, he says, “but when that is all community means, it is basically sentimental, and in the strict sense of the word, nostalgic,” ‘nostalgia’ being, quoting Christopher Latch, “merely a psychological placebo that allows one to accept regretfully but uncritically whatever is currently being served up in the name of progress.”<sup>32</sup>

The foregoing may suggest that Bellah’s rejection of standard conception of community is built around his discontent with defining community in terms of shared values and goals. Bellah rejects defining community in terms of shared values and goals especially because it does not allow for social criticisms, and eventually stagnates the society. The liberals have objected to this idea of shared values and goals from a different perspective. According to liberals, societies are supposed to be a contractual association of communally unencumbered, right-carrying individuals, with the principle of fairness underlying their pursuit of individual interests. Rawls, for instance, holds that society, being as it were, distributive, competitive and populated by self-interested human beings, is a co-operative venture for mutual advantage.<sup>33</sup> This suggests a denial of community because if the idea of community is woven around shared values and goals, then it can only exist in small groups, which is neither possible nor desirable in large-scale societies or institutions.

According to Bellah, community consists either in silent consensus about shared values and goals or in contractual relation among free and disjointed fellows only interested in pursuing largely incompatible goals. This implies that while none of these represents community in its own right, it is impossible to define community without having recourse to either of them. Hence, Bellah seeks to reconcile the two seemingly disparate accounts by conceiving them as a “continuum, or even as a complementarity, rather than as an either/or proposition.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 4.

<sup>34</sup> Bellah, 16.

To construe community as an amalgamation of these two accounts, however, seems to involve an error. This error comes to fore when you conflate community with the spirit of community, two clearly different phenomena. Such error is common both to supporters of community and to their philosophical liberal critics.

In order to remove the above error, a distinction must be made between community and the spirit of community. This distinction is clearly suggested in Amitai Etzioni's *The Spirit of Community*, where what could be referred to as the communitarian manifestoes of the ideal community are well spelt out. These cut across different spheres of the community including family, school, and other political institutions. It is discovered that Etzioni's discussion of these different organs of community, beside its critical attitude towards liberal/libertarian social systems, provokes the need for a return to the good old days when the community was being run not by the greed introduced by a dangerous over-stretching of individual rights, but by a healthy communal concern for one another. The spirit of community may be thought of as community values and goals which define the essence of community's existence. Community must, therefore, be distinguishable from community spirit because the thought of one does not include the other, necessarily. Whereas a community is an entity defined essentially by *shared space* within which interactive activities among its inhabitants (persons and nonpersons) occur under the umbrella of common ownership of the space, the spirit of community helps to specify the *kind* of people occupying an actual human community, and this forms part of the basis for their identity.

Perhaps Bellah's failure to recognize the above distinction, leads to the illusion that all communities strive towards the same ideal. Difficulties attend attempts to provide an acceptable proposal for what this ideal really is. Thus, the proponents of the normative conception of community have the responsibility of specifying what the end is to which all communities strive. A typical communitarian response may be one that specifies 'common good' as the end of all communities. As Hussain notes, "the 'common good' refers to those facilities – whether material, cultural or institutional – that the members of a community provide to all members in order to fulfill a relational obligation they all have to care for certain interests that they have in common."<sup>35</sup> Setting aside the ambiguity of the definition, it suggests that diverse

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<sup>35</sup> Waheed Hussain, "The Common Good," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2018 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/common-good/>.

things may constitute the common good for different communities. For example, what constitutes the common good for a community sited along a coastal line may be different from that of another community located close to the desert. They are geographically constrained to have different interests, which form the basis of their values and goals.

The community spirit can be progressive, stagnant, retrogressive, corrupt, hard-working, war-like, hospitable, sociable, lazy, violent, and religious, to mention a few, but only community can be developed as secure, vulnerable, poor, dirty, beautiful, small, far, desolate, populous, etc. The spirit of community may be strong, low, high, elated, but it is community itself whose soil is fertile, whose girls are sexually profligate, whose light is stable, whose husbands are unfaithful, whose youths are uncritical, etc. It is in the community where children are born, where children are raised, where the dead are buried, where accidents happen. It is the community that people leave behind when they travel, and to which they return. Community is where all sorts of things happen without any known pattern of happening, leading ultimately to the suspicion that community is an elusive phenomenon. Following from this argument, one may object to Bellah's submission:

Thus we are led to the question of what makes any kind of group a community and not just a contractual association, the answer lies in a shared concern with the following question: "What will make this group a good group?" Any institution, such as a university, a city, a society, insofar as it is or seeks to be a community, needs to ask what is a good university, city, society, and so forth. So far as it reaches agreement about the good it is supposed to realize [...] it becomes a community with some common values and common goals.<sup>36</sup>

A problem with the above characterization of community derives from the worry over whether a community has the ability to disintegrate into a non-community. Suppose, for instance, there is a human group that exhibits Bellah's specifications for ideal community. Such human group, to follow Bellah, would qualify for a community because it would manifest qualities that would have made it 'a good human group.' Suppose further that at a later time of the group's existence, it loses sight on its desire to be a good human group. This, still following Bellah, would imply that

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<sup>36</sup> Bellah, 16.

the group has degenerated into being an ordinary ‘contractual association’ rather than a community. The question, then, is this: is it an essential characteristic of community to be this fluid, dangling between community and non-community? This fluidity, it appears, raises some issues in logic that Bellah may not be comfortable with.

Hence, to say that a community disagrees on its values and goals is to say that there is the possibility of a shift occurring in the community spirit. The dominant attitude within a community per time determines its spirit of the time. A community does not disintegrate or cease to exist because it fails to demonstrate Bellah’s ideal property. It may raise genuine concern for the community spirit to be re-evaluated in the light of its current, perhaps undesirable, state, and the goals the members of the community have set for themselves. For instance, the university is a community because it attracts certain category of persons (such as scholars, researchers, students, administrators, emissaries, food vendors, etc.), accommodates certain buildings (such as lecture theatres, senate building, faculty offices, departmental offices, etc.) and encourages certain sort of activities (such as teaching and learning, research, scholarship, student unionism, etc.) among others. Both human (e.g., scholars, researchers, students, etc.) and non-human (buildings, learning, research, scholarship, etc.) occupants of a university constitute the shared space called the university community. A good or bad university is a product of the activities of members within the shared space. Put differently, a university is good or bad to the extent to which members sharing its space make it. Hence, it cannot be the case, as Bellah proposes, that agreement on what constitutes a good university makes a community; rather, it is out of the community that a good university is made.

The normativity of Bellah’s view is further reinforced by the definition of community in *Habits of the Heart*. Here, Bellah, along with co-authors, defines community as “a group of people who are socially interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision making, and who share certain practices that both define the community and are nurtured by it.”<sup>37</sup> This definition presupposes that there are social conditions to be met before there can be talks about community. The problem with this definition is that it puts the cart before the horse; it assumes that the conditions predate

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<sup>37</sup> Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William N. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Stephen M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), 333.

community. On the contrary, according to the shared space view, community is temporally prior to what its members do or fail to do. The conditions outlined in the definition, namely social interdependence, joint discussions of issues and decision making, etc., are all products of community; their presence does not constitute the community.

The point against the normative notion of community, either as the communitarian shared value or the liberal contractual agreement, is that for both, there really should be no disagreement on what a community is. This is because attitudes towards terms such as ‘community,’ ‘individual liberty,’ and ‘human rights,’ etc., provide theoretical framework for distinguishing communitarianism from liberalism. For example, whereas liberals opine that the primary locus of political allegiance is the preservation of individual liberty and rights, communitarians believe preservation of community ought to be the primary locus of political allegiance. It is not the case that liberals lack the conception of community nor do communitarians lack the conceptions of liberty and rights. Thus, there can be a genuine ground for disagreement between liberals and communitarians only if they both share the same conceptions of these terms; otherwise, the acclaimed disagreement between them would be spurious, or, at best, merely verbal. I propose that the appropriate conception of community should be something that both liberals and communitarians accept, even if they disagree on whether or not it constitutes the primary locus of political allegiance.

Rethinking community in terms of shared space helps to reinforce the need for both communitarians and liberals to be committed to the survival of community. The debate between communitarians and liberal has often been framed as an ideological impasse between the communitarians’ commitment to the shared value of common good and the liberals’ commitment to the shared value of individual liberty and rights. This way, communitarianism seems to be antithetical to liberalism, the former being a collectivist theory while the latter an individualist theory. However, with the shared space conception of community, the dispute between communitarians and liberals, traditionally framed, becomes merely methodological in the sense that they are both methods of ensuring the shared space, that is, community, is kept at its best state for human survival.

Both communitarians and liberals are committed to keeping the community, conceived as shared space, alive, albeit with different



methods. Communitarians, on the one hand, flaunt their commitment to the well-being of the community by being more concerned about the protection of things that members of community share in common. To communitarians, community is a moral voice that shapes members' character in relation to the community itself and to the other occupants of the same community. Etzioni recounts his experience as a new tenant in a community in Washington, D. C. thus:

When I first moved to a suburb of Washington, D.C., I neglected to mow my lawn. One neighbor asked politely if I needed "a reference to a good gardener." Another pointed out that unless we all kept up the standards of the neighborhood, we would end up with an unsightly place and declining property values.<sup>38</sup>

The two community co-members of whom Etzioni writes are devoted to the value, that is the 'community spirit' of keeping the community as beautiful as Etzioni met it. Suffice to say that they are both committed to the well-being of the community, to which Etzioni's act of negligence poses a significant threat.

On the other hand, liberals seek to achieve the same feat by talking about rights. It is good to note that talks about rights help to ensure the continuous existence and sustenance of community. Among other things, rights help to create a level playground for individual members of community to realize, develop, and be who they want to be within the context of community, without anticipating harm from fellow community members. Other non-human occupants of community are imbued with rights to bar members of community from their indiscriminate exploitations, which may be injurious to the community. Etzioni articulates how the concept of rights has become so trivialized that it now applies to sand! He writes:

[...] have pointed out that many builders use sand from beaches, that cities cut into them to create new harbors, and that utilities use them for their power plants – all of them benefiting from beaches and contributing to their erosion. But instead of turning to the language of responsibility to protect beaches, legal scholars, among

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<sup>38</sup> Etzioni, 33.

them a Los Angeles lawyer- who specializes in the environment, have advanced the notion that sand has rights! It is difficult to imagine a way to trivialize rights more than to claim that they are as common as sand.<sup>39</sup>

As trivialized as the above may appear, it is arguable that the so-called notion of the right of sand being advanced by the likes of the Los Angeles lawyer is an attempt to protect beaches and their enviroing community from the hazards that may result from their unguided exploitations. Protection of rights and liberty from abuse seems to be a liberal approach to forestalling community collapse. It is a way of saying that the community is protected if the rights and liberty of individual members are protected.

One merit of the concept of community as shared space is that it reveals community as the primary element of social life. Hence, not only is it that no individual can flourish without community, but also life itself is not possible without the community. It is within the shared space called community that we live and have our being. Community is an amphitheater where all activities that characterize the spirit of community are showcased. Disagreements over shared values and goals are only some of the interactive activities that occur within community, and, thus, do not essentiate it. In other words, one of the activities that community as a shared space allows for is the possibility of conflicts among members. The shared space is the *absolute* common good for both communitarians and liberals. Hence, as common good, the shared space receives maximum care and attention from both communitarians and liberals. Famakinwa has brilliantly argued for correcting the long-standing error that the notion of common good is primarily communitarian.<sup>40</sup> Although he posits liberty as the liberal common good, the value of liberty is not sought for its own sake. As the liberal common good, the value of liberty is an instrumental one, aiming ultimately at the protection of the shared space. In fact, the threat of insecurity and lack of safety to this shared space provides a moral justification for liberals to engage in a just war, in spite of the alleged liberal commitment to individual rights and liberty. Rawls writes that liberals “go to war only when they *sincerely* and *reasonably* believe that their safety and security are seriously endangered by the expansionist policies

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>40</sup> Jimoh O. Famakinwa, “The Liberal Common Good,” *Diametros* 12 (2007): 25-43.

of outlaw states.”<sup>41</sup> This represents an attempt to safeguard the existence of the community by a liberal regime.

#### IV. Conclusion

Our conception of community can be roughly summarized in the following words by David A. Hardcastle:

[...] the word *community* conjures up memories of places where we grew up, where we now live and work, physical structures and spaces – cities, towns, neighborhoods, buildings, stores, roads, streets. It calls up memories of people and relationships – families, friends and neighbors, organizations, associations of all kinds: congregations, PTAs, clubs, congregations, teams, neighborhood groups, town meetings, and even virtual communities experienced through chat rooms. It evokes special events and rituals – Fourth of July fireworks, weddings, funerals, parades, and the first day of school. It stirs up sounds and smells and feelings – warmth, companionship, nostalgia, and sometimes fear, anxiety, and conflict as well.<sup>42</sup>

The above shows that community is, first and foremost, a place, a shared space where all that are listed above take place. It is a point of social interaction. The idea of a shared space, which community traditionally conjures, has been redefined in the face of contemporary reality in the world of science and technology. Such advancement has revealed the whole world as a community, whose members are united by the common cause of ensuring the continuity of the shared space called earth. This global community is faced with common challenges, such as global poverty, global warming, climate change, global terrorism, among others. Establishment of such world bodies as International Monetary Fund (IMF), United Nations Organization (UNO), World Health Organization (WHO), to mention but a few, are some of the efforts aimed at fighting these common global enemies, thereby ensuring that the global community not only continues to exist, but is kept in peace, for it is only in this that individual members therein can flourish.

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<sup>41</sup> John Rawls, *The Law of the Peoples: With the Idea of Public Reason Revisited* (London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 90-91.

<sup>42</sup> David A. Hardcastle, “The Concept of Community in Social Work Practice,” in *Community Practice: Theories and Skills for Social Workers*, eds. David Hardcastle, Patricia R. Powers, and Stanley Wenocur, 94-129 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 94.

This paper does not aim to determine which of the communitarian and liberal approaches is more plausible. Rather, it attempts a response to the probe “what is a community?” Given the discussion so far, one is amply warranted to submit that an adequate response to the probe cannot be in terms of the attitude of members of community. This, at best, may be required to answer another probe, namely, “how ought we to live to realize a progressive community?” What constitutes an appropriate answer to this question depends largely on what kind of community is in question. It may be true that some communities realize their essence through manifesting properties identified by Bellah. The paper has also shown awareness of some communities that realize their essence by the so-called silent consensus. Community is a natural organism whose existence is conceptually detachable from whatever happens in it. Hence, neither silent consensus on basic shared values nor argument about what the shared goals are – what is here referred to as the spirit of community – in themselves, makes up a community. They may only help to keep community alive and properly oiled.

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# The Reinstatement and Ontology of Meaning

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## **Abstract**

*While science and logic are incredible intellectual endeavors, and while reductionist methodologies have led to advances in knowledge, these methods do not tell the whole story of life, world, and reality. There are real phenomena that, due to their experiential and holistic nature, cannot be properly quantified over by limiting oneself to science, logic, or reductive means of explanation and description. Attempting to understand the world and the human condition requires a plethora of epistemic pursuits to more fully quantify over the plurality of phenomena. Existential meaning is, I argue, an experiential and holistic phenomenon, and as such it cannot be quantified over by reductive endeavors, pure logic, or scientific inquiry. Meaning emerges through the relation of a complex structure (human) in relation to the world, and it exists as an irreducible embodied and embedded experience.*

**Keywords:** *meaning; experience; authenticity; phenomenological; being-in-the-world*

## I. Introduction

The contemporary scene of many western cultures is one of increased nihilism. The technological age of detachment, the rise of scientism, and the still-felt repercussions of a mechanical universe have produced an attitude of perceived purposelessness and meaninglessness. This attitude is extended to both one's individual life and the cosmos at large. In this paper, I will argue that existential meaning is not absent from the world, but that it has become veiled

by the deification of science, logic, and reduction. Science and logic are indispensable tools in helping to frame the world in an intelligible manner, and reductive methodology has produced a wealth of useful information, but science, logic, and reductive explanation do not tell the whole story.

The meaning that I will argue for in this paper is not one of supernatural origin; it is found in the natural world of experience. As such, it is through phenomenological investigation that existential meaning is to be found, as opposed to reductive abstraction, science, or pure logic. I also will not be arguing against science, logic, and reduction as such, rather I will argue that these endeavors are not suited to reveal the nature of meaning in human life. I will argue that a phenomenological approach is essential not only in illuminating meaning, but also in understanding the world more generally and holistically, as experience reveals aspects of reality that cannot be understood through the strict and limited methodologies of reductive science and logic. I will conclude by suggesting a holistic approach to understanding, which places lived experience, next to science and logic as tools to revealing and understanding life, world, and reality.

## II. Science and Reduction

While it may be impossible to exhaust questions such as “what is science?”, “how does science work?”, and “what type of knowledge is produced by science?” it is useful nevertheless, to give some general answers to such questions. This might serve as an incomplete but general description of the scientific enterprise: “science seeks to describe, control, and predict the natural world through observation and experimentation.” It attempts to determine causal relations and strives to obtain knowledge of how the universe functions. The Science Council defines science as “the pursuit and application of knowledge and understanding of the natural and social world following a systematic methodology based on evidence.”<sup>1</sup> It goes on to list criteria for scientific methodology which includes, at the top of the list, “objective observation.”<sup>2</sup> Science isn’t interested in how one *feels* about something, and it strives to ensure that the knowledge gained through a scientific approach is devoid of “particular perspectives, value commitments, community bias, or personal interests.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Science Council, “Our Definition of Science,” October 12, 2020, <https://sciencecouncil.org/about-science/our-definition-of-science/>.

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

<sup>3</sup> Julian Reiss, and Jan Sprenger, “Scientific Objectivity,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of*



Science is reductive, in that it seeks to reduce the world to scientific explanation, such as the reduction of complex entities, for instance human beings, to biological, chemical, or physical levels of description. The success of reductive science has led to the belief that reductionistic endeavors can explain everything. The problem with this is that there exist non-reductive phenomena such as meaning, and, applying a reductive methodology to something such as meaning has led to claims that meaning is not real, because it is not explainable in reductive terms. This is an attempt to reduce something, which is inherently holistic and perspectival to objective physical terms, such as particles and fields of force. Or, in other words, it is to apply the fantastical concept of “a view from nowhere” to something (meaning) which inevitably requires “a view from somewhere,” and someone or something, to have the experience. In short, reductionism fails to recognize the reality of holistic and relational phenomena, and it risks misunderstanding the human condition in relation to the world.

It might be useful to look at Frank Jackson’s *Knowledge Argument*, to show that a world reduced to scientific physical facts, does not convey a complete understanding of the world. The *Knowledge Argument*, sets up a theoretical circumstance, wherein a scientist named Mary, has lived her life in a black and white room. She has had the most rigorous education in science and has learned every physical fact about the world which includes every physical fact, regarding color vision. When she is released from her black and white room, and enters the world of color, will she learn anything new? I would argue that yes, she will learn something about the world, namely what it is like to see color.<sup>4</sup>

It is argued that she will not learn any additional physical facts about the world, however, because seeing the color red for instance, is not a scientific-physical fact, but nevertheless the experience of seeing red, imparts a new understanding of the world that Mary did not previously have. This leads one to conclude that there are things in the world that can be known, discovered, or revealed, but which are not reducible to physical facts. There are things about the world that are irreducibly experiential, and which can only be known or understood through experience. I will refer to this type of knowledge,

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*Philosophy* (Winter 2020 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/scientific-objectivity/>.

<sup>4</sup> Martine Nida-Rümelin, and Donnchadh O Conaill, “Qualia: The Knowledge Argument,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2021 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/cgi-bin/encyclopedia/archinfo.cgi?entry=qualia-knowledge/>.

as experiential knowledge. The neglect of experiential knowledge, parallels a void in one's understanding of reality and the human condition. If one wants to pursue a comprehensive understanding of the nature of reality, experiential knowledge must be admitted into the toolkit of valid resources for doing so.

### III. Logic

Just as in the previous section, my goal is not to give an exhaustive description of logic, but to provide generalizations, as to what logic is and how it functions. On one conception, "logic is the study of certain mathematical properties of artificial, formal languages."<sup>5</sup> In another sense, logic is a tool that can be used to test the validity of certain claims within an established theoretical framework. As with science, logic is disinterested in the subject, it generally does not take feelings or personal values into consideration when determining the validity of an argument or theory. If one asks, "what is a meaningful life?" and does not admit passion or personal interest into the equation, and instead chooses logic and reason as the sole tools of analysis, one will never arrive at a relevant conclusion. What can disinterested reason and logic tell of a meaningful life? How is one to use logic and reason alone, in determining whether a life in pursuit of academia would provide him or her, with a more meaningful journey, than a life of business management for example? A purely logical analysis of either endeavors does not include or admit of any talk, regarding existential meaning or value. On a purely logical and rational basis, meaning is unfounded. It takes experiential engagement with a pursuit to reveal whether it is meaningful to the person in question, not logical armchair theorizing. It should be noted, however, that logic can, and should reenter the picture, as one begins to reflect on the experience of meaning, because it is through logic that one might organize their experiences, and once one has chosen this or that possibility for being that they find meaningful, logic can help direct one toward that end.

### IV. Meaning, Phenomenology, and Holism

Whether meaning exists in the cosmos without reference to human life, or life in general, is not the focus of this paper. Rather, what will be discussed, is meaning as experienced. In this, meaning seems

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Hofweber, "Logic and Ontology," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2021 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/logic-ontology/>.

to be a holistic phenomenon emerging from the human structure in relation to the world and as such, it is not reducible to any lower order explanations.

Holistic phenomena require a broader scope of analysis. That is, some phenomena might be irreducible if the phenomenon in question is ontologically dependent on other phenomena for its existence and/or mode of being. Such a phenomenon could only be understood in a holistic manner. Holism requires that one recognize the interplay of interrelated and unitary entities. This holistic approach stands in contrast to a reductive approach, which isolates a given entity or set of entities to be investigated without reference or concern for the wider world.

Phenomenology is a holistic philosophical approach in that it attends experience as experienced, in an attempt to reveal the structures of experience.<sup>6</sup> In other words, that which shows itself in experience is admitted into the scope of phenomenological analysis. It is in this sense that phenomenology is holistic, i.e., it doesn't dictate a priori what may or may not be admitted into the investigation. Rather, experience is allowed to inform theory. We must, then, look to experiences of meaning and let such experiences inform our ontology of meaning. For this, a phenomenological approach is necessary.

## V. The Ontology of Meaning

Meaning does not appear in our experience as a physical object, nor can we experience the phenomenon of meaning by conjuring up the concept or idea of meaning, as we might recall a fact. Meaning seems to be a holistic phenomenon of being-in-the-world. Being-in-the-world is a central concept of Martin Heidegger's phenomenological treatise *Being and Time*.<sup>7</sup> "The compound expression 'Being-in-the-world' indicates in the very way we have coined it, that it stands for a *unitary* phenomenon. This primary datum must be seen as a whole."<sup>8</sup> In other words, being-in-the-world is a necessary and unceasing relation between human and world, "it belongs essentially" to the type of being that we ourselves are, and it reveals human being and world as

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<sup>6</sup> David Woodruff Smith, "Phenomenology," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/>.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie, and Edward Robinson (Oxford, UK : Blackwell, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

necessarily unified and inseparable.<sup>9</sup> Because being-in-the-world is a holistic and unitary phenomenon, being and world must be examined together as being-in-the-world, if either being or world are to be properly understood. I will make use of the unitary phenomenon being-in-the-world, as I articulate the experiential and irreducible nature of meaning.

Meaning seems to reveal itself in experiences of active involvement with the world. The inability of reductive science to verify the existence of meaning does not, by necessity, lead to the conclusion that meaning must not be real. A more natural conclusion might be that meaning is an irreducible phenomenon. It is irreducible because if the human structure as such, is removed from the equation, and only the world is investigated, meaning cannot be revealed. Likewise, if human being is isolated from the world, meaning cannot be revealed. It would be akin to taking  $2 + 2 = 4$  and removing the left side of the equation, leaving  $+ 2 = 4$ . The conclusion cannot follow, because an essential part of the equation has been removed. Thus, removing either human being or world from the equation, is to remove a fundamental and necessary part of the equation that leads one to meaning. Human + world = experience, and meaning is an experiential phenomenon (though not all experience is necessarily meaningful).

Meaning falls into the ontological category of experience and the epistemic category of experiential or phenomenological understanding, which are both holistic-relational categories. Meaning is an experience; it is something embodied rather than conceptually created. It exists and is known through experience. One must be present in the world – present to the experience – to experience meaning. Meaning as such, is very much real but it can be difficult to conceptualize due to its inherent experiential nature. It is an experience as opposed to a concept or fact. Just as the phenomenal experience of seeing red, reveals something about the world, so does the experience of meaning. It helps to reveal things about oneself to oneself, it helps in establishing what one values and what purpose one might have in life. The signal of meaning is absorption of self into the world; it is the Heideggerian involvement of authentic being-in-the-world, the modern flow-state, or the Zen concept of “mushin no shin” which translates as the “mind of no-mind.”<sup>10</sup> The state of embodied meaning is marked by absorbed engagement with the world – it is the pursuit of excellence in one’s

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>10</sup> S. F. Radzikowski, “Mushin State of No Mind in Martial Arts,” *Shinkan Ryū Kenpō*, November 30, 2018, <https://shinkanryu.org/mushin-no-mind/>.

authentically chosen field of interest – or in being-with-others during a shared celebration.

Finding and experiencing meaning in life is linked to Martin Heidegger's concept of authenticity. According to Heidegger, authenticity requires that we "take ourselves back."<sup>11</sup> and make "manifest our freedom for choosing and grasping ourselves."<sup>12</sup> In other words, we must stand witness to the possibilities which are before us, and we must choose according to our "call of conscience."<sup>13</sup> In this, we take responsibility for our own being, and we embark on an authentic journey. To live authentically "is to live a life that one oneself chooses, not the life that is prescribed for one by one's social situation."<sup>14</sup> Such authenticity often involves the risk of failure and criticism but "[...] a meaningful life is one focused on authenticity."<sup>15</sup> Authenticity is discovered through active engagement with the world and an experiential examination of self-in-the-world.

To reveal meaning, we might ask in what experience is the illusion that one is separate from the world severed? What leads to a feeling of unification between self and world? What draws one nearest to the world? It is in uncovering the perspectival but truthful answers to such questions that authenticity can emerge, and from authenticity, meaningful engagement with the world follows.

Experience unencumbered by reductive meta-analysis of the experience in question is where one finds meaning. When one ceases to define, ceases to categorize, and embraces experience as such, the true manifestation of meaning emerges. Hindered by an advanced intellect and lack of wisdom, human-being is a plague unto itself. The conditions for happiness and meaning are ever-present but obscured by the anxiety of the intellect. This anxiety is self-made, wherein one lives within the conceptual creations of the mind, and not within the world. Experience ceases to be meaningful when the intellect takes hold of being and drowns it, in reductive conceptual anxieties. Like any tool, rational reflection must be used when it is needed and discarded when it is not. Just as one would not use a screwdriver to drive a nail, nor a hammer to tighten a bolt, one would not (or should not) use logic and reason to conjure existential meaning, though logic and reason can

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<sup>11</sup> Heidegger, 287.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

<sup>14</sup> Wendell O'Brien, "The Meaning of Life: Early Continental and Analytic Perspectives," *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed March 1, 2022, <https://iep.utm.edu/mean-ear/>.

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

help appropriate and organize one's experiences of meaning, after one has lived the experience.

Absorbed involvement within the world, allows one to transcend the need for a manufactured meaning of life and allows one to experience true meaning through the unification of self and world. Meaning, then, is not in oneself, nor is it in the world, it is a holistic manifestation of human engagement with the world. Human-being does not simply project values onto the world, nor are values found inherently existing, independently within the world. Rather, meaning and value are holistic phenomena of being-in-the-world. Meaning is not simply a logical or rational concept from which the embodied experience of meaning can be extracted. The ontology of meaning, then, is irreducibly holistic, relational, and experiential.

## VI. Conclusion

The rational mind engages in a translation of reality, and any such translation is necessarily fragmented and incomplete. Logic and rationality always require rules, and when rules are pressed upon the world, the world reveals certain aspects of advanced understanding due to a focused scope of inquiry, but in doing so, the world becomes fragmented and other aspects of it, become veiled and hidden from view.

Although we often take our concepts as absolute, we must remember that our judgments are tentative. Our conceptual creations are mere translations of reality, seated in a particular point in time, from a relative and perspectival position, with both implicit and explicit assumptions. We begin defining the contours of our world, in an attempt to organize our chaotic state of being. The contours defined, begin to blur quite quickly as the cosmos doesn't accept the definitions given. These are humanly produced narratives, descriptions, and explanations of the world in which we are thrown; attempts to define the contours of the cosmos. The foregoing analysis of meaning is no different, and as such we must not forget that these words, concepts, and theoretical constructions are mere signposts which are attempting to point to the phenomenon of meaning, in experience. In other words, this analysis of meaning should not be taken as meaning as such, it is instead, an attempt to show where meaning resides.

Because science and logic do not admit the use of subjective influences in their methodology, they are extremely valuable in obtaining objective (or at least intersubjective) data about the world, and in determining the validity of an argument. But it is precisely for this

reason that they remain inept at revealing meaning. Just as a scientific description of color vision does not include the phenomenal experience of seeing the color red, a scientific description of a universe devoid of meaning, does not include the experience of meaning as such.

However, reason and logic should not be discarded in favor of unbridled passion or emotion. Rather, passion, perspectival interest, emotion, and lived experience should be included as relevant and necessary tools in determining what meaning is and what a meaningful life might be, and we cannot take the scientific reductive view of the world as encompassing all that exists. Human experience must be admitted into the picture of reality, it must be admitted as part of the natural world, and the holistic phenomena which emerge from being-in-the-world, must be taken seriously. A “view from nowhere” is a dangerous and misleading conception, because a “view” must always be from “somewhere.” To view, or experience anything, implies a necessary and unceasing relation between the structure viewing or experiencing and, that which is being viewed or experienced. In other words, any viewpoint and every experience, necessarily, presuppose the unitary phenomenon of being-in-the-world, because any viewpoint and every experience is the view or experience, of an existing entity embedded in a world.

By admitting human experience into an investigation of reality, then, one also admits the unitary phenomenon of being-in-the-world, as it is here, where experience occurs. From this, forgotten things of existential importance like meaning, purpose, and value can begin to reemerge as really existing phenomena, and this can lead to a more holistic understanding of the world and the human condition. After all, meaning, purpose, and value never stopped being real, we just stopped believing that they were.

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# Responsibility in the Time of Crisis

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### Abstract

*One of the crucial questions that this text seeks to answer is whether again it is just one of the current crises of the value system that we can call “western” or it is a definite end of the functioning of a particular system and its hierarchy, whose principle of growth and imperial development is predominantly determined by the economic logic of profit/capitalism and the “infinity” of its progress. The answer implies the return/internalization of positive utopian energies and a new universalist moral optimism (macro ethics) as a dialectical antipode of postmodern “liberal” antihumanism and self-destructive relativism and total nihilism. Moreover, it requires a commitment to the creation/construction of new systems of thinking and acting and great importance of the moral-political responsibility of all social subjects in those new systems of social technology.*

**Keywords:** *crises; bioethics; responsibility; life; system; subjectivity; evolution*

## I. Bioethical axioms in the post-conventional understanding of responsibility

*The decisive force can only be a new ethos.*  
Karl Jaspers

**A**lthough there are many paradigms in contemporary *bioethical theory*, we start from the bioethical axioms in the works of Hans Jonas, among other things, because of the almost acclaimed statement that he is “one of the deepest analysts of our current moral troubles” which are an expression of the general moral uncertainty,

confusion, and profound ethical *crisis* of postmodern theory, and within which, for the same reasons, his ethical theory and normative ethics cannot be classified. Hence, it is most appropriate to speak of a kind of *post-conventional* ethics, especially when it comes to the notion of *responsibility*. In the case of Jonas, his philosophical analysis begins with Aristotle and “ends” with the always inevitable Immanuel Kant and his ethical “legacy.” As a critique of the Promethean utopia, that relies particularly heavily on well-known Bacon’s program for mastering nature through science and technology, his ethics (*The Imperative of Responsibility*) is strongly influenced by the *theory of power* (from Nietzsche to Foucault), which reinforces the role and responsibility of the *global power* in modern technological civilization for its uncertain/dangerous future, emphasizing the (geo)political outcome point and the moral responsibility of the international *political/state* factor for the present and *future* state of civilization on a global/universal level.<sup>1</sup> With this, according to several historians of recent ethics, Jonas lays the *principle/foundation* for a new social and political ethics, in which “the transformation of ethics into the ethics of responsibility leads to the transformation of the ethics of responsibility into a *political philosophy*.”<sup>2</sup>

Jonas’s philosophical/ethical views are the *ontological basis* in constituting the modern bioethical paradigm, of course, of the one that we have chosen as such, and which is often simply called the “ontology of responsibility” (as an explicit antipode to the “ontologization of the responsibility” of Ernst Bloch).<sup>3</sup> By relativizing the boundaries between the natural, technical, social, and spiritual/humanistic sciences, *philosophical biology* is the one that records and explores the primordial phenomena of “freedom” and “subjectivity” in the organic world.<sup>4</sup> With the development of modern technological civilization, which is a result of the development of sciences, especially natural and medical, there is a considerable increase and multiplication of *human power* of self-therapy, prolongation of death and self-creation, and

<sup>1</sup> Karl-Otto Apel, *Diskurs und Verantwortung: Das Problem des Übergangs zur postkonventionellen Moral* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990), 179-216. Also Zigmund Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 32-67, and Alexander Zinoviev, *Velika prekretnica: kritika zapadne hegemonije* (Beograd: Naš dom/L’Age D’Homme, 1999), 62-71.

<sup>2</sup> Annemarie Pieper, ed., *Geschichte der neueren Ethik 1-2* (Tübingen, and Basel: Francke Verlag, 1992), 126-127.

<sup>3</sup> Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 750.

<sup>4</sup> Hans Jonas, *Organismus und Freiheit. Ansätze zu einer philosophischen Biologie* (Göttingen: Sammlung Vandenhoeck, 1973), 340-342.

also of new *impotence* of self-reflection, self-control and ethical and any other self-regulation and *regulation* of the limits of freedom.<sup>5</sup>

The new condition endangers the existence of the *human subject* itself, and the survival of all other biological species, whose life depends on the free will of the same human subject. At the same time, this, vice versa, does not abolish the necessity and *dependence* of the human subject from the survival and existence of other biological species and all-natural resources. Hence, the new state of *mutual conditionality* and threat is formulated in a famous slogan: “Too much victory endangers the winner himself” or “Everyone is a cause, but also a consequence of their disappearance!” In other words, paradoxically, the more we struggle to *free* ourselves from dependence on nature, the more our survival *necessarily depends* on the survival of nature. Unfortunately, many philosophers/ethicists, among others and the great Hegel, have *underestimated* the importance and significance of nature – *inside* and *outside* of us. But, of course, this already comes out of the “ethical” context that is the subject of this specific analysis.

In a highly developed technological society, there is a maximum relativization and “loneliness” of the *power of the subject*, which requires new ethics with post-conventional, or “postmodern” normative moral, which the traditional moral of *duty* still considers valid, *but not sufficient*.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, in the conditions of technological civilization, there is a normative moral stagnation (ethical vacuum), so that the “new” moral has a necessary need to *supplement* with the *consequentialism* of the ethics of responsibility, which extends the scope of its normative moral action *far into the future*, and expands it on the *totality of the living world* on the planet (*animioethics* and *geaethics*).<sup>7</sup> Namely, it is about pleading for a voluntary “self-censorship of science in the sign of responsibility which must not allow our growing power to overcome ourselves or those who will come after us.”<sup>8</sup> With that, the macroethics of responsibility become axiomatics of post-conventional moral in general and bioethical moral in particular.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> In today’s modern language we would say “red lines,” a situation that is absurd in modern times, a kind of “paradox of power” in which power over nature simultaneously leads to absolute human submission: “At the top of the triumph is revealed its lack, contradiction, and loss of self-control!” Dejan Donev, “The Imperative Responsibility: The Return of Ethics in Science,” *Annuaire Faculté De Philosophie* 74 (2021): 28.

<sup>6</sup> Hans Jonas, *Macht oder Ohnmacht der Subjektivität: Das Leib-Seele-Problem im Vorfeld des Prinzips Verantwortung* (Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, 1981), 13-84. Also Apel, 93-105.

<sup>7</sup> Hans Jonas, *Daz Prinzip Verantwortung* (Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, 1979), 42-44, and Dejan Donev, *Voved vo etikata* (Skopje: UKIM, 2018), 159-164.

<sup>8</sup> Hans Jonas, *Technik, Medizin und Ethik. Zur Praxis des Prinzips Verantwortung* (Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, 1987), 80.

<sup>9</sup> Abdulah Šarčević, “Etika odgovornosti u krizi znanstveno-tehničke civilizacije: Makroetika

a) *Being and non-being as a matter of life and death*

Ontologically, the struggle for life is an explicit confrontation of being with non-being. Due to the need to satisfy the internal biological needs, through the exchange of matter, *life* contains in itself the possibility of non-being, as its own, constantly present in it, antithesis, i.e. danger and threat, which seeks and forces on care, and causes constant concern and *struggle for survival*. Hence, the affirmation and constant self-affirmation of one's own life negate non-being, a negation of non-existence and a constant *free choice* of life. "Thanks to that denied non-being, the being becomes a positive aspiration, meaning a constant choice of the self."<sup>10</sup> *The choice of life*, the willingness and the readiness to continue to live, and to survive, is a constant affirmative answer – a big Yes – to Hamlet's question toward which we are faced every day: to be or not to be!? The act of keeping alive puts a stamp on the self-affirmation of being. It is always, again and again, the cognition and recognition of the incomparable and irreplaceable value and advantage of life *before* death, and life *above* death; struggle to overcome *evil* and defeat death; the *light* of prevailing over darkness, and another win of the battle in the eternal war of *Eros* and *Thanatos*.

From a logical point of view, "life is mortal" is a paradox and a fundamental, dialectical contradiction, but at the same time, it is inseparable from its essence. One can think of life precisely because of life and for the sake of life, instead of and thanks to its mortality, that is, death as such. Life is mortal, not even though it is life, but because it is life, because it is so and such, according to its original constitution. However, the belief and the knowledge that being, i.e. life, is the primary state of things, has always been valid, so that death became a confusing and astonishing *secret* of that same life. Hence, death has become a problem, and the *problem* of death is, *historically*, the first real problem that the *spirit* was given the task of solving, and whose birth and development was yet to come, says Jonas. The appearance of the phenomenon of death "as an explicit problem, signifies the awakening of the questioning spirit, before any conceptual level of theory has been reached."<sup>11</sup> Consequently, *panvitalism* is (also)

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Hansa Jonasa," in Hans Jonas, *Princip odgovornost*, trans. Slobodan Novakov (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1990), 327-375, and Denko Skalovski, *Vo prvo lice ednina (mal ličen kulurološki rečnik) – Tom 2, od Liber. do Psiho* (Skopje: Az-Buki, 2012), 182-183.

<sup>10</sup> Jonas, *Daz Prinzip Verantwortung*, 114-119.

<sup>11</sup> Jonas, *Organismus und Freiheit*, 19-21.

a primordial human thought. It is embodied in myth, cult and *religion*, and mainly in all forms of early metaphysics, in which all states of consciousness fought death, either to assimilate it into life or to treat it as something external and alien, as evidenced, among other things, by all forms of belief in the afterlife, proving the original, *ontological dominance of life*.<sup>12</sup>

However, with the advent of the *modern age* and the development of the natural and technical sciences, especially with the breakthrough of technology in *medicine* as a field of the most *practical* application of *biological* discoveries, and with the breakthrough in the totality of “production” and the maintenance of life in general, this constancy of life, through death, will be seriously endangered, and today more and more by experimenting with *human genes*.<sup>13</sup> Because of – with the help of *technique* – the enormously increased *power* of life for “*abnormal*” which means “immoral” prolongation of life and procrastination of death, in recent decades, rises the number of philosophers/ethicists talking about the “obligation for dying” or according to Jonas, the *right* of dying, i.e. the moral *duty* to die.<sup>14</sup> This is an obligation prescribed to man by God himself (or, if we like, “mother nature”), and it is from this fateful obligation that the wandering Prometheus (namely man) wants to get rid of, by constantly and persistently striving to take the place of Zeus, namely the God. By doing so, man wants to destroy pain and wants to become a creator of himself, of course, in the image of his creator God. So – again with the help of technique – man wants to fulfil his primordial desire to become *immortal*, but this time not only mentally but also physically, which is a much *more dangerous* desire because there is no greater danger to man/humanity than people who have imagined that they have become gods and that as such they can do whatever they want – including the most remarkable crimes – and go *unpunished*. In this ontological/anthropological/political context, it is essential to mention a similar meaning in the radical interpretation of the Old Testament and its tradition given by Erich Fromm, with the famous slogan: “Man can become like God, but he cannot become

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 11-41, and Ana Fritzhand, and Dejan Donev, “Between Ego(centr)ism and Cooperation: Would People Become Morally Disengaged or more Altruistic after the Covid-19 Pandemic?” in *Practical Ethics – Studies: Medicine and Ethics in Times of Corona*, eds. Martin Woessler, and Hans Martin Sass, 411-419 (Zurich: LIT Verlag, 2020).

<sup>13</sup> Jonas, *Technik, Medizin und Ethik*, 162-241, and Suzana Simonovska, “Ethical Dimensions of Genetic Engineering,” *Annuaire Faculté De Philosophie* 59 (2006): 669-678.

<sup>14</sup> Jonas, *Technik, Medizin und Ethik*, 242-268.

God.”<sup>15</sup> Not to mention Fromm’s dystopian prediction that humanity will enter an age in which a new “fascism with a smiling face” will rule (already ruling?!) and that the new rulers will be people who believe that they have become gods.

And when we finally summarize all the relations of being and non-being as questions of life and death, then logically follows Jonas’ warning that we must *heuristically* assume that the immortal man would probably no longer be human, “because birth and death go together [...]. Happiness is that there are always and again newborn creatures for which everything is new, who see the world with new eyes.”<sup>16</sup> After all, this is not something new in the history of philosophy – from Plato to Ernst Bloch – but Jonas is right when he *warns* that with technological intervention in human life, this “always new and young” will be maximally relativized and *endangered*, even with real chances/dangers for self-destruction of life, i.e. with the *possibility of non-being*.<sup>17</sup>

### b) *The organism and the paradoxes of freedom*

*Man can get rid of everything, except from the being.*  
Emmanuel Mounier

Exposing a kind of prolegomena for a possible “ontology” of the biological phenomenon, Jonas’ main intention is to overcome Descartes’ dualism in understanding the *organic world*, because in a certain sense, the history of modern philosophy, primarily philosophical anthropology, is “revolving” around Descartes’ alternative principle, and philosophical biology is the one that eliminates and removes this artificial dichotomy of spheres, so when considering the organism, it never loses sight of the fact that he is not a whole only in a functional sense, but he is a *whole* and in the physical-mental sense.<sup>18</sup> This, even more since the philosophical development after Descartes, especially of rationalism, and then of subjective idealism (even in Kant and Schopenhauer’s voluntarism). Aware of this Cartesian fallacy, he “sought to smooth out this dualism as much as possible, trying to dissolve the notion of nature and, ultimately, the whole content of experience – into the *ego*, understood *transcendental*.”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Erich Fromm, *You Shall Be as Gods: A Radical Interpretation of the Old Testament and Its Tradition* (New York: Fawcett Premier, 1969), 53.

<sup>16</sup> Jonas, *Daz Prinzip Verantwortung*, 312-314.

<sup>17</sup> Skalovski, *Vo prvo lice ednina – Tom. 2*, 186.

<sup>18</sup> Helmuth Plessner, *The Levels of Organic Life and the Human: Introduction to Philosophical Anthropology*, ed. Phillip Honenberger, trans. Millay Hyatt (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), 161.

<sup>19</sup> Max Horkheimer, *Critique of Instrumental Reason (Radical Thinkers)*, trans. Matthew

As a long-term consequence of this dualism, man turns to *introspection*. But it is no longer a reflection of human consciousness about the state of its own soul and body, but anthropocentric cognitive care that is interested only for its own content. Moreover, part of Descartes' legacy left to philosophy is the problem of the soul-body relationship and the problem of the interaction of mind and body, that is, spirit and body, which remains one of the most relevant philosophical questions.<sup>20</sup> So, in general, "the essence of the Cartesian cogitatio is in fact cogito which always means cogito me cogitare, and which must lead to certainty because nothing is involved here except what consciousness itself has produced; no one intervenes except the producer of the product: man is faced with nothing and no one, but himself."<sup>21</sup>

Today, however, even the most intoxicated and euphoric anthropocentrists gather the courage to acknowledge the unsustainability of their philosophical/anthropological position. In that spirit, and so that it does not turn out that we rely too much on Jonas and his arguments too, we will quote the words of Edgar Morin, who *self-critically* admits his extreme anthropocentric/humanistic "sins":

My anthropologism has perverted itself in humanistic Vulgate, in which only man is a value, and in which only he, that being completely separated from the Universe and the world, is irrevocably destined to become *the subject of the world and its owner*. Today, [...] I do not give up from anthropologism at all, but I am inclined to instill deeper and deeper *biological understandings* in it and fit it into a *cosmologism*. Today I reject isolationist-proprietary *humanism*.<sup>22</sup>

We cite these findings of Morin not only because they occur at about the same time and coincide with those of Jonas – after a series of problems, and even after the problem of understanding the phenomenon of death – but also because almost in the same period (60'/70'/80' of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) they coincide with the critical "diagnostics" of the Frankfurt

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O'Connell (London: Verso, 2013), 76-77.

<sup>20</sup> Vladimir Davčev, *Analitičkata filosofija i "duh-telo" interakcijata* (Skopje: Az-Buki, 2010), 62-72.

<sup>21</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Human Condition* (Chicago, and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 273-280.

<sup>22</sup> Edgar Morin, *L' Homme et la Mort* (Paris: Points, 1976), 409.

School (from Horkheimer to Habermas), which, in turn, is best known for continuing along the tracks and paths of the dialectical philosophical “methodology” of Hegel’s/Marx’s intellectual heritage.<sup>23</sup>

In the spirit of the same self-awareness and self-criticism, Jonas believes that the exchange of matter, movement, the satisfaction of needs, feelings and perceptions that reign in the organic, “already in their lowest creations, prepare the spiritual, and that the spirit, even in its highest distant kingdoms, remains part of the organic.”<sup>24</sup> And if today the prevailing opinion is that Cartesian dualism is surpassed by the notion of the unity of life, and if Marx’s rule that “consciousness is a conscious being” holds true, then this holds true for Jonas: “The soul is the soul of this body. And the spirit is the spirit of this bodily-mental unity.”<sup>25</sup>

So that the creation of one *philosophy of life* (perhaps a new kind of individually immanent cosmologism), which is one of the main intentions of Jonas, in its subject necessarily includes the philosophy of the organic and the philosophy of the spirit, which means that on certain degree biology “transcends” “climbs” into ethics. And the condition for any ethics – we know – is the notion of *freedom*. It is founded in the lowest layers *not only* of human biology, and as such, it has first ontological-biological, and only then socio-historical and cultural genesis. But, returning the notion of freedom to the lap of the organic and the natural, Jonas believes that this does not contradict the conclusion about the antinomy and dialectic of the character of organic freedom. On the contrary, wherever we start and wherever we arrive, “we always encounter the *dialectical structure* that pervades the whole ontological character of life, and from all sides, it shows as a *paradox* of material existence.”<sup>26</sup> However, the destiny of man is inseparable from *being*, Jonas constantly repeats. Therefore, the path of seeking the essence of man cannot lead to avoidance but the interception of/with being. The very possibility/power of such a meeting with oneself and with being is an essential dimension and ontic capacity of the human *subject*; means freedom – whose birthplace is *history* – is itself possible only through the transhistorical, ontic essence of the subject. Thus, “history as an ontic possibility implanted in man, is a construct

<sup>23</sup> For further reading see Max Horkheimer, *Critique of Instrumental Reason*, and Jürgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, trans. John Viertel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988).

<sup>24</sup> Jonas, *Organismus und Freiheit*, 11-13.

<sup>25</sup> Hans Jonas, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung: Gespräch mit Ingo Herman* (Göttingen: Lamuv Verlag, 1991), 105-106.

<sup>26</sup> Jonas, *Organismus und Freiheit*, 292-316.



of his freedom, which, as such, is not historically, but *ontologically* generated.”<sup>27</sup>

This completes the critical elements of Jonas’s philosophical biology, developed almost twenty years before his ethical, bioethical, and biomedical theory of responsibility. We can call this period “early Jonas” unlike the later one, in which he completes his general ethical point of view, and also the new, special, *bioethically* categorical “worldview” which most explicitly emphasizes the notion of responsibility as a critical ethical notion.

c) *The (non)power of subjectivity and the ontological seat of goals*

*Subjectivity, which elevates the subject,  
also condemns him to ruin [...].  
The complete transformation of each individual area of being  
into a field of means leads to the abolition of the subject  
that is supposed to use them.*

Max Horkheimer

Based on the previous simplified representation of philosophical performances, it is not difficult to assume that Jonas will seek to relativize *the power of the subjective*. However, he will still consider its reality as “objective” like that on bodily things. “Soul” and “will” are principles among the principles of nature, and here neither dualistic nor materialistic principles satisfy. However, the effectiveness of goals is not tied only to rationality and free choice, but its beginnings – insists Jonas – are based far *before* and *beyond* man.<sup>28</sup>

On the other hand, persistent in his “model” of a possible unification of ethics with natural science, Jonas is deeply aware of the pernicious dangers, *especially for ethics*, and of the mind in general, if in elaborating the question of subjectivity, the thesis of the “powerlessness of the psychic and the epiphenomenon-argument” reigns, which lead to “right to the suicide of the mind.”<sup>29</sup> Hence, aware of the need to relativize the power of the free subject in relation to his own natural necessity, Jonas is also aware of the danger of reducing it to an *epiphenomenon* of natural evolution.

Therefore, subjectivity must have the treatment of a *new foot*, which has the power to exert “violence” on the substrate from which it arose, and which co-determines it, meaning subjectivity must be regarded as something of *continuity*, “so that we can let the highest,

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 11-18.

<sup>28</sup> Jonas, *Macht oder Ohnmacht der Subjektivität*, 29.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 65-85, and Skalovski, *Vo prvo lice ednina – Tom. 2*, 191-192.

the richest, to teach us what is below.”<sup>30</sup> In this way, the expedient action, hitherto almost entirely “reserved” only for man, is “refunded” *beyond* human subjectivity. Henceforth, it is treated as unifying with the notions of philosophy and the science of nature and is naked only as of the pinnacle of a great iceberg.

Finally, [...] and for the sake of ethics – we want the ontological seat of the goal in general, to extend it from what is discovered in the top of the subject, to what is hidden in the breadth of the being, and then, not to use what is hidden to *explain* the one who hides it – who has a completely different face.<sup>31</sup>

This “completely different person” is crucial to Jonas in preserving the *autonomy* of subjectivity, namely morality, fully aware that – consequently in his biological-organic metaphysics – subjectivity is on the verge of epiphenomenalism. Yet, Jonas dislocates goals, namely expediency, beyond any subjective consciousness, extending it diffusely downward to the whole physical/biological world as its own original *principle*. “And to what extent down, all to the elementary forms of being does its rule among the living reach, that may remain an *open question*.”<sup>32</sup> Although he does not dare to claim that some explicit “it” is the definite goal of nature, Jonas claims that nature, with the birth of life, declares, albeit tautologically, *at least one* such goal – *life itself*.

As we see, as far as “subjectivity” itself, it is so pervasive that the notion of an individual subject is slowly but surely lost, and *nature* could be labeled as an *impersonal subject*. Jonas believes in a kind of subjectivity without subject, or transsubjectivity, which means that he would rather believe

in the scattering of the core appetite inside through innumerable individual elements, rather than in their initial unity in a total metaphysical subject [...]. “Units” of discrete alliances of multiplicity, whether organic or inorganic, would already be an advanced result, to say a crystallization of scattered targeting, and would be inseparable from differentiation and individualization [...].<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Jonas, *Daz Prinzip Verantwortung*, 103-107.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-107.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

However, further such speculations regarding the issue of subjectivity and the ontological seat of goals, as Jonas himself assesses, go beyond what he and we need for our ethical, namely *bioethical goals*, i.e. for an elementary introduction with the bioethical axioms in his works, which, as we said at the beginning, we take as one of the possible bioethical paradigms for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## II. Controversies around the system/systems and crisis

*The philosophy of history springs from criticism.  
Criticism is a harbinger of the crisis.*  
Reinhart Koselleck

*With crises, we associate a performance of an objective force that deprives an entity of some of the sovereignty that normally belongs to it. Understanding an event as a crisis, we tacitly give it a normative meaning: the solution to the crisis brings the subject relief from trouble.*  
Jurgen Habermas

*The global economic crisis was caused  
by white people with blue eyes.*  
Luis Inacio Lula Da Silva

In our next short presentation, we will rely mainly on the observations of the term crisis given by Habermas in modern philosophy and social theory, back in the early '70s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the crisis was increasingly and more frequently discussed, first as cyclical *economic* crises (both in early and late capitalism), and then as a crisis of a whole *system of values* (from ethical to aesthetic/cultural) and its hierarchy, which we can simply call *Western* dating back to the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Edmund Husserl's observations, known as the "crisis of the western sciences" are often taken as the first "diagnoses" for such a modern philosophical understanding of the crisis.<sup>34</sup> But, of course, in modern times, crises have been discussed since the time of Marx, which will be mentioned as well later in the case of Habermas.

It is indicative and significant for us today, especially from the position of bioethical axioms, that even Habermas (who was never an explicit bioethicist) dates the term crisis back to the "pre-scientific" age, in the field/language of *medicine* (as crisis/absence of health). From which (from Aristotle to Hegel, i.e. to Durkheim and Merton and American functionalism), it is transmitted to all areas of human life and (self)creation, and among other things to aesthetics, where "crisis means a turning point in a fateful process," often conflicting, paradoxical and contradictory, and which happens to people in a specific time/historical period, and in a certain, *specific*, social/living space. And when we are talking about aesthetics, then we are also talking

<sup>34</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), 9-44.

about the classical/ancient tragedy, from which the notion of crisis is derived, and which in the philosophy of history in the 18<sup>th</sup> century is “transferred” to the *evolutionary theories* of society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some analysts believe that one can also speak of a parallel with the notion of crisis in the history of the *theological* notion of “salvation,” with which the discourse on the crisis acquires the broadest, almost “cosmic” character (*krisis kosmou*), above all in what we conditionally call it *Western*, Christian civilization and culture.<sup>35</sup>

On top of this, we can only add that in the vocabulary of some, to say non-Christian civilizations and cultures, the word “crisis” *does not exist*, i.e. that it makes *sense* to speak of a crisis *only* from the position of some infinite imperial/colonial/postcolonial development/progress towards ever higher qualitative instances/levels of growth and development of the *human world of life*.<sup>36</sup> So, to talk about the term *crisis* only makes sense if we talk about the term *progress*, and vice versa, and in this correlation, one can “read” a whole Hegel(ian) “philosophy” of the history of Western imperialism as “progressive” process of global expansion that continues to this day. However, in the conditions of technological civilization (of which Jonas speaks), that “progress” becomes self-destructive and destructive to nature on which it depends and thus reaches the highest *limits* of growth/development and causes its *own end*.<sup>37</sup> So, the new popular slogan for “sustainable development” is *contradictio in adjecto*. That is why lately (especially within the Critical Theory to which Habermas belongs) there is more and more talk about the “end of progress” and the beginning of a *new era*, in which we all expect a “reassessment of all values” (Nietzsche) and a difficult/tough global (bioethical) *struggle for survival*.

Nevertheless, Habermas and Koselleck rightly state that the all-serious analysis and development of the socio-scientific notion of a *crisis of a system* (including philosophically, namely Hegel’s), begins with Marx, especially with the help of his notion of *social formation*, and on that basis is inevitably based the whole today/contemporary discourse on social, *economic*, political, namely cultural/moral crises. Thus, the (post)modern notion of crisis inevitably refers to Marx (and the logical/dialectical structure of the notion of *capital* as a fundamental notion of the social ontology of capitalism) as the founder of contemporary *general theory of crisis*.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 10, and Denko Skalovski, *Vo prvo lice ednina (mal ličen kulurološki rečnik) – Tom 1, od Ang. do Kult* (Skopje: Az-Buki, 2010), 195-200.

<sup>36</sup> Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 9-17.

<sup>37</sup> Amy Allen, *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 201.

<sup>38</sup> Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 10-17.

Namely, today the systemically-theoretically understood notion of crisis dominates convincingly. Crises occur when the *structure* of a social system allows fewer opportunities to solve problems than is necessary for the maintenance/self-reproduction of the structure of that system. In that sense, we can also see crises as permanent obstacles in the *integration of systems*. And when crises arise, the question/problem of *direction/exit* is always asked, or in other words, popular words, “which way to go” to get out of the “dark tunnel in which a ray of light is (not) seen.” And when it comes to structures, i.e. the *structurally* based/layered/insoluble contradictions that cause the crisis, as Habermas and Luhmann emphasize, then the elements that can be changed must be distinguished from those that can be changed will change/abolish/destroy its *identity*.<sup>39</sup>

And social systems also have their own *identities* that they can create and lose, as evidenced by the revolutionary ups and downs of the great empires in human history, with objective historians being able to distinguish revolutionary changes in a state or the collapse of an empire from ordinary structural changes, e.g. in the same establishment. In other words, the same *social class* remains in power despite the transition from liberal to organized/“state” capitalism. Thus, Habermas concludes, “it is not possible to see unequivocally the difference whether a new system has been created or the old one has regenerated.”<sup>40</sup> This is all the more so, because breaking a specific tradition can be a wrong criterion for a crisis, because the tradition itself and its mediators often change “invisibly.” The modern awareness of the crisis often turns out to be false post festum. On the other hand, Habermas warns that this does not apply to traditional *family* structures either, as family statuses and relationships have been shown to determine overall social communication and “simultaneously guarantee social and *systemic* integration.”<sup>41</sup> We would add that even today (after 50 years) this is a strong argument in the hands of those who still believe that it is most important to nurture and defend/protect family values from the onslaught of nihilistic liberalism, and to prevent a *total crisis* of those values, additionally also caused by a number of other reasons, among which we can cite the commitment to same-sex marriage and the right to adopt children, and then the emergence of surrogacy, genetic engineering, the rights of LGBT communities, etc.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Jürgen Habermas, and Niklas Luhmann, *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder sozial Technologie?* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971), 147, and further.

<sup>40</sup> Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 11.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>42</sup> Simonovska, 669-678, and Suzana Simonovska, and Denko Skalovski, *Etikata i rodot* (Skopje: Filozofski fakultet, 2012).

However, and with everyone's right to their own free opinion and free choice, instead of general conclusions about the genesis and outcomes of the phenomenon of *cyclical crises* that occur in both "liberal" and "organized" capitalism, we will enclose the following relativizations, "warnings" and "directions" of Habermas:

A society does not fall into crisis only when its members say so, nor is it in crisis when they say so. How can we distinguish *crisis ideologies* from the fundamental *experiences* of crises if social crises can be determined only with the help of phenomena of consciousness? Crisis events have their *objectivity* thanks to the circumstances arising from unresolved *targeting problems*. In doing so, the *subjects* acting are generally *unaware* of the problem of targeting. Still, they create accompanying problems that, in a specific way, affect their consciousness – and precisely by endangering *social integration*. However, the question is when the targeting problems that meet that requirement arise. The notion of crisis, exemplified in the social sciences, must, therefore, encompass the *connection* between systemic and social *integration*.<sup>43</sup>

We will conclude this brief sketch of Habermas' views with just a brief note that at the time of this work (*Legitimation Problems in Late Capitalism*), Habermas *also* warned of the danger of an "end of the individual." With that, his views are, in essence, similar, if not the same, to those of Jonas, which we have previously presented. This only once again confirms the conclusion that philosophical/ethical theories that at first glance seem radically opposed and antipode (in this case Jonas and his followers and Habermas and his followers), over time and the historical distance in their interpretation, prove to be convergent/complementary, which especially refers to situations that all modern humanity shares without a remnant.<sup>44</sup> But, of course, this topic for the *individual*, i.e. for the subject and his treatment at Habermas, will leave it for some next occasion due to its complexity and exceptional importance.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 13.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 143-157.

<sup>45</sup> Skalovski, *Vo prvo lice ednina – Tom. 1*, 167-170.

### III. Responsibility in times of crisis as a time of crisis of responsibility

The title of this short chapter does not intend to make semantic, quasi-dialectical rhetoric of words and their meaning, but with the serious intention of making a critical analysis of the discourse so far, whether in the form of a short logical excursus or a short logical “intermezzo.”

Namely, exactly on the example of Hans Jonas, who died almost 30 years ago, it can be seen how *unfulfilled* his commitments were (or rather unfulfilled hopes) by today’s political-economic and intellectual world elite: to be more responsible than the previous ones, namely responsible for all the dire consequences of the development of technological civilization, which, as we all agree, led us to the brink of self-destruction. Unfortunately, disagreements over the causes of climate change and global warming and ways to address these major global problems/dangers show that responsibility has not become part of the consciousness of the same elites, even more, the processes/consequences that continue to multiply on a global scale are becoming *even worse*. On top of that, we continue to defocus and underestimate the dangers of climate and other environmental change and divert attention to irrelevant/ephemeral phenomena with a profitable short-term character.

As an example of defocusing from the main problems of humanity, we can take the general “digitalization” of the world as the most common technical make-up for rejuvenation/regeneration of the “old” capitalism/imperialism, and not to improve the planet’s ecological and general conditions, and prevent of disasters. These “facilitators” of human daily private and professional life and communication show that the very sense/awareness of *responsibility* for the fate of the planet is *further declining*, further falling into *crisis*, as *power* is declining – first of all economic, and then political and ideological – of the great (imperial) powers that have *hitherto* been the main prototypes and “controllers” of the “old” and “new” world postcolonial order/system, and as such the *most responsible* for the present state of the world and its *future*. This contrasts Jonas’s commitment to “grading” moral and political responsibility, which insists on the unwritten ethical imperative: The *more* powerful you are, the *more* responsible you are! In other words, the *system* of (ir)responsible thinking and action that led us to this mess remains the same, so that the *bad* consequences of its further implementation will remain largely the *same*, or *even worse*. Not to mention that there are ethicists who have long assessed the moral crisis as a state of “after virtue”; “a state in which we are ruled by the new barbarians [...], namely exactly by the most powerful and richest, which means – the *most responsible*.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 196.

We believe that the situation will improve/change *if and only if* we change the system (and its hierarchy of values) of our previous thinking and acting and think and build a *new one*. For whom (which) we can be optimistic, *but without sociolutoopus illusions* (in Jonas's words, "non-utopian ethics of responsibility"), to believe and hope that it is *achievable*, and that will enable *common* survival and prosperity of world civilization, regardless of its great internal *cultural diversity*.<sup>47</sup> We will try to outline these new (and some old) projections/ideas/visions for the future of humanity (e.g. the idea of socialism) in the next two short chapters of our text.

#### IV. Need for new systems/new beginnings/new visions

*The world we have created with the way of thinking so far  
contains problems that cannot be solved  
with the thinking with which we created the same world.*  
Albert Einstein

*We will have to ask ourselves the key question: What is wrong with our system, so we found ourselves  
unprepared for the catastrophe that befell us, despite the fact that scientists have been warning us for years?*  
Slavoj Žižek

*In the history, there are examples, when great events derived from insignificant beginnings. No matter how  
insignificant it might seem, the beginning is important.*  
Karel Kosik

After all, Christianity began with Jesus and the twelve Apostles! From a historical point of view, at least as far as the emergence of modern social theories/philosophies is concerned, the need to create *new* theories/systems of thinking and acting (new economic-political formations and different modes of human socialization) is most explicitly stated by Marx, precisely as a result of the emergence of crises in the development of modern/early capitalism, whose contemporary he was himself. As we have already pointed out, the use of the word *crisis* dates back to much earlier. It is created in other areas of human daily practical life, especially in *medicine*, which is the most indicative when it comes to Jonas and his modern understanding and role of medicine and the mass health care of the population and the prolongation of human life. This has become a global process that is best seen in pandemics, which in the language of medicine are called mass "health" crises.<sup>48</sup> And again Marx is the central figure, to whom more or less, implicitly or explicitly, everyone invokes, especially when it comes to moments that represent great historical *milestones/revolutions* in the course of some fateful social processes/movements, today already global/general, and then also specific, such as the current pandemic.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Jonas, *Daz Prinzip Verantwortung*, 311.

<sup>48</sup> Jonas, *Technik, Medizin und Ethik*, 162; 203; 218.

<sup>49</sup> Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 9-11.



However, in the spirit of the needs of our *bioethical* positions, we will not continue on the paths that in history/evolution so far, mainly in the West, have been built and interpreted “from above” with the primary role/supremacy of the human *spirit* over his body, or with a dominant determination of the *social/cultural* factor in the (self) creation of human history. Instead, perhaps unexpectedly for the potential reader, we will turn to two theorists/humanists of the middle of the last century, who are unfortunately forgotten but relevant, and will *still* be relevant/useful in conceptualizing *new bioethical paradigms*. It is about Pierre-Thierry de Chardin and Theodosius Dobzhansky. Their analyzes and projections explicitly correspond and synthetically complement each other in a relatively coherent theory and projection of the *evolution of humanity*, according to which, if a man wants to survive, he will have to change radically its ontological relation to the natural environment in which he is born and on which he depends and develops, i.e. to build *systems of social survival* that will *have to be* in *greater harmony* with nature, its processes, laws and the *ecosystem/biosphere* as a whole. With Chardin and Dobzhansky, we return to the ethical theory of Jonas, which is an implicit/creative continuation and elaboration of the axioms already outlined in their almost common biological/cultural theory.

#### a) Chardin and Dobzhansky and the controversial relationship biology culture

*Man has not only evolved, but fortunately or unfortunately, he continues to evolve. [...] Man is not the center of the universe physically, but can be his spiritual center. Man, and only man, knows that the world is evolving and that he is evolving with it.*  
Theodosius Dobzhansky

At the end of his extensive and in-depth study of the *evolution of humanity*, and reflecting on the *passed road and the road ahead*, Dobzhansky invokes Chardin’s views, assessing it as perhaps the most inspiring attempt in times of deep and chronic *crises*, depressions and nihilistic nonsense and disorientation, to delineate the contours of a possible optimistically *systematized* philosophy of cosmic, biological, and human *evolution*.<sup>50</sup> Chardin, according to Dobzhansky, must be read as a science, as a metaphysics, and as a theology, even as something that Chardin himself did not intend – *as poetry*. In this, to call it a theosophical bioethical worldview, the evolution of matter, the evolution of life, and the evolution of man are viewed as integral

<sup>50</sup> Theodosius Dobzhansky, *Mankind Evolving* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1962), 319-345, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1961), 165.

parts of a single process of cosmic development, as a single and in itself consistent history of the entire universe; a process in which Chardin recognizes clear directions, tendencies or trends, which to this day are not interrupted or stopped. Evaluating the universe and its evolution/history as seemingly meaningless and inconceivable, Chardin's idea of evolution comes to us as a ray of hope, and as such, meets the demands and needs of landmarks and "directions" (Habermas) to get out of this challenging time, "filled" with gaps, alienation, realization, nothingness and restlessness.

Faced amid all these destructive and hopeless human conditions, Chardin tries to give to man, to restore its "universal will to live that converts to him and is homogenizes in himself."<sup>51</sup> Although in the millennial history of our anthropocentric and egocentric *western culture*, we have long and naively believed that we are the center of the universe, Chardin "offers" the "disappointed" man something he considers more magnificent and *much more beautiful* than that, namely

[...] man is the pinnacle of a *great biological synthesis* that is constantly ascending. A man who, for himself, constitutes the last formed layer, who is the freshest, the most complex, the richest with transfusions from all the stratified *layers of life*.<sup>52</sup>

From all these insights, it can be clearly seen that Jonas was strongly influenced, among others, by the philosophy of Chardin's biology, especially when it comes to his ethical theory of responsibility, which Jonas wrote about 40 years later. The same applies to the thorough research, analysis and conclusions of Dobzhansky, which coincide and result in similar visions of the future as those of Jonas. However, they were written 20 years earlier.

#### V. Responsibility in the new systems or: Instead of conclusion

Perhaps at the beginning of this joint text, we did not emphasize enough that our starting point of discourse is the bioethical paradigm that Jonas gave at the end of the last century, which refers specifically to his theory of responsibility, on which, more or less, and we rely on in the critiques of our current situation, incredibly ethically, and also in our projections of the future of human civilization, especially

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<sup>51</sup> Chardin, 262.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

when it comes to the notion of responsibility and the chances of its universalization. Of course, this does not mean that some other positions are unacceptable for us, e.g., Habermas, especially when some of his analyses and projections coincide and correspond with Jonas's. However, Habermas' approach is to say more sociological and political-economic, namely Hegelian-Marxist.

Perhaps the most challenging task that is rightly posed to any modern philosopher/scientist is the task, the expectation, for him to predict the future, regardless of whether his predictions are optimistic or pessimistic, which, we consider, is more in the realm of psychology, than in the field of social philosophy/ethics and social theory in general. We even think that due to a number of factors, Kant's question about "What should I do?" is more difficult than the question "What can I know?" for the simple reason that, extremely vulgarly speaking, without metaphysics, one can *somehow* survive, but without "social physics" and clear rules (moral and legal) that we will manage in our daily lives and relationships with others – there is *no way* to survive! It is these and such rules/guidelines that we lack today, and that is precisely what we need more than ever before in history. That is why it is crucial for us *what (will) happen with the responsibility* of the current generations of people for our descendants' fate and their descendants. Last but not least, we must not forget that in conditions of a multipolar, polycentric and *multicultural* world, Kant's question "What should I do?" will receive similar and *different* answers. In other words, despite *being gens una sumus*, the human race is also too heterogeneous to expect any general/global moral renewal of humanity.

In the course of this short joint text, we have tried to present at least some of the possible ethical imperatives for the future, which are far from being acceptable to all humankind for several reasons, and whose presentation goes far beyond borders of the capacities of this text. As such, we would leave them for another occasion. On this occasion, we are forced to make a laconic, "diplomatic" statement that the question of global responsibility for the global state of humanity remains – an *open question*! Even more, perhaps this is our inability to answer a question which Kant himself left – partially answered. Or this is a treacherous way for us to escape our responsibility!? However, with the review of several authors and with their help, we also tried to give at least a partial answer to the question of responsibility, which, fortunately, or unfortunately, as to whom will *still be intensively posed*, precisely by the deep *crisis* in which several proven *humanistic*

values have fallen and *collapsed*, including the sense/awareness of responsibility – personal to *each of us*, and common to *all of us*.

This is all the more so because humanity has never been in such a harmful and so dangerous state, natural and social, as it occurs and will continue to occur with *climate change* as the most significant global danger, and for which, the measures for prevention/mitigation are remaining extremely *irresponsibly* delayed or not accepted by those who are the biggest/most potent causes and “culprits” for such a catastrophic ecological situation that escalates and threatens to destroy the entire planet. Of course, this is just one of the difficult issues that will have to be resolved if we want the survival of humanity and in the future, and which again and again, who knows how many times brings us back to the question of the *responsibility of the present for the future of next generations*. We agree with Žižek that the current pandemic, as the most prominent *world crisis* so far, has shown and proved to us that “now we are all on the same ship,” but what Žižek forgets to say is the fact that on the ship, as before, there are a minority of captains and officers. In contrast, others are the majority of slaves and rowers but undeck. What we fully agree with Žižek, and several others who have said this long before, including Jonas and a range of Marxists, is that “we must change our social and economic system” and build “a more modest world order” with *lower* goals, and also that “we still do not agree on *how* we will change it, in which direction and with what measures.”<sup>53</sup> And this is what should *worry* us, because any further delay (the ship is sinking!) is precisely an expression of new, *global irresponsibility* of the world’s transnational financial, geopolitical and every other kind of *elites*, among whom we *must not* forget the *responsibility* of the world’s *intellectual* elites, as the leading creators of the old and the new ideologies. On top of everything, and precisely as responsible intellectuals, we must not close our eyes<sup>54</sup> to the obvious manifestations of a new, militant, world, regional and local “fascism with a smiling face.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Pandemic! COVID-19 Shakes the World* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2020), 79.

<sup>54</sup> At the end of our joint text, we can mention the *re-actualization* of the *idea of socialism* as an *idea for a new system* of thinking and social action that will provide a way out of the crisis of modern civil societies, which is promoted by Axel Honneth, but which, due to complexity of its historical genesis, we will leave it for some next occasion. Further see Axel Honneth, *Die Idee des Sozialismus: Versuch einer Aktualisierung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2015).

<sup>55</sup> Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be?* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 9; 141.

## Author contribution statement

Both authors contributed equally to the conception, design, and authorship of this paper. Both authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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# Lear on Irony and Socratic Method

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## Abstract

*In “The Socratic Method and Psychoanalysis,” Jonathan Lear argues that Socrates’ conversations seek to draw out an irony that exists within human virtue. In this commentary, I suggest that Lear should identify irony with aporia to align his interpretation with Plato’s texts and capture the epistemic dimension of Socrates’ method. The Socratic dialogue is a form of inquiry that encourages the interlocutor to carry on the inquiry. The irony of aporia is that the interlocutor grasps his life’s principle by recognising that he does not know what it is.*

**Keywords:** *Socratic method; elenchus; Jonathan Lear; irony*

## I. Introduction

In “The Socratic Method and Psychoanalysis,” Jonathan Lear offers an alternative to the standard view of Socrates’ method as cross-examination or *elenchus*.<sup>1</sup> Developing an argument that is, he says, “roundabout and unusual,”<sup>2</sup> he proceeds in three stages: first, he presents an account of irony as the dislocating apprehension that the reality of virtue must transcend its pretence; secondly, he shows how irony, so understood, can change the structure of a soul; and

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Lear, “The Socratic Method and Psychoanalysis,” in *A Companion to Socrates*, eds. Sarah Ahbel-Rappe, and Rachana Kamtekar, 442-462 (London, and New York: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 443. It is tempting to say that the indirectness of his argument forces the reader to draw out the irony for him- or herself.

thirdly, he brings these points together to argue that Socrates' true method, which lies below the surface of *elenchus*, is to draw out the irony inherent in human virtue.

Lear's interpretation is difficult and profound, but can Socrates' notorious "logic chopping" really be understood in this way? I believe that it can be if Lear identifies irony with aporia. By so doing, he would align his interpretation with Plato's texts and capture the epistemic dimension of Socrates' method. The Socratic dialogue is a form of inquiry that encourages the interlocutor to carry on the inquiry. The irony of aporia is that the interlocutor grasps his life's principle by recognising that he does not know what it is.

## II. The standard view of Socratic method

Lear begins from the premise that Socrates tried to "improve the lives of those he talked to, through his peculiar form of conversation."<sup>3</sup> His method is designed to "motivate a person to care for his soul and to help him to take steps to improve it."<sup>4</sup> But how does Socrates realise these ends? What is his method? The standard answer is the *elenchus* – an adversarial style of argument that uncovers inconsistency in the interlocutor's beliefs.<sup>5</sup>

Lear objects to the standard view on the grounds that soul care demands attention to, not just belief content, but psychic structure.<sup>6</sup> He explains his point by imagining somebody who is left cold in a scientific revolution. Although the content of her beliefs changes, she believes in the same way as she did before – her understanding is disconnected from her emotional life. But then she enters into "a peculiar conversation" and the world opens up as beautiful and strange.<sup>7</sup> She now believes the same things, but in a different way. The structure of her soul is changed even as the content of her thought remains the same.

If therapy demands attention to soul structure, then the *elenchus* will not be a very therapeutic affair – for it operates exclusively at

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 442.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. On the standard view of Socrates' method, see Gregory Vlastos, "The Socratic Elenchus: Method is All," in *Socratic Studies*, ed. M. F. Burnyeat, 1-29 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Lear, "The Socratic Method," 444.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

the level of content.<sup>8</sup> But how then should we understand Socrates' method? Or was he just naïve? As befits an ironist, Lear approaches these questions indirectly by drawing on Kierkegaard and psychoanalytic practice. He develops an argument in two stages: in the first, he argues that irony can change the structure of a soul; and in the second, that Socrates' true method lies beneath the formal workings of *elenchus* and consists of irony.

### III. Irony

On Lear's account, irony comes to light against a backdrop of pretence and aspiration. By pretence, he means claiming to be a human being of some sort.<sup>9</sup> For example, in our lives we put ourselves forward as mothers, fathers, teachers, friends, and so on.<sup>10</sup> And when we put ourselves forward in this way, "we do so in terms of established social understandings and practices."<sup>11</sup> These understandings and practices express what society thinks one must do and be to be human in some specific form.

According to Lear, pretence falls short of aspiration.<sup>12</sup> By this he does not mean that we often fail to live up to accepted norms, though this is, of course, quite true.<sup>13</sup> Instead his point is that the accepted social understandings and practices themselves fall short of what they aspire to be. For example, in putting oneself forward as a friend, one expresses a desire to be a friend. And there are various socially recognised ways in which this might be shown. Yet one can do any or all of these things and fail to be a true friend.<sup>14</sup> As Lear explains:

[The] pretense seems at once to capture and miss the aspiration.<sup>15</sup> [In] putting myself forward as a [friend] – or, whatever the relevant practical identity – I simultaneously instantiate a determinate way of embodying the identity

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 446.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 449. See also Jonathan Lear, *The Case for Irony* (Cambridge, MA., and London: Harvard University Press, 2011), 10.

<sup>10</sup> I paraphrase and adapt Lear, "The Socratic Method," 449.

<sup>11</sup> Lear, *The Case for Irony*, 10.

<sup>12</sup> Lear, "The Socratic Method," 449.

<sup>13</sup> See Lear, *The Case for Irony*, 4-5.

<sup>14</sup> I here adapt some of Lear's examples. See Ibid., 14-16.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 11.

and fall dramatically short of the very ideals that I have, until now, assumed to constitute the identity.<sup>16</sup>

It is worth noting that this feature of “pretence transcending aspiration” is not contingent but necessary, inherent in the nature of things.<sup>17</sup>

The gap between pretence and aspiration is manifest in an ironic question: *among all As, is there an A?*<sup>18</sup> For example: *among all teachers, is there a teacher?* Though this question has the form of tautology,

[we] intuitively detect that a genuine question is being asked about how well or badly our current social understanding of [teaching or, say,] doctoring – the pretence – fits with our aspirations of what is truly involved in<sup>19</sup>

doing this work. So, the first occurrence of the term “teacher” in the ironic question refers to a pretence, for example, those who are registered with a relevant teaching board and follow its codes and guidelines. The second occurrence expresses an ideal that the teaching board aspires to in its procedures, but which it cannot ever satisfy. Thus, we can ask: among all teachers, is there a teacher, that is, someone who can *truly* help others to learn?

Irony comes into being on account of the necessary gap between pretence and aspiration – it is, one might say, the dislocating apprehension that a good to which one aspires transcends the account of it that is embodied in one’s pretence. In irony, one recognises that one’s understanding of what it is to be, say, a Christian, a teacher, or a friend, falls radically short of the thing itself. Lear describes this as erotic uncanniness – the agent is committed to the ideal but loses her grasp on what it would mean to live up to it.<sup>20</sup> And insofar as this ideal is constitutive of her practical identity, she loses her grip on herself and what she is about.

Consider how this might work in the example of friendship. Suppose that B, who is a friend to A, lives out a certain social understanding of what this means. Yet one day he is struck by the thought that he is nevertheless failing to be a friend. In this moment, he hears the call of

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Lear, “The Socratic Method,” 449. See also Lear, *The Case for Irony*, 16.

<sup>18</sup> Lear, “The Socratic Method,” 450-451.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 450.

<sup>20</sup> Lear, *The Case for Irony*, 20.

a purer kind of love. What would it mean to allow A to touch his soul and to genuinely commune with her in turn? B puts himself forward as a friend but has now lost his grip on what friendship is. This is, for Lear, an experience of irony.

#### IV. Irony and Therapeutic Action

According to Lear, direct speech cannot be therapeutic because a neurotic will interpret it in terms of prevailing structures of soul – that is, in terms of structures that therapy must seek to disrupt. For example, we might imagine somebody who feels that she does not measure up in life feeling that she is not measuring up in therapy.<sup>21</sup> If the analyst tells her that she is doing well, she may feel unworthy – no doubt she will fail to live up to expectations, for this is what she always does.

How can this problem to be handled or mitigated? From a psychoanalytic point of view, neurotic conflict cuts off the parts of the soul from each other so that real communication between them is impossible.<sup>22</sup> And each of these parts can be understood in terms of the gap between aspiration and pretence.<sup>23</sup> Therapeutic work must therefore bring these parts into communicative relations with one another.<sup>24</sup> And this can be, Lear believes, accomplished by irony.

Lear gives an example to support his claim.<sup>25</sup> Mr. A. was a single, middle-aged man, “successful in his professional occupation;” he entered analysis because he was concerned about “aggressive impulses and angry feelings,” especially towards those in authority.<sup>26</sup> These feelings “became prominent” in developing a “transference” relationship with the analyst. This means, roughly, that the aggressive dispositions for which he sought help manifested in and disrupted the therapeutic relationship.

On Lear’s telling, matters came to a head in the “termination phase” of the relationship. Mr. A. developed a lingering cough – a neurotic symptom, in the analyst’s view. He was angry at the therapist for not

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<sup>21</sup> Lear, “The Socratic Method,” 452. See also Jonathan Lear, *Therapeutic Action: An Earnest Plea for Irony* (London: H. Karnac Books, 2003), 49-50.

<sup>22</sup> Lear, “The Socratic Method,” 452.

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

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 453.

<sup>25</sup> Lawrence N. Levenson, “Superego Defense Analysis in the Termination Phase,” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 46, no. 3 (1998): 847-866. For further discussion, see Lear, *Therapeutic Action*, 121-133.

<sup>26</sup> Lear, “The Socratic Method,” 453.

curing him, for not making him the man that he wanted to be. But he was also angry at himself for being angry. He felt that he ought to be grateful for the help he had received. And he could not bring these opposing feelings into contact with one another: “[n]eurotic conflict of this sort makes thoughtful evaluation impossible.<sup>27</sup> The aspiring and pretending parts of the soul can’t communicate. They conflict in ways that have bizarre manifestations.”<sup>28</sup>

At one point in the termination phase, A. became incensed and went to the bathroom in a coughing fit. When he returned, he was puzzled by his response, for his therapist had *done nothing but been there*. To this, the analyst responded: “maybe that’s why.”<sup>29</sup> In this remark and its interpretation, we see irony doing its work. Notice that the analyst does not tell A. what to think, for this would simply reinscribe neurotic structures. If he spoke directly and said, “your problem is such and such,” then

Mr. A.’s compliant self would have accepted the “insight” with gratitude.<sup>30</sup> The analyst’s “interpretation” would [...] be used as one part of the neurotic conflict, rather than as anything that might resolve it.<sup>31</sup>

At a verbal level, words that seem to speak of innocence (“you haven’t done anything but been here”) also express a complaint. And Mr. A.’s problem is that he can’t “hear both voices at the same time.”<sup>32</sup> When the analyst echoes A.’s words, he invites him to use them as a “bridge” to connect dissonant points of view. Like somebody who changes aspect to look at Wittgenstein’s duck-rabbit image, he should use the words to which the analyst has ironically drawn attention to “go back and forth” between his sense of gratitude and his “genuine feelings of disappointment and anger.”<sup>33</sup> Irony brings the warring parts of the soul into communication with one another. It dissolves neurotic structures by forming an ability to hold together conflicting attitudes in one mind.

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 454.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 455.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 454.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 455.

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

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

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

## V. Socrates' method as irony

What does any of this have to do with the Socratic method? Not very much, on the surface. To see Lear's point, we must zoom out a bit; we must abstract from the level of argument to take a broader perspective on Socrates' business.

On Lear's telling, Socrates "investigates what it is to be human" by considering various ways in which people try to live up to ideals.<sup>34</sup> These ideals include the virtues, professional roles, and other social formations such as cities, each of which is concerned with the good of human beings.<sup>35</sup> There are, in this regard, Socratic versions of the ironic question, *among all As, is there an A?* For example,

1. Among all doctors, is there a doctor?
2. Among all rhetoricians, is there a rhetorician?
3. Among all wise people, is anyone wise?

As we have seen, the first use of the term in the question designates the pretence, the social manifestation, whereas the second gives the aspiration. The discrepancy between pretence and aspiration comes to light in the fact that the question is meaningful despite its tautological structure. For example, question 3 can be heard as "among all rhetoricians, is there a *true* rhetorician?"

Plato's answer to these questions is, for Lear, embodied in the figure of Socrates. He is a true doctor, since he is concerned with the health of the soul; he is a wise person, since he knows that he does not know; he is a true rhetor, since he leads people to truth, and so on.<sup>36</sup> Socrates' knowledge of how to live is a matter of knowing how to be sensitive to the way that a human life fails to be what it pretends to be, and thus, fails to be what it is. Socrates recognises that he cannot *be* good but must always *become* it; this constitutes his peculiar human virtue.

Lear's account also enables us to make sense of Socrates' disavowal of knowledge. Socrates knows that he does not have an adequate understanding of the virtues. So, he puts himself forward as one who does not know, that is, as a man who is not in a position to put himself

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 449.

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

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 450.

forward. “*He is all aspiration and no pretence.*”<sup>37</sup> Ironically, there is nothing ironic about the way that Socrates lives.<sup>38</sup> Unlike everybody else, he is not a victim of the irony of taking pretence to express the reality of virtue. By living with the irony, he manages it.

With these points in mind, Lear argues that the *elenchus* is merely a surface. Socrates’ real method comes to light in what he does with his cross examination, how he uses it to draw out irony. Irony is the means by which he seeks to improve the structure of the interlocutor’s soul.<sup>39</sup> It follows that Socrates is not concerned with specific beliefs about virtue but with how these fit together into a pretence that constitutes an agent’s practical identity. He seeks to draw out “an *aspiration* buried in [interlocutors’] understanding of the relevant virtue they pretend to know.”<sup>40</sup> In this, he tries to get them to apprehend the discrepancy between the nature of virtue and what they claim to be. “Socrates actual use of *elenchus* can be understood as a species of irony” for it draws out the irony at the centre of the interlocutor’s practical identity.<sup>41</sup>

Lear applies this account to a famous episode in the *Republic*. Socrates uses his *elenchus* to force Thrasymachus “to acknowledge that justice has aspirations which transcend his official account.”<sup>42</sup> At this level, irony occurs in the “macrocosm of public debate:”<sup>43</sup> The sophist is ashamed because he recognises that others perceive his failure to make good on his claim to know. But there is also, for Lear, a more important irony here, and one that works itself out in Thrasymachus’ soul. The man of pretence, in a pejorative sense, a “thumotic” personality whose reason is subordinate to honour, comes to see that his claim “to knowledge has fallen short of his own aspiration to truth.”<sup>44</sup> Lear discerns in his famous blush a moment of therapeutic irony: “the aspiring and pretending parts of Thrasymachus’ soul [are] brought into a different relation with each other.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 459. Emphasis in the original.

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

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 457.

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

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

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 458.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 459.

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

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* For Thrasymachus’ blush, see Plato, *Republic*, 350c-d.



## VI. Does Lear's account apply to Plato's dialogues?

For Lear, Socrates uses his method to disrupt psychic structure and change it for the better. Though Lear does not make this explicit, improvement is presumably a matter of cultivating virtue. The interlocutor would be benefitted by Socratic discourses if they helped him to develop virtue of soul.

One of Lear's guiding insights concerns the role of the transference in dialogue. As I noted above, the transference of unconscious feelings onto the analyst inhibits the client's ability to raise certain questions about herself. Applying this point to Socrates' conversations, we can say that the interlocutors' lack of virtue prevents them from properly inquiring into virtue. Is there any evidence for this claim in the dialogues themselves? I believe that there is.

Socrates discusses virtue or particular virtues with different kinds of interlocutors. And their deficiencies in the virtue in question do prevent them from discussing it in an appropriate way. Those who lack perseverance cannot learn that courage requires perseverance if it does; their lack of perseverance impedes their search.<sup>46</sup> Those who are not open to the divine principle are unable to learn piety if it requires such openness; their lack of openness manifests in the inquiry, preventing them from recognising that piety requires openness.<sup>47</sup> We can put this point as a paradox: the interlocutor must already be virtuous to an extent if he is to learn what virtue is.<sup>48</sup> He must not be lacking in precisely those features that would, if he possessed them, constitute the virtue in question or his ability to learn it.

Lear is in my view right to say that Socrates is concerned with psychic structure and the way that it might be improved by discourse. He does not need the *Republic's* theory of the tri-partite soul to make this point,<sup>49</sup> since it is already encoded in the action of the dialogue – and specifically, in the way that the interlocutor's moral weaknesses manifest themselves in discussion.<sup>50</sup> Because the interlocutor's lack of virtue inhibits his ability to learn virtue, Socrates must try to disrupt these bad qualities. For this reason, he cannot focus on belief alone –

<sup>46</sup> See the drama of Plato's *Laches*.

<sup>47</sup> See the drama of Plato's *Euthyphro*.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Plato, *Meno*, 81b ff.

<sup>49</sup> See Lear, "The Socratic Method," 446.

<sup>50</sup> Jacob Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno* (Chicago, and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 18.

he must work on the structure of the interlocutor's soul.

Now, as we have seen, therapeutic speech cannot work directly. If neurosis is corrosively present in the forms of interpretation that the patient uses to understand herself and what she must do to be better, then ordinary ways of communicating will not work. Therapeutic conversation must employ indirect means. And this is where the significance of irony comes into view – that is, as a form of talk designed to disrupt thought patterns that impede self-understanding. But how, if at all, does this point carry over to the Socratic dialogue?

Lear distinguishes between the “what” and the “how” of the Socratic method.<sup>51</sup> The “what” is the form of the *elenchus*, which is, he thinks, what it is said to be in the scholarship.<sup>52</sup> However, in his view, the propositional attitudes which such a method seeks to elicit should not be interpreted atomistically – they are parts of a more general disposition to life or “pretence.” The Socratic method is concerned not so much with the content of the claims that Euthyphro, or anyone else, is inclined to make about virtue, but with what the making of such claims reveals about how one thinks and lives.

According to Lear, the “how” of Socrates' method is its use. In this regard, he claims that Socrates uses the *elenchus* to draw out irony, that is, to bring people to the awareness that they aspire to more than they pretend. If his method worked as intended, then the interlocutor would apprehend a contradiction in his practical identity: he would recognise that he is not what he claims to be. The experience of this contradiction is, as I understand the point, the experience of irony.

Lear gives only one example of this occurring in a Platonic dialogue – Socrates' refutation of Thrasymachus. Yet this episode does not map onto the example of Mr. A., who comes to “see” himself in and by means of an ironic question. The analyst's ironic reflection of A's words back to him is therapeutically significant, on Lear's telling, because it enables him to incorporate contrary perspectives into a unitary view of self. Nothing of this sort occurs in Socrates' encounter with Thrasymachus; no specific statement or question, it is clear, works as a bridge to a more unified self-understanding.

The closest analogue in Plato's writings for the sort of irony recognised by Mr. A. is Socrates' interpretation of the Delphic oracle.<sup>53</sup> As is well known, Socrates initially thought the Pythia's statement that *he was wisest* to be false, since he was in no way wise. But later he

<sup>51</sup> Lear, “The Socratic Method,” 457.

<sup>52</sup> See Vlastos, “The Socratic Elenchus.”

<sup>53</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 21a-23b.

apprehends its truth – the recognition that one is not wise is itself a kind of wisdom. Inquiry thus brings two different understandings of wisdom and of self into contact with one another. In Lear’s terms, Socrates comes to see the wisdom in recognising that the human aspiration to wisdom must outstrip its pretence.

In his *Tanner Lectures*, Lear describes the irony of “being struck by teaching in a way that disrupts [one’s] normal self-understanding;”<sup>54</sup> this is, he says, more “like vertigo than a process of stepping back to reflect.”<sup>55</sup> From what I can see, there is no suggestion that this experience must be produced by some specific statement. For this reason, we should probably not put too much weight on the aetiology of Mr’s A.’s irony. In fact, Lear says explicitly that irony does not require words to mean different things; what is key is that they “be used as a point of attachment between different parts of the soul.”<sup>56</sup> The question remains, however, as to whether anything in Plato’s dialogues, beyond the possible example of Thrasymachus, answers to his account of ironic experience.

Though Lear does not to my knowledge make this claim overtly, irony, as he describes it, resembles the *aporia* that is a predictable effect of Socratic discourse. In the first place, *aporia* is the experience of oneself as falling short in relation to an ideal. Thus, Euthyphro is frustrated because he cannot keep his speeches straight;<sup>57</sup> Laches feels angry with himself because he cannot say what he thinks that he knows;<sup>58</sup> and Meno is disconcerted because he is dumbstruck, unable to speak a knowledge that he has stated well on other occasions.<sup>59</sup> In these cases, the interlocutor’s *aporia* manifests in the recognition of a discrepancy between a pretence to knowledge and an underlying aspiration.

Though there is clearly a similarity between irony, on Lear’s account, and *aporia*, there is also a difference. The experience of *aporia* is rationalised by two different ideals. The first is a conception of virtue – Laches, for example, lives out a general’s understanding of courage in which he holds the line, wards off the enemy, and so on. The second is an understanding of what it would mean to *know* virtue or some specific virtue. Euthyphro, Laches, and Meno think that they have failed to live up to an ideal of knowledge because they fail

<sup>54</sup> Lear, *The Case for Irony*, 17.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Lear, “The Socratic Method,” 455.

<sup>57</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro*, 11b-e.

<sup>58</sup> Plato, *Laches*, 194a-b.

<sup>59</sup> Plato, *Meno*, 80a-b.

to answer Socrates' questions. They feel that they should be able to account for what they claim to know and think of themselves as falling short when they cannot. Given this distinction, we must ask whether the interlocutor in *aporia* feels that he cannot make good on his claim to be a knower or whether he becomes disoriented in relation to a substantive ideal such as courage. Whether these are in fact separable points is something I will return to shortly; the conceptual separation or attempt at such will, I believe, lead to deeper insight.

As I said earlier, Lear describes irony as a dislocating apprehension in which the agent becomes perplexed about what it might mean to live up to an ideal. She remains committed to being a Christian or a teacher, say, but loses her grip on how she might adequately express this good in her being and in her life.<sup>60</sup> This is the phenomenon that Lear refers to as erotic uncanniness: the agent cares for and is motivated to pursue a form of virtue that starts to seem strange and unfamiliar. She longs to move toward it but is not sure how to go on. Lear does not in this context discuss the demands of knowledge as distinguished from the demands of the substantive ideal in question.

The experience of *aporia* as presented in the Socratic dialogues resembles irony in that the interlocutor comes to be disorientated. He lives a life that consists of activities that, he thinks, express some specific excellence. But now the grounds for the intelligibility of the life that he leads seems to be eroded and called into question. The things he was wont to say to account for himself appear to him to fall short. Virtue in its true form now seems elusive and separate from its ordinary manifestations. Both irony and *aporia* are thus "dislocating" in a way that distinguishes them from ordinary practical reflection – stepping back to consider whether one is living up to a fixed conception of what excellence consists in and requires.

Yet there is this difference: on Plato's representation, when the interlocutor is reduced to *aporia* he does not question what it would mean to live up to an ideal of virtue. He feels that he certainly does know what virtue is but that he has not managed to give a sufficient account of it. The experience of *aporia* is then distinguished from irony in two ways. First, in irony, the agent's prior understanding of an ideal is displaced ("what has any of this got to do with teaching?"), whereas in *aporia*, this is not the case – if anything, the interlocutor's sense

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<sup>60</sup> In Lear's examples, the agent feels that he has lost his grip on a given activity or role even as he lives up to the conventional understanding of it. "I am listening to my priest, and this is precisely my problem." See Lear, *The Case for Irony*, 14-19.

of himself as knowing some specific virtue is intensified.<sup>61</sup> Secondly, in irony, the interlocutor's understanding of what it would mean to know a virtue is not brought into focus, whereas *aporia* depends fundamentally on this experience.

I infer that, for Socrates, a conception of oneself as living up to a substantive virtue or excellence rests on a conception of oneself as knower. This makes good sense, since people put themselves forward as knowers whenever they act.<sup>62</sup> For example, by going to war, an exhibition of arms, or even to the *agora*, Laches in effect claims to know how to live courageously; and similarly for the religious person who attends Sunday mass. In reducing the interlocutor to *aporia*, Socrates uses his sense of himself as living up to a substantive ideal of virtue to, as it were, concretise his understanding of *what it would mean to know this ideal*. This is, as he comes to think on account of Socrates' leading questions, a matter of accounting for the unity that runs through the plurality of virtuous thoughts, deeds, and institutions.<sup>63</sup>

Should we infer that *aporia* is not a kind of irony or, rather, that Lear's account of irony misses an epistemic dimension of the experience that Plato wishes to highlight? To my mind the latter is the right inference, for two reasons: first, the experience of *aporia* resembles the experience of irony in significant ways; and, secondly, given the dearth of ironic experiences in the Platonic dialogues other than *aporia*, and given the close connection between *aporia* and Socrates' method, there is little else that might justify the application of his account.

Of course, if Lear makes this move, then his interpretation of irony is incomplete. On his view, as we have noticed, the ironic experience leaves the agent at a loss in regard to how she should go on. She is committed to the ideal but no longer knows what is involved in living up to it. In Plato's dialogues, by contrast, the interlocutor in *aporia* is not lost in regard to the substantive ideal to which he is committed, and *does know how to go on*: he must pursue knowledge of virtue.<sup>64</sup> By attending to irony's epistemic dimension, we make Lear's account fit the texts and account for the protreptic aspect of Socrates' discourse. It is always clear that the interlocutor should carry on in the inquiry. The irony at the heart of *aporia* is this – one grasps one's life's principle by recognising that one does not know what it is.

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<sup>61</sup> See Plato, *Laches*, 194a-b.

<sup>62</sup> Lear makes a similar claim about the agent's "non observational first-person authority" concerning what he or she is doing. This is explicitly a reference to Elizabeth Anscombe's account of intention and practical knowing. See Lear, *The Case for Irony*, 15.

<sup>63</sup> See, for example, Plato, *Euthyphro*, 5c-d, and Plato, *Laches*, 191c-e.

<sup>64</sup> See Plato, *Euthyphro*, 15c-e, and Plato, *Laches*, 194a.

## VII. The “What” and the “How” of Socrates’ method

Lear does not question the standard view that Socrates’ method is a form of cross-examination. He merely argues that we must pay attention to how he *uses* discourse of this sort. But, as he himself observes, cross-examination leaves many interlocutors angry and unmoved. The idea that Socrates would in general defeat his therapeutic goal by applying an inappropriate method seems to me implausible. I suggest that while Socrates does use a kind of inconsistency for therapeutic ends, his method is not *elenchus* even on the surface.

As I have noted, Lear accepts that Socrates seeks to reduce his interlocutor to inconsistency. If this end is to be compatible with therapy, then, since irony is therapeutic disruption, there must be a sense in which contradiction can be ironic. Lear’s discussion of Mr. A. suggests that contradiction can reveal different “voices” or “perspectives” within the soul. When A. recognises that the sentence “all you’ve done is sit there” expresses opposite sentiments, he “hears” the voices of both complaint and gratitude. The recognition of irony is a drawing together of contradictory elements and the forming of a point of contact between different “voices” in the soul.

In the preceding section, I argued that the experience of aporetic irony is not quite of this sort. It involves the dislocating sense that one’s understanding of virtue falls short of what one knows that it should be. In the aporetic moment, the interlocutor takes up two different and conflicting “perspectives.” On the one hand, there is the hubbub of ordinary virtuous action that constitutes his understanding of how to live; on the other, there is a higher knowledge, not fully grasped, which would account for the goodness of all of these actions. In ironic experience, the interlocutor looks down from the vantage of knowledge upon ordinary virtuous acts; his viewpoint has been elevated to the level of the universal. He thus recognises in the moment of irony a contradiction between two different perspectives on virtue that are both felt to be his own.<sup>65</sup> This experience involves, as it were, communication between two centres of agency within the soul.

If this is correct, then the form of the Socratic method cannot be *elenchus*. Socrates wants his interlocutor to experience his own understanding of virtue as falling short of the demands of knowledge and to identify himself with these higher demands. Cross-examination could not produce this effect since it would leave conflicting propositions

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<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Plato, *Laches*, 194a-b.

at the same level: it would not create any depth. A therapeutic contradiction relevant to Socrates' method must differentiate between levels of self.

We can find a harmony between the “what” and the “how” of the Socratic method by paying attention to the way that Socrates handles insufficient accounts of virtue. As is well known, he attributes knowledge to his interlocutor; he invites him to articulate it by giving a *logos*. In response to the interlocutor's answers, Socrates introduces principles of definition to lead him to the judgement that these answers are unsatisfactory. And, from this he infers that the interlocutor has not stated what he knows – for this reason, he must seek to give a better account.<sup>66</sup>

This model of the Socratic method is supported by many of Plato's texts.<sup>67</sup> In the present context, the main point is that it enables us to see how the form of Socrates' method might be fitted to its use. The form of Socrates' method is not *elenchus* but *exegesis* – the “drawing out” of knowledge that interlocutor is assumed to have already.<sup>68</sup> The method does not seek to reduce the interlocutor to inconsistency at the level of propositions. It aims rather to get him to see that he lives by opinions that fall short of his knowledge. In this ironic moment, the interlocutor's conception of virtue is recognised as insufficient from a higher perspective that is also somehow his own.

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<sup>66</sup> See, for example, Plato, *Euthyphro*, 15c-d.

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, my article, “Socrates' Search for Laches' Knowledge of Courage,” *Dialogue* 56, no. 4 (2017): 775-798.

<sup>68</sup> This idea will seem familiar to readers of Plato and so, in fact, it is. See, for example, the myth of recollection in *Meno* and the notion of spiritual pregnancy in *Theaetetus*.

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# Political Realism in the Chinese Warring States Period and the European Renaissance: Han Fei and Machiavelli

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## Abstract

*This article presents the basic similarities and differences between the Political Realism of Niccolò Machiavelli in the 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D., i.e. during the Renaissance in Europe, and the Chinese Legalism of Han Fei in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C., during the Warring States period. It could be supported that Political Realism and Political Legalism share numerous elements that bring them closer rather than apart. The fundamental works written by the main representatives of these two political doctrines, namely the Prince by Machiavelli and the Han Feizi by Han Fei, are addressed to living political leaders, specifically Lorenzo de' Medici and the governor of the Hann state in the Warring States historical period (476-221 B.C.) respectively. Both philosophical movements emphasize the importance of statesmanship in a ruler and reject the idealistic approach to politics. Machiavelli and Han Fei do not promote a cruel leadership, but straightforwardly condemn morality alone as insufficient for the establishment of a state. Both of them try to replace previous models of virtuous political philosophy – that of classical antiquity in the case of Machiavelli and that of Confucianism in the case of Han Fei – with a new notion of political correctness which takes into account the urgency of the moment and ensures political stability.*

**Keywords:** *ruler; statesmanship; human nature; political realism; legalism; daoism; morality; laws; History; ministers; aristocracy; necessity; ruthless governance; “two handles;” non-action form of governance; “wu wei”*

## I. Introduction

In this essay, the basic tenets of western Political Realism which Machiavelli represents will be presented as well as the tenets of ancient Chinese Legalism, as they are mainly advocated in *Han Feizi*, the most important text of Legalism along with the *Book of Lord Shang*. After presenting what these two philosophical movements stand for, this paper will endeavour to shed light on how these two movements, separated by nearly 1750 years, came to support the theory of Political Realism or else “Realpolitik.” We will examine why these movements developed and, also, what discriminated them from the prevailing notions of rulership of their times, i.e. what these two movements had the purpose to promote regarding the qualities and virtues a ruler should possess. Many, mostly non-specialists but not only, tend to describe the leader who is a Political Realist as a villain, caring only for the goals he achieves no matter what means he uses to achieve them. This work aspires to show that this accusation is erroneous, not only for Machiavelli but also for Han Fei. Both philosophers strive to formulate a new notion of political correctness rather than condemn the ideals and purposes conventional politics stand for. But does this mean that Machiavelli and Han Fei share the same view on what an ideal prince should be like?

The doctrines of Machiavelli and Han Fei have justifiably caught the attention of many scholars of philosophy and political science around the world, both in the West and the East. It is widely held, that both Han Fei and Machiavelli have very similar views about the ideal leader they want their reader to be (as they both address their texts to the ruler of a state) and this is a thesis this work adheres to. Indeed, many researchers have pointed out that both thinkers’ outlook on humanity is very similar since they see people as self-centered beings. Therefore, a ruler should not trust them, he should be relentless, punishing anyone, no matter his social status, for violating the laws; and he should distribute rewards to those who contribute to the state’s prosperity. But this does not signify that differing elements do not exist in either man’s thinking and this paper will present some of them.

Some perspectives that have affected the frame of mind of Han Fei and Machiavelli have not been thoroughly debated. This study puts forth that the Political Realism of both men is inextricably linked to each one’s historical background. Machiavelli (1469-1527) lives during the Renaissance, a period in the history of humanity which is marked by magnificent achievements and innovations in various fields of study, but the situation in the political domain, especially in Italy, looks

ominous. The Republic of Florence, which Machiavelli comes from, has been subjugated to king Charles VIII of France (1494), the religious leadership of Girolamo Savonarola has failed and, generally, all the major Italian city-states constituting the Italic League, will be annexed by France, Spain and the Holy Roman Empire by 1530. Therefore, the groundbreaking thought of Machiavelli is inextricably linked with this historical context and the failure of Humanism and Christianity to provide some solution in the matter of political instability.

Moreover, Machiavelli is not a priori prejudiced against malevolent human nature, he is led to this conclusion by what he experiences. He criticizes the moral probity that Humanism and Christianity promote, because it cannot bring political peace. If the political situation was as prosperous as the Arts at the time, there would be no need for such emphasis on authoritarian governance. Humanistic ideals fail to take into consideration the self-centered, inherent drives of human nature and offer no fail-safes if these inducements prevail over moral principles. What he alludes to is that the principles of politics a ruler adheres to, should be constructed upon an ideal, a moral code, different from that of common individuals.

In other words, what Machiavelli means is that what is considered to be right in politics according to humanistic and Christian ideals does not always have to coincide with what is right according to political ideals, even though this does not mean that these two must always diverge. Machiavelli's precepts undoubtedly have an authoritarian air, in accordance with the standards of the time, but they are not totalitarian as they aim for the achievement of political stability.

Han Fei, like Machiavelli, is influenced by the historical events in ancient China. He comes from a noble family of the Hann state, the smallest of seven kingdoms during the Warring States period (476-221 B.C.) who continuously fight among them. Therefore, it cannot be a coincidence, that the call for a political doctrine like Political Realism arises when societies are forced by need to put to the test a different form of government, since if they remain inactive, destruction is imminent.

This essay also aims to criticize the belief that Political Realism is often supposed to adhere to the motto "the end justifies the means." As far as Machiavelli is concerned, this seems pretty unfair. If the teachings of Humanism and Christianity cannot be put into effect, what options are there? Machiavelli does not disagree with these ideals; he only tries to fill the gap in case of non-realisation. Besides, if, as he claims, people tend to be opportunistic by nature, then rulers are no exception and they can be

even more self-centered than common people. If by chance a rapacious or sadistic leader managed to secure political stability, Machiavelli would probably not congratulate him. It would then be irrational to devise a compendium of qualities that a ruler should possess such as the princely virtue. The model of a consummate prince for Machiavelli is normative and the holder of governmental authority should entirely abide by its rules. Otherwise Machiavelli would not condemn policies such as those of Agathocles of Syracuse, much more so, since Agathocles was highly capable, intelligent, and effective.

On the other hand, Han Fei cannot be accused of only caring for the maximum accumulation of power, as he is often criticized. Han Fei's attitude towards leadership is more ruthless than Machiavelli's, but his call for the reinforcement of laws has to be taken into account. Since a universally accepted legal system did not exist in ancient China and the laws were only known to the nobles, they could easily circumvent them. Besides, the traditional way of government in ancient China relied exceedingly upon ministers and high-ranking officials, so phenomena of corruption and nepotism could appear quite frequently. Confucianism proclaimed the appointment of righteous officials who could moderate the king's harshness and guide him towards a fair and benevolent exercise of power (Confucius himself held a leading governmental post for some time) but this didn't always happen. So Han Fei's call for authoritarian rule stems from political corruption perhaps to a greater extent than in Machiavelli's case.

Even if he presents a more stony figure of an ideal ruler, Han Fei clearly denounces the accomplishment of the desirable results as the ultimate purpose. He does not encourage the head of the state to solely aim at the enhancement of his power; on the contrary, we see a remarkable sense of duty. He definitely supports a more normative model of governance than Machiavelli but this is due to his Daoist influences. Han Fei believes that by detaching himself from human passions, the prince will reach a level of serenity and possibly enlightenment, which will lead him to transcend human nature, adjust his leadership to the rules the Creator used to shape the cosmos and celestial perfection, and perceive the Heaven or "Dao" (a term contiguous in a way to that of Logos in ancient Greek and Western philosophy). Therefore, this paper supports that Legalism does not describe a tyrannical institution nor an unscrupulous ruler, because Han Fei is trying to put together a set of precepts not only equivalent to the princely virtue of Machiavelli, but also much more difficult to attain.

Thus, the existence of a Legalist ruler with subordinates, who through the publication of laws will endeavour to emulate his stance, could

seem an unachievable goal but that is no reason to interpret the stern spirit of Legalism as despotic. J. G. A Pocock characteristically speaks for Legalist utopia, if the Legalist doctrines were to be implemented. Eventually, there would be no need for authoritarian leadership and retributions since people would invariably obey the laws, which would become mechanical, as would the authority of the ruler, and then, the appropriate governance could be carried out by either a fool or a sage with no obvious difference.<sup>1</sup>

This essay will also focus on the differences between Legalism and Machiavellianism which are not often analysed. Machiavelli is not influenced by a philosophical theory like Taoism. Thus he does not embrace the non-action way of governance (*wu wei*), but urges his ruler to be energetic and proactive, adjusting himself to the vagaries of fortune. Han Fei does not show an interest in fortune since – for him – the world is affected by the “*Dao*” which determines the path of nature. Han Fei is more preoccupied with the consolidation of a system of meritocracy, since the ministers retain a role of paramount importance in public administration and especially since Han Fei has not witnessed an alternative way of governance, like the Republicanism Machiavelli has. Han Fei also unequivocally rejects the imitation of successful rulers of the past, while Machiavelli holds admiration for ancient Rome and considers that its path to glory should be taken into consideration. Also, Han Fei does not hesitate to severely and openly criticize the nobility of his era, which Machiavelli refrains from. Finally, both philosophers place the human soul under scrutiny, endeavouring to construct their view of the world on the profound and obscure incentives of the psyche of man.

Consequently this article will show that Political Realism does not favour the ascendancy of a despotic ruler to power. It rather seems that rulers according to this philosophy of politics should be more selfless than selfish, which reminds us of Plato’s claim in *The Republic* that: “the gold and silver of mortals is unnecessary to those who have gold as a divine gift in their souls.”<sup>2</sup> There is also an effort to prove that the cruel kingship of Qin Shi Huang does not illustrate in the best fashion the ideals of Legalism. Although Qin Shi Huang was deeply inspired by the teachings of Han Fei and managed to unite China (221 B.C.) his ruthless attitude did not secure lasting stability and Qin was one of the shortest-lived Chinese dynasties. It will further be proposed

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<sup>1</sup> John Greville Agard Pocock, “Ritual, Language, Power: An Essay on The Apparent Political Meanings of Ancient Chinese Philosophy,” *Political Science* 16, no. 1 (1964): 20.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, 416e.

that the emperor who most suitably embodied the ideals of Legalism concerning kingship was Taizong of the Tang dynasty or else Li Shimin (598-649 A.D.), who managed to balance his policies in a way that earned him the acknowledgement of his greatness both by his people and history.

## II. The exercise of political power from the legalistic and Machiavellian perspective

Han Fei's tenets are widely considered to be similar to Machiavelli's, since both philosophers throughout their work are preoccupied with the conservation and consolidation of political power, providing advice to their heads of state so as to achieve these goals.<sup>3</sup> They both urge their princes to set as a priority the maximum benefit for their country basing their advice on Utilitarianism and Political Realism rather than Idealism.<sup>4</sup> Legalism bitterly attacked Confucianism as the latter proclaimed that moral integrity and compassion are the proper capabilities a ruler ought to have. Instead, Legalism argued that the accumulation of power in one person, with everyone else in the state pledging allegiance to this person, was far more important,<sup>5</sup> just as Machiavelli did when he opposed to the ideas of his humanistic contemporaries.

Machiavelli points out the necessity for a leader to gain the approbation of his people as a subject of paramount importance. This should occur even if the rise to power is not attained with the aid of the laypeople but with that of the nobility. Therefore, even a prince abhorred by his realm must protect his subjects because this will persuade them to embrace him as a ruler. Still, Machiavelli claims that a ruler's fair attitude towards his people is not enough to guarantee his stay in power. He uses historical examples to solidify his precept among which the famous example of Gracchi brothers.<sup>6</sup> These brothers had committed a huge mistake by associating the people of Rome with the Greek "demos," when the latter had far more responsibilities than its roman counterpart who, consequently, could not be trusted.<sup>7</sup> Even

<sup>3</sup> Han Fei Tzu, *Basic Writings*, trans. Burton Watson (New York, and London: Columbia University Press, 1964), 4-5.

<sup>4</sup> Xing Lu, "The Theory of Persuasion in Han Fei Tzu and its Impact on Chinese Communication Behaviours," *Howard Journal of Communications* 5, nos. 1-2 (1993): 111.

<sup>5</sup> Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 251-252.

<sup>6</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey Mansfield (Chicago, and London: Chicago University Press, 1998<sup>2</sup>), 40-41.

<sup>7</sup> John Clarke Stobart, *The Grandeur that was Rome* (London: Ballantyne Press, 1912), 86.

though the Gracchi always acted in favour of the plebeians and the weaker, they failed to take into consideration the corruption and gullibility of human nature, which brings the necessity for authoritarian rulership into perspective. Thus, having misjudged reality, the Gracchi remained attached to their idealistic approach to politics and always acted according to what ought to happen and not what was the actual case, which led to their fall from grace and death.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, according to Machiavelli, if a future ruler wants to ascend to power, he has to watch out for the reaction of the mob. Apart from those who have acquired multiple privileges from the previous government and will presumably feel threatened by the new order, a ruler has to fear those who were not favoured by his predecessor too. Radical reformations must be prepared before the ascendancy of a new leader because people may see an innovator as a criminal even if the majority will profit in time. The followers of a reformer will fade away if there are no immediate results, as people tend to be incredulous and not believe in things they cannot experience first hand.<sup>9</sup>

As far as Legalism is concerned, the formation of a concrete legal code will set some objective standards which will judge all actions performed by anybody, either laypeople or nobles, as permissible or unacceptable. If the laws are formed upon the ideal of justice and social order and everybody obeys them, the constant political turbulences of the past will gradually fade away and sociopolitical tranquility will be attained. Hence, the ruler will be able to control his subjects with this rationalistic system and also strengthen his kingdom financially, politically, and militarily according to necessity and current events.<sup>10</sup>

The consolidation of a universal legal system will also shed ample light on people's and, especially, ministers' behaviour. For that system to become established, objectivity and strictness are required. All subjects must be addressed as equals, regardless of their social status, in order to eliminate any chances of corruption and manipulation.<sup>11</sup> The inherently villainous human nature should be constrained by laws, as, if it remains unbridled, the destruction

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 87-90.

<sup>9</sup> Catherine H. Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics* (Chicago, and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 58.

<sup>10</sup> Benjamin Isadore Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, MA, and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985), 328-329.

<sup>11</sup> Lundahl, 141.

of human society will naturally ensue. If laws work this way, the “Tao” will become one with human life and will open the path for the reconciliation of man and nature.<sup>12</sup>

Another function of the law is the evaluation of inferiors by the superior, the prince, so that their compliance with his orders and the stability of the state can be guaranteed. Moreover, a series of tests would prove the abilities of ministerial candidates as a simple interview is not sufficient to ascertain someone’s suitability for a high office. An individual’s progress in the hierarchy would be gradual, beginning from minor positions, which is the only way to test the virtue of the man.<sup>13</sup>

But the laws also have a penal character, so that the administration of punishment is commensurate with the committed crime. Shang Yang, one of the prominent figures amongst Legalist thinkers before Han Fei, devised a penal legal code for the state of Qin nearly a century before Han Fei’s writings. These reforms transformed a minor state into a superpower that dominated all the other kingdoms and brought China under the rule of one king. The establishment of a concrete legal system was innovative in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. in ancient China.<sup>14</sup> The conviction that Shang Yang’s reforms were the most significant event during the Warring States period is widely held in academia. He abolished the privileges of the nobles and enhanced the status of peasants by creating a system based on rewards and punishments according to the worth of individuals. Thus, as a Legalist himself, he politically consolidated the monarchy’s standing and set the foundations of the first Chinese state in history.<sup>15</sup>

One of the few but major differences between Han Fei and Machiavelli is the emphasis on laws. Indeed, Legalism promotes the publication of the laws as it was not something obvious in 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. ancient China. The significance of making laws intelligible for the laymen is stressed as people should be aware of their obligations. Hence, there is care for the compliance with the philosophy of law, as enforced submission to laws would have a vindictive and exploitative character instead of enlightening people according to the “Way” (as mentioned in *Han Fei Tzu* a term related to Dao) the ruler follows. In consequence, Legalism complies with the Western philosophy of law

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<sup>12</sup> Jan Julis Lodewijk Duyvendak, “Études de philosophie chinoise,” *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l’Étranger* 110 (1930): 406.

<sup>13</sup> Lundhal, 141.

<sup>14</sup> Karyn L. Lay, *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 175.

<sup>15</sup> Shouyi Bai, *An Outline History of China* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1982), 97-98.



influenced by Cesare Beccaria's statement that punishment ought to have a correctional and paradigmatic manner rather than a retributive one.<sup>16</sup> This is important to note, because it is clear that Machiavelli does not focus on the consolidation of a legal system, as it was obvious for the survival of a country in the 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D. However, the immense growth of the Chinese population and the constant fighting led people to realize that the elucidation of inviolable rules was a prerequisite for political stability.

On the other hand, *Han Feizi* makes clear that laws require a punitive but not vengeful spirit. Governmental laws must take into consideration the ideal of natural laws, which embody nature's impassivity. In this way, political authority will be exercised in an impersonal fashion. Via the consolidation of a legal system and the strict punishments it merits out, Han Fei tries to set an objective standard of what is right or wrong.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the use of the "two handles" is a way to curtail human impulses, making people realize that they should strive for collective and not individualistic welfare. Especially in times of need, like third century B.C., when a dramatic dearth of goods has come about, laws are the only means left to secure the survival of a nation,<sup>18</sup> after the failure of conventional moral theories like those of Confucianism.

The essence of the penal laws is often misunderstood and perceived as vindictive, but it simply does not provide political immunity to offenders belonging in the aristocracy, treating every citizen with egalitarianism. The noble's monopoly on land ownership can cease, as it provides individual and not collective benefits, which could be exploited in order to strengthen the state.<sup>19</sup> In a nutshell, penal law is the only way to enforce law and discipline. Punishment aims only at making people obey a law they would not naturally obey. Even if people consciously want to abide by the law, their nature subconsciously drives them away from this. Hence, retribution is intended to fix this natural malfunction as both Han Fei and Machiavelli believe.<sup>20</sup> As it

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<sup>16</sup> Peng He, "The Difference of Chinese Legalism and Western Legalism," *Frontiers of Law in China* 6, no. 4 (2011): 660.

<sup>17</sup> Albert Galvany, "Beyond the Rules of Rules: The Foundations of Sovereign Power in the *Han Feizi*," in *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Han Fei*, ed. Paul R. Goldin, 87-106 (Heidelberg, New York, and London: Springer, 2013), 103.

<sup>18</sup> Anne Cheng, *Histoire de la pensée chinoise* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2015), 340.

<sup>19</sup> Schwartz, 332.

<sup>20</sup> Eirik Lang Harris, "Han Fei on the Problem of Morality," in *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Han Fei*, ed. Paul R. Goldin, 107-134 (Heidelberg, New York, and London: Springer, 2013), 121.

is clear, Machiavelli proposes a moral ideology separate from the existing one, but Han Fei tries to establish a system, with specific and unbending laws, that will be universally accepted and will offer a new moral standard. He wants to establish a powerful ethical code and he criticizes Confucianism for not offering the solid foundations for a legal system but rather a well-meaning yet inept morality.

Additionally, Han Fei severely criticizes dictatorship, like Machiavelli, because it is an impermanent solution and opportunist leaders who resort to it further their own ends, breaking valid laws and throwing their country into turmoil. However Machiavelli focuses more on the mob as a mass than Han Fei; the latter pays more attention to the ministers and main associates of the ruler, which does not mean that Machiavelli disregarded criticizing the ministers. For both political theorists, it is indisputable that the phenomenon of incessant intrigue and machinations is responsible for administrative turbulence. Han Fei mentions nepotism to refer to the endemic corruption that had been created by the most powerful families of the country through the forging of alliances between them. Thus, it is crucial for a ruler to designate his collaborators in leading positions not according to their reputation, wealth and social status, but according to their qualities since they must follow their leader's orders. The administrators ought to be characterized by moral integrity since the imperial court is full of conspirators who protect only their patrons' interests rather than their emperor's. Han Fei makes it clear that his era demands such behaviour.<sup>21</sup>

If the legal constitutions represent the ultimate force of nature (i.e. the "Tao"), they are the only ones with the power to constrain the king's authority, chiefly in the case of a dictator, who rules selfishly. Legalistic laws and Shang Yang's measures altered the nobility's monopoly of power by giving peasants lands since they became part of the national army so they could not be subjugated by force. Also the publication of laws made everyone aware of them and the crimes committed could not be legitimized by anyone falsely claiming to act in the name of the law, when in reality was prompted by vile motives.<sup>22</sup>

By urging a ruler to preserve energy and remain imperturbable, Han Fei endeavours to transfer a part of the ruler's energy to his ministers. But rather than maximizing the chances of the ruler being deceived by them, he proposes a clever way to keep them occupied in favour of the state. Without even uttering a word, this ruler will own a way to make his country as functional as possible. So, a ruler accepts the proposals

<sup>21</sup> Han Fei, 22-24.

<sup>22</sup> Marcel Granet, *La pensée chinoise* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1968), 271.

of his ministers – instead of solving the problems by himself – and when they are successful, he rewards them, but when they fail, he punishes them. The enlightened ruler is never extravagant either in his awards or his penalties. This way, none of the ministers will neglect their duties or think that their master is vulnerable, which will make them attempt to earn their ruler's favour and will place obstacles to future selfish behaviours.<sup>23</sup> Similarly in Machiavelli's criticism of Agathocles, it is obvious that the comportment of a king can be an inducement for his subjects to embrace moral standards.

Ministrial duties are precisely determined. The government executives are nothing more than representatives of the prince, holding no authority over him since they are his subjects. Their main role is to obey orders unquestioningly. Additionally, the publication of laws makes it possible to punish their infringements. Any form of initiative under any sort of justification by anyone, aiming for the modification of the law in order to secure personal interests will not be tolerated. For instance, Confucius is condemned as he praised someone who defected justifying himself for taking care of his sick father.<sup>24</sup>

In short, nobody is above the law and the king is the first to give the example by always acting in accordance with it. If everyone abides by the law regardless of their social and financial status, even a more lenient policy would not jeopardize the cohesion and order of a state.<sup>25</sup> In order for the ruler to become enlightened, he has to suppress all his desires, anything that might put his devotion to protecting his subjects at risk. An egocentric ruler will not be recognised by the mob and his overthrow will be a matter of time.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, the most safe course of action for a ruler is to rid himself of any trace of emotion, following the Taoist influenced non-action model of governance and concealing his intentions. If a leader reveals his preferences, cunning ministers will adjust their interests according to their lord's tastes. Such spurious behaviour by a minister will help him to achieve his avaricious goals and manipulate his master.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Han Fei, 19-20.

<sup>24</sup> Granet, 272.

<sup>25</sup> Fung Yu-Lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 322.

<sup>26</sup> Yuri Pines, "Submerged by Absolute Power: The Ruler's Predicament in the *Han Feizi*," in *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Han Fei*, ed. Paul R. Goldin, 67-86 (Heidelberg, New York, and London: Springer, 2013), 78-79.

<sup>27</sup> Ernest R. Hughes, *Chinese Philosophy in Classical Times* (London: J. M Dents and Sons, 1942), 261.

Machiavelli, on the other hand, clarifies that defiance of traditional ethical codes is a choice only when compliance with them is inevitable. Of course, traditional moral codes aim to reprimand people for any kind of disobedience, offering no other alternative. Machiavelli forms his mindset in the way he does, because he believes that a ruler might not be able to take a political decision for the sake of his state's prosperity by combining political astuteness with the moral integrity Humanism stands for. He offers an alternative in case the ethical stance of a ruler fails to achieve the desirable results. Conventional ethics do not offer such an alternative since it is considered that statesmanship and morality coexist no matter what.<sup>28</sup>

In a similar vein, Han Fei criticizes Confucius and Mo Tzu for devising their political philosophy upon mythical figures of Ancient China who lived thousands of years ago. How can anyone be certain about the sincerity and validity of those philosophers' opinions when they praise wise kings so ancient that their reign has not been witnessed? To firmly believe in something so essential as the ruling of a country through moral ideals without corroborating evidence, is a fraudulent attitude that an enlightened ruler must avoid at all costs.<sup>29</sup> Representatives of Political Realism such as Machiavelli and Han Fei undertake a peculiar project aiming to prove mainstream beliefs as unrealistic and impossible to be put into practice in the political arena. Chiefly, what they are trying to put forth is that if a ruler is to be highly capable, he must not take political decisions according to immutable standards. Instead, his decisions should be adjusted to the ever-changing political conditions, otherwise political turmoil will be a fact and his position as the head of a state would be at least unstable.<sup>30</sup>

Han Fei advises a prince to control his ministers with the practice of the "two handles," i.e. rewards and punishments. At the beginning of the book, punishment is presented in a cynical manner, being likened with mutilation and death, whereas favour is equivalent to the granting of honors and awards. Hence, instead of enjoying maximum profits, the ministers will be perpetually motivated to avoid being punished because they will know that they could even be killed and will act in such a way as to ensure that honour and rewards will be bestowed to certify their master's appreciation. But the ministers are untrustworthy

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<sup>28</sup> Janet Coleman, "A History of Political Thought- From the Middle Ages to the Renaissance," (Oxford, and Malden: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 249-251.

<sup>29</sup> Chan, 253.

<sup>30</sup> Hans-Jorg Sigwart, "The Logic of Legitimacy: Ethics in Political Realism," *The Review of Politics* 75, no. 2 (2013): 413.

and will do anything to deceive a prince in order to be allowed to use the “two handles” themselves as they see fit. As a result, the people will learn to respect the criticism or appraisal of a minister. If a ruler lets himself be blandished either consciously or unconsciously, he cedes his place to his inferiors because he surrenders the weapon that allows him to be the head of state. To clarify this, Han Fei uses the example of a tiger, which because of its claws and teeth, is stronger than a dog, but should a tiger let the dog take over its advantages, it will be defeated.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, it would be foolish of a prince to accept the counsel of his ministers without judging them first-hand. When meting out rewards and punishments, the king will observe the reactions of his ministers until it is obvious whose counsel is shaped by flattery. If the proposals of the ministers are rejected their irritation will be revealed as the adulation to their master will cease. But if the ministers expect to be punished when they come up with devious plans, they will be deterred from doing so and will struggle to implement beneficial policies for the state, knowing that they will be rewarded. Instead of plotting to increase their status by vying for the use of the “two handles,” the ministers will be promoted as per their contribution.<sup>32</sup>

Additionally, Han Fei proposes that a prince can extinguish insubordination by simply abiding by a legal code. Despite their social class, status and their family’s reputation and political connections each subordinate is equal in the face of the law whose limits cannot be crossed unpunished. The law has the power to encourage compliance with authority and manage to unshackle people, as far as possible, from their self-centered nature. The law’s impartiality and the blind obedience it demands, is the only protection against the prevail of evil and the destruction of society due to its submission to natural human selfishness.<sup>33</sup>

A tremendously important characteristic part of Han Fei’s work has to do with the fact that political disorder will stop as soon as a leader compares the words and deeds of his ministers. They present their propositions and, based on the result they have achieved, the ruler makes his decision; deeds should match with words, meaning the ministerial propositions. Big words that lead to puny results must be punished for their discrepancy and for not producing the desirable result. Small words that bring about praiseworthy results are also condemned

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<sup>31</sup> Han Fei, 30.

<sup>32</sup> Paul R. Goldin, “Han Fei’s Doctrine of Self-Interest,” *Asian Philosophy* 11, no. 3 (2001): 153.

<sup>33</sup> Han Fei, 27-28.

because there is a big difference in coherence.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, we observe that Political Realism showcases an extraordinary sense of duty, as the form of public administration that it promotes is based on Reason. The savage, opportunistic and atrocious cynicism it is sometimes labeled with is at least unfair.

Besides, Legalists were writers concerned with public administration aiming to become the prince's closest associates and advisors so as to gain his praise and be able to put their theories to the test, an element discriminating them from professional politicians. The latter cared mostly for diplomatic manoeuvring and the achievement of their goals, while Legalists were preoccupied with internal politics. Politicians wanted to exploit the degeneracy of feudalism so as to lead their preferred masters to power and also secure their personal gains while Legalists in an effort to consolidate the supremacy of their master came up with a new concept, the idea of law to which even the monarch is bound.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, it is clear that Legalism is not a theory aiming to legitimize political authority for individualistic purposes; instead, Legalism urges rulers to always govern their state using Reason and taking emotionless decisions. If Legalism was a tenet focusing only on the achievement of an end, then how could the Legalist leader reprimand his subordinates for achieving better results than the leader himself anticipated from them?

### III. Han Fei and Machiavelli's perception of human nature

Both political theorists construct their ideology on their perception of human psychology. They believe that people perceive the surface of things and only use their senses. They cannot believe in something, unless they have had an experience of it in the first place and their knowledge is superficial. By emulating what they see, people fail to recognize their most profound motives.<sup>36</sup>

For Machiavelli, the beliefs of common people do not always coincide with nature, which has created man with the proclivity to dominate others. Since people cannot reconcile their behaviour with their inherent traits, the transition from a benevolent government to an authoritarian one might be closer to the natural order and, thus, it could retain social cohesion.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 31-32.

<sup>35</sup> Granet, 268.

<sup>36</sup> Coleman, 254.

<sup>37</sup> Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago: The Free Press, 1958), 56-57.

Scholars have concluded that elements of various sciences can be traced in *Han Fei Tzu* also, which shares in this way the epistemology of the *Prince*. In *Han Fei Tzu* there can be found influences from psychology, regarding behavioural norms and introspection as well as from sociology, anthropology and political science. Unfortunately, the merge of these elements that formed Legalism and undermined it in the following centuries was judged according to Qin Shi Huang's ruthless governance.<sup>38</sup>

Now the primary purpose of the leader, for Machiavelli, is to keep his citizens pleased by using a virtue they do not have because of their nature, and this is no other than being able to set aside his selfish and self-centered motives.<sup>39</sup> Since ordinary people, even ministers, do not possess this ability, a leader must find a way to keep his inferiors satisfied as much and as long he can without the constant need of offering awards as a bait for compliance. Instead of being deceived by his inferiors, a supreme leader had better deceive them by demonstrating his apparent intentions and not his actual ones, because, by doing this persistently, the ministers will become habituated to this behaviour and act accordingly.<sup>40</sup> As Han Fei clearly states, if people see a minister exercise authority, they will rightfully treat him as a ruler.<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, due to their position, high-ranking officials demand more privileges than laypeople, so they cannot be trusted since they are acquisitive. Machiavelli implies that poor people are more decent than wealthy ones as the latter just want to oppress others, while the former simply do not want to be oppressed. Besides, the poor are numerous and, with their numbers, have the ability to overthrow a leader or support him, in contrast to the wealthy, who are fewer and their protestations must be crushed. Although Machiavelli considers human nature selfish, he implies that not all people share the same degree of avariciousness.<sup>42</sup>

Hence, a leader should avoid any kind of quixotic approach to politics as people are bound by what they can experience. For this reason, it is a matter of vital significance to safeguard the interests of the people so they can be content under the guidance of their master.

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<sup>38</sup> Lay, 173.

<sup>39</sup> Machiavelli, 73-74.

<sup>40</sup> Erica Benner, "The Necessity to Be Not-Good: Machiavelli's Two Realisms," in *Machiavelli on Liberty and Conflict*, eds. David Johnston, Nadia Urbinati, and Camila Vergara, 164-185 (Chicago, and London: Chicago University Press, 2017), 169.

<sup>41</sup> Han Fei, 30.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

If the citizens of a state are pleased with their ruler, they will not only happily accept his power, but they will fight for the maintenance of their leader's supremacy.<sup>43</sup> Many usurpers hope to secure endorsement by the mob in a political riot. But if the people are content with their master, they will not betray him and will do their best to keep him in charge.<sup>44</sup> If a prince treats his subjects fairly and enhances their status, they will fight wholeheartedly to keep him in power. For fear of losing their fortune and earned privileges, Machiavelli claims they will even sacrifice their lives for their country's survival, a fact which justifies why lay troops are more efficacious than mercenaries in his view.<sup>45</sup>

It has to be noted though, that the characteristics Machiavelli reiterates as suitable for a prince throughout his essay, do not correlate with those he attributes to Lorenzo di Medici in his dedication at the beginning of the *Prince*. Maybe Machiavelli endeavours to flatter the leader of Florence whereas Han Fei refrains from doing so for his prince.<sup>46</sup>

#### IV. Han Fei and Machiavelli's metaphysics

Machiavelli, dissenting from the dominant ethical code of his times derived from Christianity, rationally proves that paying close attention to the flux of reality is the only logical way to avoid the prevalence of anarchy.<sup>47</sup> It could otherwise be stated – in a more conjectural manner – that since god is ubiquitous and the creator of the universe and nature itself, it would be absurd to strive for anything other than the preservation of the celestial perfection he has created. Machiavelli endeavours to establish ontologically the accession of a ruler, with the ultimate purpose of maintaining society's cohesion. Any path diverging from this goal will be the harbinger of calamity both for the ruler and his people.

Machiavelli is often considered to be among those thinkers who have vastly contributed to the founding of political science. Indeed, the *Prince* is a work that endeavours to form a political stance based upon sensible evaluation of experience, thus rendering the exercise of power a political paradigm. This normative form of governance is

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<sup>43</sup> Machiavelli, 95.

<sup>44</sup> Zuckert, 85.

<sup>45</sup> Benner, "Machiavelli's Two Realisms," 167-168.

<sup>46</sup> Zuckert, 46.

<sup>47</sup> Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 51.



based on two kinds of knowledge: theoretical, on the one hand, related to the understanding of nature, and practical on the other, focusing on the rules that will make the solidification of a state possible by putting the theory of ruling into practice. Furthermore, what is natural is associated with what is solid and permanent, meaning political stability. Thus, reasonable political actions, which are favoured by nature, are realized via the establishment of central authority.<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, by scrutinizing Machiavelli's perspective on natural order, we cannot claim that Machiavelli asks a leader to govern according to an immutable natural law. Since our world is not a world of forms or ideas, where everything follows natural order, but an ever-changing world contrasting cosmic perfection, every attempt to attain any kind of normality requires tremendous effort as nothing is given a priori to anyone.<sup>49</sup>

A more spiritual approach in the political domain, despite leading to concrete results as well, is the Taoist interpretation of statecraft by Han Fei. He advises a ruler to follow the route of nature as the floating water and the boat do, so as to select the options closer to nature and reach his mental peak, attaining enlightenment.<sup>50</sup> Remarkably, the "Way" is said to exist but without being able to be seen or known, since, to witness its existence, detachment from human feelings is required. The only one capable of fulfilling this task is none other than the leader who, by keeping himself aloof and imperturbable, becomes the guide of the worthiest and the wisest without revealing his motives and preferences.<sup>51</sup>

This Daoist aspect of Han Fei, urging a ruler to seek his inner serenity through reconciliation with nature, is akin to the tenets of Stoicism, if we looked for something similar in Western philosophy. The Stoics also considered that people are naturally disposed to define the principle of virtue (*arete*), so they should embrace *apatheia*, a situation that enables them to keep their composure in order not to gratify their passions.<sup>52</sup> This teaching of the Stoics makes abundantly clear the strenuous task Han Fei's ruler has to fulfill, as it demands a

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<sup>48</sup> Strauss, 55-57.

<sup>49</sup> Miquel Vatter, *Machiavelli's The Prince: A Reader's Guide* (London, and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 50.

<sup>50</sup> Chan, 254.

<sup>51</sup> Han Fei, 17.

<sup>52</sup> Evangelos Protopapadakis, "Notions of the Stoic Value Theory in Contemporary Debates: Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide," *Zbornik Matice srpske za klasične studije* 11 (2009): 216-217.

sort of voluntary abandonment of the pleasures of life or the pleasures that other people are allowed to enjoy.

In a characteristic passage, a prince is instructed to be detached, like a god, so that his deepest thoughts remain concealed. Impassive as he will be, the sky (i.e. “the Way” in Taoist terminology) will be revealed to him and he will resemble Earth itself. Then, who from his subordinates could really approach him or defy his unique impartiality? Besides, the “Way” is boundless and its magnificence encompasses the entirety of nature.<sup>53</sup> By comparing the prince with heaven, Han Fei entrenches the ruler’s divine impartiality. The way of governance depends on the placing of everyone according to their worth, which is reinforced and inspired via the rewards and penalties attributed by the prince. The basic triad of rulership, i.e. power, tactics and the law embodies the divine spirit that guides cosmic perfection, a view that somehow resembles Machiavelli’s mention of Moses.<sup>54</sup>

Han Fei was influenced by Daoism and tried to establish Legalism through Daoist metaphysics. But unfortunately, even though he was admired by Qin Shin Huang, who united China in 221 B.C. and tried to adopt his teachings, he fell victim to a conspiracy and his intentions were misunderstood, resulting in his enforced suicide.<sup>55</sup> It is worth noting that the first emperor of China held Han Fei’s philosophy in great esteem. A moment that illustrates Han Fei’s unequalled frame of mind is the words of the emperor when he read a portion of his work: “I wish I could just meet this man. With him, I could face death with no regret.”<sup>56</sup>

Certainly the portrait of a ruler as described by Han Fei, entails some sort of superhuman ability. Because of that and his Daoist influence, the most essential political pragmatist in ancient China, can also be seen as a political utopian who could think beyond immediate and necessary Legalistic outcomes. Once the law-abiding government has implanted in the minds of its citizens the way they should behave for the maintenance of their country as a harmonious and unselfish social formation, they will become accustomed to this state of affairs. Then, their acquisitive and materialistic motives will be put aside and there will be no need for them to be concerned about moral principles

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<sup>53</sup> Han Fei, 37-39.

<sup>54</sup> Fung Yu-Lan, 320.

<sup>55</sup> Kim-chong Chong, “Classical Confucianism (II): Meng Zi and Xun Zi,” in *History of Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Bo Mou, 189-208 (London: Routledge, 2008), 208.

<sup>56</sup> Duyvendak, 402.

since they will have already embraced them by obeying the law.<sup>57</sup> This shows that the Legalist ruler does not desire to enforce blind obedience to the laws of the state. Instead, voluntary obedience to the law will develop in the laity a kind of a Stoic moral conscience, in that they will be able to distinguish permissible from impermissible acts.<sup>58</sup> Thus, they will have a kind of self-consciousness about the laws, since their individual act of law-abidingness will ensure social and political stability, provided that they obey the laws as if they were categorical imperatives.<sup>59</sup> In Stoicism, too, adherence to the moral law is linked to the laws of nature, which in turn are linked to god.<sup>60</sup> Similarly it could be argued that in Legalism, when citizens obey the laws, they are imitating the behavior of their ruler. Their actions are thus guided by a kind of divine wisdom, as their ruler is a figure with godlike attributes, being the only one capable of discerning the “Way” and ensuring the well-being of the state.

Machiavelli presents a supreme figure that has to transcend his mortality by reaching goals that other humans simply aspire to, reminding us of Nietzsche’s perception of the evolution of mankind into a superior to the existing one.<sup>61</sup> Simply put, if righteous governance was conceived in an Aristotelian manner, if virtue was equal to harshness and stability while vice was a synonym of leniency and instability Machiavelli would not choose a middle way but the virtuous extreme.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, Han Fei endeavors to show that a leader, either by his excellent statesmanship or his serenity, can approach a predetermined normative model or idea that defines the cosmological flux and which can be revealed with the use of appropriate laws. It is certain, though, that Han Fei’s Political Realism did not have its parallel in ancient Chinese philosophy.

Machiavelli believes that the laws have been set into place in order to bring concord within the society since humans care about their own interest – this is the same in Han Fei. Furthermore, ordinary ethics focus on forging human moral principles so as to limit aggressive

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<sup>57</sup> Schwartz, 341.

<sup>58</sup> Michail Mantzanas, “The Concept of Moral Conscience in Ancient Greek Philosophy,” *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 2, (2020): 76.

<sup>59</sup> Antony Arthur Long, and Despina Vertzagia, “Antiquity Revisited: A Discussion with Antony Arthur Long,” *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 1, (2020): 119.

<sup>60</sup> Mantzanas, “The Concept of Moral Conscience in Ancient Greek Philosophy,” 77.

<sup>61</sup> Strauss, 78.

<sup>62</sup> Harvey Claflin Mansfield, *Machiavelli’s Virtue* (Chicago, and London: Chicago University Press, 1996), 18.

behaviours and quarrels among people for the sake of common good. Machiavellian ethics point out to a leader that he had better emulate moral behaviours like dignity, honesty and compassion. Deep down, both Machiavelli and conventional morality aim for the prosperity of society, but from a different perspective. Thus, it is not absurd to claim that there are two alternative kinds of morality from which the head of state must choose, instead of a moral and immoral option.<sup>63</sup> But whichever option might be preferred, the legitimacy of the next prince and not only of the contemporary prince must also be secured. In volatile political situations, affecting both internal and external affairs, provisions must be made for the future as well. Besides, Machiavelli, like Heraclitus, seems to admit that “war is the father of all things.”<sup>64</sup> Thus, Machiavelli perceives things to be continuously evolving so the possible destabilisation of a sovereign state should be anticipated.<sup>65</sup> Han Fei shares this view since to him nothing is permanently determined, but everything flows in accordance with a dialectical methodology which turns every substance to its opposite after it reaches its zenith.<sup>66</sup>

Machiavelli promulgates that the handling of fortune is a necessary qualification for rulership. This justifies his classification as a Political Realist by modern scholars, since his statement about fortune resembles that made by the founder of Political Realism, Thucydides, who mentioned that fortune always favours the brave. Thus, energy is the key to bridle fortune since it tends to favour those who are bold, harsh, aggressive, and decisive instead of those characterized by lack of enthusiasm and impetuosity.<sup>67</sup> Still, being a blessed leader does not guarantee a peaceful and long governance, as staying in power demands far more than that. Even a combination of virtue and fortune is rejected, because if a prince relies on fortune, he will never develop the skills needed to keep himself in place. Machiavelli implies that counting more on one’s leading abilities than on lucky incidents is the right option for someone in command.<sup>68</sup> In any case, since fortune is the sum of all possible changeable forces, it also has the power to

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<sup>63</sup> Coleman, 248-249; 262.

<sup>64</sup> Heraclitus, DK B53.

<sup>65</sup> Vatter, 64; 75.

<sup>66</sup> Chung-Ying Cheng, “The Origins of Chinese Philosophy,” in *Companion Encyclopedia of Asian Philosophy*, eds. Brian Carr, and Indira Mahalingam, 445-480 (London, and New York: Routledge, 1997), 475-476.

<sup>67</sup> Machiavelli, 101.

<sup>68</sup> Erica Benner, *Machiavelli’s Prince: A New Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 70-71.

transcend princely virtue. Unlike young men who are less wise and more ardent, being governed by their emotions and not caring about political contemplations, the prince must take control of the aspects of life within his reach. A prince who is daring and impetuous increases his chances of riding the path of fortune.<sup>69</sup> Of course this does not constitute advice for the rash practice of governance. Since there is no rationalist model for politics, by monitoring the ever-changing circumstances, the head of state has to seize the opportunity provided to him by fortune, taking the right decision, for the right reason, at the right place, and the right time.<sup>70</sup>

But in order to effectively face unpredictable events, a prince has to comprehend the essence of necessity, meaning the mandatory decisions he has to take when there is no alternative to safeguard his state. It is a common phenomenon for leaders to resort to the excuse of exigency so they can evade any sort of rebuke for their actions when, in reality, they had been unprepared.<sup>71</sup> Thus, it would be wise for a ruler to take into consideration any factor that may deter him from taking some unscheduled measures. The deeds carried out by force do not merit positive or negative assessment since their outcome cannot be ascribed to their agent, who acted in this way out of necessity. A prudent leader should adjust his will to the inevitable facts of fate so as to avoid any hesitation or reluctance, which will result in his indecisiveness and will possibly weaken his status. Especially if people are forced to obey regulations contrary to their interests and the prince himself, who formed these regulations, does not believe in them, political turbulence will break out and enemies within or without the state will take advantage of that.<sup>72</sup> After all, revolutions may occur from time to time as history follows a cyclic path. For this reason, it would be wise for a ruler to take for granted that, even after the end of his rule, political stability may be at risk. Someone who cares for the perpetual welfare of his realm has to establish political institutions that will aid the future ruler to adjust to the political reality and become more versatile in his decisions.<sup>73</sup>

Concluding, both Han Fei and Machiavelli, reject the compliance with an ideal and permanent model of leadership as historical

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<sup>69</sup> Coleman, 260.

<sup>70</sup> Zuckert, 98.

<sup>71</sup> Erica Benner, *Machiavelli's Ethics* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 136.

<sup>72</sup> Benner, *Machiavelli's Ethics*, 148.

<sup>73</sup> Vatter, 27.

conditions and reality fluctuate, so the management of vital matters needs to differ from time to time.<sup>74</sup> But, in contrast to Machiavelli, Han Fei pays less attention to the notion of fortune or the lessons from prominent figures of the past. He considers the ultimate weapon for restoring order to be no other than the law. The restriction of human aggressiveness will be achieved only with the enforcement of the law and people can succeed in that by emulating their ruler.<sup>75</sup>

### V. Machiavelli's and Han Fei's view of history

Machiavelli had great esteem for Rome's supremacy and due to the cyclic path of history he firmly believed that the ancient Roman virtue could be imitated so as to revive Rome's past glory. But Machiavelli deliberately created a myth about the unmatched Roman virtue that he knew did not exist to the extent he described. In order to support his Political Realism, he used an idealistic interpretation of ancient Rome. Even in his *Discourses on Livy*, he deals only with Rome's successes like the victories against Carthage, rather than Rome's degeneracy. Influenced by Polybius, Machiavelli considered that history follows a cyclical path. The Renaissance period, which he lived in and abhorred, would eventually change and the glory of the past would return. Thus, the imitation of ancient Roman virtue will bring about the end of Italy's present degeneration.<sup>76</sup> He professed that the Roman spirit hung over Europe waiting for the historical moment to imbue a personality, who would bring Italy out of the stalemate it was in, by using the law and a strategy from the past, and would guide his country to its unification.<sup>77</sup>

Believing that Italians can find many personalities to imitate from their Roman past, Machiavelli gives an example of such a virtuous man, an emperor who embodied these ideals, Septimius Severus, an extraordinary figure combining ferocity with astuteness. He was esteemed by his subordinates, but even when he was hated by some of them, his virtuous rulership gained their support and consent.<sup>78</sup> Severus used cunning diplomacy to rise to the imperial throne, offering to designate one of

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<sup>74</sup> Lundahl, 141.

<sup>75</sup> Duyvendak, 412.

<sup>76</sup> Georgios Steiris, "Machiavelli's Appreciation of Greek Antiquity and the Ideal of Renaissance," in *Renaissance? Perceptions of Continuity and Discontinuity in Europe*, eds. Alexander Lee, Pit Péporté, and Harry Schnitker, 81-94 (Leiden, and Boston, MA: Brill, 2010), 91-93.

<sup>77</sup> Louis Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, ed. Francois Matheron, trans. Gregory Elliott (London, and New York: Verso Books, 2001), 45.

<sup>78</sup> Machiavelli, 78.

his adversaries Clodius Albinus, as the future Caesar and make him his sole successor as emperor instead of his children. This gave him time to concentrate on the threat from his other adversary and commander of Asian armies, Pescennius Niger. The latter was first deserted by his troops and then vanquished by Severus. Severus later intimated that his offer to Albinus would realize only if he had been defeated by Niger or simply died. Since this did not occur, Severus rightfully seized power and declared Albinus an enemy of Rome, thus providing himself with the pretext to obliterate him.<sup>79</sup>

Indeed, Septimius Severus fits perfectly Machiavelli's teachings about the ideal leader. He was ferocious as a lion, and shrewd and astute as a fox. He used lies to convince one of his rivals (Clodius Albinus) that he was an ally in order to strike at the forces of his other rival (Pescennius Niger) and annihilate him before dealing with the first. Severus employed an immoral tactic so as to put an end to the political turmoil after the death of Commodus, aiming to achieve political stability and stop the volatile political situation that was taking place. He secured a prosperous reign for eighteen years, demonstrating remarkable qualities as an emperor and avoiding such atrocities as Agathocles had resorted to.

As for Legalism, it is widely supported that it flourished because of the volatile political situation during the Warring States period when long-held beliefs about the status quo were challenged. It was something fresh, providing tenets which were radical for ancient Chinese political philosophy and questioning the ethical standards of Confucianism, Mohism, and Daoism which had been prevailing then. These moral philosophies had failed to stop the constant fighting and the civil wars among people who shared the same national identity.<sup>80</sup>

Similarly, Renaissance Italy from the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> to the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (approximately the period Machiavelli lived) was in political upheaval and the five major city-states of Florence, Milan, Naples, Venice, and the Papal states (Rome) would be conquered by Spain, France and the Holy Roman Empire. In the political field, there was a dearth of sound political judgement so the principles of government were influenced by the belief in fortune as the stability and future of each state were in doubt. Humanism failed to raise prudent leaders with sound judgement who could decide on an appropriate course of action, thus setting the stage for the emergence of Machiavelli's new political morality.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Antony Birley, *Septimius Severus* (London, and New York: Routledge, 1999), 98; 113; 121.

<sup>80</sup> Lay, 172.

<sup>81</sup> Alison Brown, "Rethinking the Renaissance in the Aftermath of Italy's Crisis," in *The Short*

Most importantly, the Italian city-state regimes collapsed mainly due to internal strife as rapacious aristocrats monopolized power and contributed to the rise of nepotism and elitism. It's clear that Machiavelli as a Political Realist describes the historical reality of his times. Since military power was not a problem for Italy, the lack of an astute leader, able to inspire in his compatriots the will to resist and fight corruption, was conspicuous, and as a Political Realist, Machiavelli describes exactly that: the reality of his times.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, the cunning and ruthless attitude Machiavelli encourages a ruler to have, was what was necessary for a prince in those times. His seemingly immoral opinions are entirely adjusted to the historical events he experiences.

It cannot be a coincidence that the call for an authoritarian leadership and the need for the rise of a highly capable political figure appear when political turmoil prevails, as, in a period of prosperity, few people welcome such policies. And this is true for both Han Fei and Machiavelli's times. In the Renaissance, the descendants of the glorious Roman Empire are some Italian city-states subdued to the rising European powers of the time, unable to unify in one powerful state due to political corruption and lack of a leader. This state of political tumult is alike the one in the Warring States period, when the Zhou dynasty had collapsed and the seven kingdoms that had arisen were ruled by weak monarchs, dependent on their officers and associates, who fought among themselves for supremacy.<sup>83</sup> The necessity of survival forces people to realize that traditional morality in the political domain is inadequate, as it cannot safeguard their cohesion as a society and it puts their interests at risk through personal quarrels irrelevant to the rest of society. So the accumulation of power under one capable, just, and incorruptible person is preferable.

As far as history is concerned, Han Fei believed in its evolution. He did not think that it was necessary for an event to come full circle, but he considered that each era was more progressive than the preceding one. The historical examples he uses are meant to prevent similar mistakes rather than suggest the imitation of personalities of the past.<sup>84</sup> Legalists had little esteem for events of the past concerning the achievement of social and

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*Oxford History of Italy – Italy in the Age of Renaissance 1300-1550*, ed. John M. Najemy, 247-266 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 247-248.

<sup>82</sup> Michael Mallet, "Politics and Society 1250-1600," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Italy*, ed. George Holmes, 57-85 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 74; 79.

<sup>83</sup> Mark Edward Lewis, "Warring States Political History," in *The Cambridge Ancient History of China – From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.*, eds. Michael Loewe, and Edward L. Shaughnessy, 587-650 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 587.

<sup>84</sup> Bai, 120-121.



political prosperity. Generally, they were discontented with the inadequacy of past political institutions and were stimulated by the idea of finding new and more effective models of governance. They concentrated on the future and looked back only in order to seek the path of evolution.<sup>85</sup>

Furthermore, the Legalistic perception of history is affected by Taoism. A prince will reach the level of enlightenment as long as he is in harmony with “Dao,” the way that maintains the balance of the universe through the unity of opposites. Eventually, Han Fei’s Daoism and evolutionary view of history imply that a leader will be able to anticipate the flux of history, aiming of course at perpetual and not temporary prosperity through the study of history.<sup>86</sup> What can be said for certain, though, is that Machiavelli and Han Fei agree that a prince should focus on the present. Even though Machiavelli is more concerned with the past and Han Fei with the future, in the end, they both care for the perennial wellbeing of their nation, as they both agree that circumstances always change.

#### VI. Statesmanship according to the Legalistic and Machiavellian model

Having volatile political situations in mind, Machiavelli voices the need to quit dreaming of unattainable and impracticable societies because the present is completely different from what people aspire to. Therefore, in corroboration with Political Realism, he alters the essence of righteousness, claiming that a leader should act viciously, especially if proper statesmanship is supposed to be based upon utopian traditional values. The standards of efficient guidance by the head of state are judged by considering the achievement of political stability in the current circumstances.<sup>87</sup>

In one of his most well known quotes, Machiavelli claims that, if a prince had to choose between his people’s fear and their fondness (since the latter option is more unachievable due to the inherently malevolent human nature), the former would be more convenient politically.<sup>88</sup> However, Machiavelli does not imply that a ruler should use his authority in order to legitimize his crimes and to exercise brutality on his people. This attitude would be mandatory only if there was no other alternative in order to save his kingdom. Only then, would a brutal or villainous action be justified – an idea that ancient and christian tradition rejected since this was an inappropriate characteristic of a virtuous personality.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Cheng, “The Origins of Chinese Philosophy,” 476.

<sup>86</sup> Cheng, *Histoire de la pensée chinoise*, 346.

<sup>87</sup> Machiavelli, 41.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>89</sup> Skinner, 44-45.

Consequently, the head of state should find ways to enhance his prestige and status aiming only at the maximum benefit. This way, he will become able to foresee the probable outcomes of fortune and manipulate the circumstances so as to favour his realm. Should a righteous path be achieved, cunning and underhand statemanship will no longer be required.<sup>90</sup> It seems that Han Fei would have sympathized with Machiavelli's viewpoint. Benevolent governance in the traditional sense cannot coexist with a strict obedience to the laws, or with a realistic approach, as the required objectivity of the laws would then have to succumb to subjectivity.<sup>91</sup>

For instance, Agathocles is criticized for his abuse of power in comparison with other historical figures. Certainly, it can be supported that Agathocles was favoured by fortune, having been able to face so many hurdles. But his savagery cannot be condoned, since his crimes did not occur seldom or last for a short time as they should have in the interests of political stability. Such methods may save an empire for a while, but they do not lead to greatness and cannot last for eternity.<sup>92</sup> Ephemeral success is irrelevant to virtue and should not be an end because political upheaval might eventually prevail. Thus, morality seems to be brought forth by Machiavelli as actions like those of Agathocles need to be condemned. Since moral probity alone cannot bring political effects, immoral ruthlessness is inadequate.<sup>93</sup> Even though Machiavelli's bad reputation seems understandable, we cannot argue that his advice is vengeful. Providing a rational philosophical argument, he proves that a leader should feel no shame of rescinding his promises to his people, since human beings are born with the propensity to defy moral standards.<sup>94</sup> When humans feel that their interests are in jeopardy they are vulnerable to their innate narcissistic impulses and tend to neglect any existing moral code.<sup>95</sup>

In Legalism, when Han Fei proposes that the ministers should come up with policies and await the approval of the king, he presents the ancient Chinese concept of "wu wei," i.e. the effortless action which conceals the king's intentions. A prince does not have to see and hear things himself, as his ministers will be his eyes and ears. If he uses his

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>91</sup> Lay, 190.

<sup>92</sup> Machiavelli, 34-35; 38.

<sup>93</sup> Benner, *Machiavelli's Prince-A New Reading*, 70; 113.

<sup>94</sup> Coleman, 254.

<sup>95</sup> Machiavelli, 66.

own senses and talents, he will reveal his intentions to his ministers and they will be able to deceive and manipulate him. When a leader implements his policies using his ministers, he keeps them occupied and he will attain glory by boosting meritocracy instead of nepotism.<sup>96</sup> In a sense, Han Fei suggests that a ruler should be identified by some kind of superhuman ability. Machiavelli does the same, but to a lesser extent.

Furthermore, Machiavelli professes that if a prince wants to control his most close associates, like his ministers, he should observe their behaviour. A minister thinking mostly of himself rather than his ruler is untrustworthy. The ruler is superior to the minister and not the other way around. Should the sovereignty of the senior be lost and he become the puppet of his minister/s, political destabilisation will loom. Furthermore, the prince ought to remunerate his inferiors for their services and look after their needs, so that they will be satisfied and will not expect more privileges, should someone else ascend.<sup>97</sup> Individual and collective welfare can coexist if the person who secures this welfare is generally accepted to be the prince. The monopoly of exercising power should not be given to anyone, especially to government officials who might be regarded by the people to possess greater power compared to the prince. If such a mistake occurs, their extermination is justified and must be immediate. Also, an alliance with the people, instead of the nobles, should be preferred, as the people will be gratified by the protection of their property and rights by someone they already accept as their superior. They may condone a brutal action of a selfish noble, if it happens for the sake of their interests.<sup>98</sup>

Similarly, from the beginning of his work, Han Fei emphasizes the importance of command over the ministers. A ruler should never make his objectives clear, as he will be flattered and buttered up by his ministers who will seek to manipulate him, enhance their political position and interests and possibly overthrow him. However, it is worth noting that Han Fei stresses a fundamental trait for the head of state, a remarkable impassivity. By letting his inferiors act according to his instructions, the leader will demonstrate that they depend solely on him due to their weakness. If a ruler reaches inner serenity, he will be able to subjugate his emotions and not reveal his intentions. This will

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<sup>96</sup> Lundahl, 130.

<sup>97</sup> Machiavelli, 93.

<sup>98</sup> Vatter, 95.

lead to the emergence of his ministers' motives.<sup>99</sup> After all, the head of a state should never forget that ministers always work to augment their affluence, so their instructions concerning governmental affairs will be affected by this motive.<sup>100</sup> Consequently, Han Fei simply proposes that a leader is not obliged to have moral principles in order to rule his state, since, if he is wise enough, he will leave this task to his most reliable and objective agent, which is no other than the unprejudiced law.<sup>101</sup>

## VII. A criticism and a story with a moral

Political Realism is widely criticized for the ferocity it brings to political affairs, defying any existing moral ideal just for the achievement of an ultimate purpose. However, as already mentioned, it cannot be supported that it completely rejects an idealistic approach to politics, according to the examples of Machiavelli in the West and Han Fei in China. Specifically, there is an effort to unite theory with practice. When we think of Idealism, theory (philosophy) is often considered a prerequisite for any practical application, as in Plato, for instance; in Machiavelli, the reverse is the case.<sup>102</sup> It can be said that Machiavelli's is a very particular idealism, a utopian situation which could theoretically achieve its end, because of the fact that its creator undertook the sisyphian task of providing a paradigm for every prince.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, this model presents an innovative notion of morality within the sphere of political affairs, pointing out that individual and political morality do not always coincide since their deontology stems from different, even contradictory circumstances. So, the notorious condemnation of Political Realism as immoral may seem understandable but it certainly is erroneous.<sup>104</sup>

Generally, the main difference between Han Fei and Machiavelli can be traced in the historical background and purpose of their respective work. In 15<sup>th</sup> century's Europe, legal systems had already been established and thrived: they were undoubtedly the adhesive substance of a country and had matured after existing for hundreds or

<sup>99</sup> Han Fei Tzu, 16-17.

<sup>100</sup> Goldin, 152.

<sup>101</sup> Chan, 253.

<sup>102</sup> Mansfield, 39.

<sup>103</sup> Althusser, 52.

<sup>104</sup> Hans-Jorg Sigwart, 410-411.

even thousands of years. In ancient China, the consolidation of a legal code was the starting point towards the formation of a nation. Laws were barely passed before, thus having little chance of becoming a part of daily life.<sup>105</sup> The term Legalism is fully justified, as it is considered to be the only classical philosophical movement with a profound understanding of the law as the plaster of human society.<sup>106</sup>

Moreover, Han Fei is usually misunderstood by those more familiar with the history of Western philosophy, as they fail to comprehend his concept of law. As a consequence, they confuse the rule of law with rule by law, arguing that Han Fei thinks an ideal ruler should abuse his power and not adhere to any moral standard that will deter him from being savage. In the rule of law lies an ethical underpinning while in rule by law – the model Han Fei is associated with by the scholars who criticize him – moral standards are irrelevant. And yet, as Machiavelli can be said to introduce a new kind of morality in the political domain, so Han Fei can be perceived as a thinker for whom governance is based upon the mutual dependence of law and morality.<sup>107</sup>

An illustrative example of the philosophy of the Legalist school is the famous example Han Fei uses himself: the well-known story in Chinese history of Bian He's jade. This is how the story goes: after having found an exquisite uncut jade, Bian He decides to deliver it to his king in the state of Chu. The king calls a jade carver to appraise He's jade and the carver states that it is just a simple stone, so the king, suspicious of Bian He, orders that his left foot be cut off. After the king passed away, He gifts his jade to his successor, but, since the jade carver says that the jade is valueless again, the new king asks that He's right foot be cut off. After being rejected by two kings of his county, Bian He is sad and, when a new prince (whom Bian He did not approach to present his jade), ascends to power, king Wen of Chu, he sends an envoy to learn the reason He is so disconsolate, thinking that his disability was the cause. Bian He replies that the fact that he was lame did not worry him. His source of grief was that the value of the jade he offered to his princes was not recognized and his action, which was inspired by his unwavering loyalty and allegiance to his masters, was judged as an action of deceit instead. Finally king Wen orders a carver to chisel Bian He's jade and it transpires that it was not just a

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<sup>105</sup> He, 667.

<sup>106</sup> Eric C. Ip, "The Idea of Law in Classical Chinese Legalist Jurisprudence," *Global Jurist* 9, no. 4 (2009): 1.

<sup>107</sup> Kenneth Winston, "The Internal Morality of Chinese Legalism," *Singapore Journal of Legal Studies* (2005): 313-315.

simple stone, but a priceless stone and Bian He had been forthright all the way from the beginning, offering his invaluable finding to his superiors instead of keeping it for himself.<sup>108</sup>

This story as used by Han Fei can be interpreted as a metaphor for the reception of Legalism, the doctrines of which were misinterpreted. Bian He could be parallelised with Han Fei and Legalist philosophers, which implies that Legalists were commonly mistreated, just like Bian He, although they provided their invaluable wisdom motivated by allegiance to their masters. Similarly to Bian He, they suffered undeserved punishment and their sincerity was disbelieved; Han Fei himself was rejected by both the king of his state (despite the fact that he belonged to the royal family of the State of Hann) and Qin Shi Huang who imprisoned him. The latter was misled by Li Si, who was jealous of Han Fei and persuaded the king that Han Fei wanted to weaken his kingdom. Han Fei's advice concerning statesmanship was not only rejected by two kings, but also led to his forced (indirectly by Li Si) death. Although Qin Shi Huang greatly admired Han Fei, he was deceived by Li Si's contrivance. Thus, the story of He's jade symbolises the fate of the Legalist school in general.<sup>109</sup>

Legalism, in contrast to Confucianism and Taoism, degenerated in the ensuing years. Surviving Legalist texts were underestimated, as Legalism was often conceived as a form of government resembling a dictatorship that legitimized the accumulation of power under one ruler and the use of brutal and abominable means to consolidate it. As has been pointed out, both Han Fei and Machiavelli imply that a prince should govern his state according to a moral code separate from that of his subordinates, as the stance of an ideal ruler, worrying about collective rather than individualistic prosperity, must transcend human nature. Nothing could better illustrate the essence of Political Realism than the stoic attitude of Bian He: a man willing to die for his ideals, and to sacrifice his life for the sake of common good. A leader embracing Political Realism and not seeking his personal gratification is an extraordinary personality.

Therefore, laws are the source of political power, but they also restrict it. Han Fei places remarkable emphasis on the sufficiency of laws as the ultimate means to ideal governance, provided that they are not based on the indulgence of personal desires but are impersonal and impartial. Many researchers erroneously see a judgemental and almost punitive aspect

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<sup>108</sup> Zhang Ying, Tao Liming, and Yao Xuan, *The Wisdom of Han Feizi* (Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language University Press, 2010), 54-57.

<sup>109</sup> David Shepherd Nivison, "The Classical Philosophical Writings," in *The Cambridge Ancient History of China – From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.*, eds. Michael Loewe, and Edward L. Shaughnessy, 745-812 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 800-801.

to *Han Fei Tzu*, disregarding its legislative, honest and unbiased spirit.<sup>110</sup> Perhaps the criticism that Han Fei does not care for the consolidation of a virtuous model of a ruler, has to do with the fact that Han Fei advises a ruler to embrace inertia. In other words, a ruler does not have to solve problems of government; instead, he should take care to not have any problems to resolve.<sup>111</sup>

Furthermore, Han Fei does not suggest that only the result or only power is all that matters. Why should someone be punished if he manages to achieve great things just because he did not initially expect to gain such glory for himself in the name of his king?<sup>112</sup> This brings to mind the example of the famous roman general Titus Manlius, who killed his son, although the latter honoured his country and family by beating a rival general, simply because he disobeyed his father's orders. If Han Fei's ideal leader cared only for power, he would not punish his subordinates who contributed to the consolidation of his power; he would reward them instead.

It is unfair to believe that Han Fei would disagree with Machiavelli in the case of Agathocles. If Han Fei's objective was to support a dictatorship, emulating a ruler like Agathocles – who murdered anyone he thought was against him – why does he try to form a hierarchy in governance with worthy advisers? Han Fei based his whole philosophy on meritocracy. He proposes that those who will be designated to leading posts should pass a series of tests, beginning with lower positions so that their value can determine their career path. Certainly the power lies in the monarch's hands, but he should not abuse it, as he exercises his power using the “two handles” on and through his ministers. Han Fei's prince would not use his ministers as if they were his sense organs, if the only thing he cared for was selfish power. Also, Legalism promotes the distribution of land to peasants, as, if land remained in the hands of nobles, it would confer political power. Then aristocrats would be few, without much power; but if many people obtained power through the cultivation of land, it would be much more difficult to stop their uprising. So, it makes no sense to claim that Han Fei supports the model of a bloodthirsty king with no regard for his ministers or his people.

### VIII. Similarities and differences

Indeed there are few differences separating Han Fei and Machiavelli. Han Fei focuses on the establishment of a legal system, something that

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<sup>110</sup> Winston, 313-315.

<sup>111</sup> Pocock, 22.

<sup>112</sup> Han Fei Tzu, 27-28.

Machiavelli omits to do. Throughout *Han Feizi*, Han Fei offers advice to a prince concerning mostly how to handle ministers, rather than people in general, while Machiavelli does the opposite. The teachings of Han Fei are not derived from observing the lives of the common people as his treatise is exclusively addressed to rulers, to whom he suggests ways to consolidate their political power.<sup>113</sup> Presumably that is the reason Han Fei is preoccupied with meritocracy and the means by which the most capable people will be chosen to handle difficult situations. Thus, Han Fei suggests that ministers should be provided with the autonomy to come up with a state policy, notwithstanding that the emperor would always make the final decision. This may be due to the importance ministers had in ancient Chinese politics in order to restrain and facilitate the emperor's absolute authority at the same time, especially since ancient China had not witnessed any other form of government.

Living thousands of years after Han Fei, Machiavelli has the opportunity to support an institution Han Fei never witnessed, Republicanism and Democracy. Han Fei implies that monarchy would be the most suitable form of governance, although both thinkers criticize tyranny and nepotism. Another element differentiating their opinions is Han Fei's attachment to Taoism. In Legalism the ruler's arsenal includes the "non-action" (*wu wei*) form of government, a model that a leader does not have to be highly intelligent to follow.<sup>114</sup> Han Fei describes the portrait of a serene and imperturbable prince while Machiavelli refers to a prince full of energy and vigor.

Additionally, Machiavelli believes in a cyclic path of history, thinking that ancient Rome's glory will sometime return, even though he condemns the view that the imitation of the past is enough for the handling of present political matters; Han Fei, on the other hand, totally rejects the possibility of a repetition of the past, denouncing even Confucius for that. Han Fei's Daoist beliefs led him towards a more idealistic conception of statesmanship, in which the ruler should be next to heaven; Machiavelli does not share a similar approach.

Han Fei considers that serenity is the most suitable trait for statecraft while Machiavelli preaches vitality and focuses on fortune, something that Han Fei does not even consider. It could also be said that Han Fei clearly and without any trace of fear attacks the nobility of a state and openly accuses them. Machiavelli does not do the same, but this does not mean that he approves of the machinations of aristocrats,

<sup>113</sup> Ying, Liming, and Xuan, 19.

<sup>114</sup> Pocock, 21.



whom he criticizes. He flatters his master (Lorenzo de' Medici), which Han Fei avoids. If Machiavelli had written that the wealth of the Medici had to be curtailed, or that land had to be distributed to poorer people – like the Legalist Shang Yang had done – the leading class of Florence would have bitterly attacked him and banned the publication of his work at the very least.

On the other hand, the ideas of the two thinkers have a lot in common. They both conclude that human nature is innately self-centered. Both texts, *Han Feizi* and the *Prince* are said to retain an epistemological character aiming to set very specific standards of statesmanship. In a way, they are texts of political science in an era when politics were not considered a science, integrating features from psychology and sociology. Accordingly, the scientific elements of the political treatises under examination are rationally justified, as the authors of these texts scrutinize psychology from an empirical perspective. The reason Machiavelli and Han Fei have reached the same conclusions, urging leaders to abandon a romantic approach to politics, is the method they used throughout their work. Thus, they both rely on experience for their conclusions, as Political Realism favours adherence to reality rather than quixotism in the political domain. Since people cannot believe in an ideal they cannot perceive through experience, it would be pointless for a ruler to construct his policy on such a factor.

Moreover, they both believe that political decisions should be taken after evaluation of the current situation and in anticipation of what may happen. For both of them, whatever occurred in the past is not an appropriate solution for present issues. They also criticise dictatorship as a political institution and highlight how important it is for a king to conceal his intentions from his ministers. They both claim that a Political Realist leader must possess abilities that surpass human nature, as he will be among people obliged – due to their rank – to suppress their selfish motives for the sake of the common good. They both think that the precise emulation of glorious historical figures is insufficient to guarantee the successful handling of the problems a ruler has to deal with, since for them history has an essentially educative role and is in a state of flux. Finally, they both hope that their teachings will not fall on deaf ears and will contribute to the unification of their devastated countries. China's unification came earlier, almost with the death of Han Fei, but Italy's came three centuries after Machiavelli died.

Therefore, political pragmatists like Han Fei and Machiavelli do not desire to circumvent morality; they simply attempt to inaugurate a new kind of morality adjusted to reality. In the end, Han Fei's

philosophy should not be evaluated by Qin Shi Huang's statesmanship, but by that of emperor Taizong (Li Shimin) instead. It is clear that the consolidation of a legal system in the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. by Taizong was influenced by the tenets of classical Legalism as recorded in the writings of Han Fei and Shang Yang.<sup>115</sup> Indeed Taizong is an astonishing historical figure, who managed to maintain balance between Political Realism and Idealism. Even though he embraced Confucian teachings and aimed at governing as if from Heaven and at displaying the highest possible moral integrity, when it came to violence, he never hesitated. In order to rise to the imperial throne, he contravened Confucian ideals, demonstrating remarkable deviousness, which brings the Machiavellian teachings to mind.<sup>116</sup> Because Taizong feared that his father would not name him heir to the throne, he murdered his brothers and their ten sons. Then he demanded that his father, Gaozu, abdicate and hand over the authority for himself to govern the empire. But despite his ruthless beginning, Taizong proved a diligent and benevolent ruler, designating his associates according to their worthiness and being willing to learn from his mistakes without criticizing those who might indicate the dysfunctions of his government to him.<sup>117</sup> His tremendous successes, which revived Han dynasty's glory, along with his governing by the law are the closest example to Han Fei's ruler.

## IX. Conclusion

Concerning the stance and thought of a politically pragmatist head of state, the consolidation of a legal system is a prerequisite for the survival of any form of community. Han Fei emphasizes that, because it was not so obvious in antiquity, as it is in recent years. As both thinkers conclude, this occurs because of people's innate propensity to pursue personal gratification through the accumulation of wealth. Consequently, the establishment of states and communities based on law abidance can secure everybody's wellbeing. The bulimic attitude of individuals seeking the maximum satisfaction of their desires and using any means to achieve them is worthy of rebuke. However, if the inherence of this behaviour is taken into account, it would be almost vindictive to blame people for

<sup>115</sup> Norman P. Ho, "The Legal Thought of Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty (618-907)," *Frontiers of Law in China* 12, no. 4 (2017): 602.

<sup>116</sup> Chinghua Tang, *The Ruler's Guide: China's Greatest Emperor and his Timeless Secrets of Success* (New York: Scribner, 2017), 66.

<sup>117</sup> Patricia Buckley Ebey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China* (Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 109.

something they cannot expunge. This brings to mind the logical answer of Protagoras to Socrates in the Platonic dialogue *Protagoras*, which proposes that, if political virtue was not teachable but innate, societies should not punish criminals, because they cannot punish someone for something he is not able to do; it would be like rebuking the lame because they cannot run.<sup>118</sup> Similarly, according to Political Realism people may be innately self-centered, but this cannot change and more importantly, it is not their conscious choice. Thus, the repression of human impulses and motives safeguards the survival of human society while the submission to human desires does the opposite.

Despite seeming odd, the distressing obedience to rules leads to pleasant results, as people are thus enabled to enjoy goods and liberties they would not have otherwise. What is interesting in the political domain though, is that one or few people must differentiate themselves from the mass in order to form the rules of the society and regulate the way it is going to be governed. It is a necessity for a large community, state, nation, or even an empire to designate some individuals who will carry more responsibility concerning governance and decide on the principles by which it will be exercised. Otherwise, the existence of states would be impossible, because human beings would have little reason to form a community if they could sustain themselves another way, which is to say that communities must serve the common good or not exist at all. Thus, there seem to be two forms of necessity: the governing of a state by one or more individuals and the collective welfare over the individualistic one.

In this analysis, following the ideals of Political Realism, we have concluded that those exercising authority are only people. This is definitely not a revelation, but it is important to underline that the existence of humanity itself is based on human beings innately seeking to gratify their own needs and wants; achieving collective satisfaction and universal welfare rarely is a priority for common people. We do find the description of human beings as self-centered and selfish very harsh, but people have learned to judge actions stemming from this as erroneous – and rightfully so – following some rules that hinder this natural tendency. If, as Political Realism proposes, the self-centered motives exist, they do so unconsciously and do not deserve condemnation.

If all or most people are born morally equal, then nobody could subdue another human being without possessing a form of inherent superior power. This probably is the reason why many monarchs in

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<sup>118</sup> Plato, *Protagoras*, 324a-c.

history endeavoured to consolidate their political power proclaiming that they had been chosen by god and that they ruled by divine grace. They subconsciously understood that they should pretend to possess a superior trait than their subjects, even if this was not the case in reality, since this supremacy could not be explained physically.

But as already mentioned, the union of people into various kinds of societies has led to the achievement of remarkable results, such as the creation of civilization. This has been achieved by establishing laws that would inhibit human self-centered impulses. If those in charge of ruling a country deliberately neglected the enforcement of the laws on themselves, it could lead to their abuse of political power so as to maintain their advantageous position. People, thus, consider such a totalitarian attitude repulsive because they associate it with the fact that someone, the prince, or the nobility or higher classes, seek to oppress them so they can secure their personal interests. In such a case, the purpose of government is not collective prosperity, but the fulfilment of the rapacious wishes of those in power, who become tyrants.

The quote “the end justifies the means” is not in accordance with Han Fei and Machiavelli’s thought since their purpose is not just the achievement of desirable results. The motto is taken to insinuate that the illicit or underhand means used to achieve a specific goal accomplish a harsh and unpleasant end, only ostensibly in the interests of social prosperity. On the contrary, this quote would be closer to the essence of Political Realism, only if it was taken to imply that the desirable end was driven by utilitarian motives and goals. It would then be awkward to criticise those goals, even if sometimes illegitimate means needed to be justified. This paper has argued that Political Realism is not a theory striving only for the achievement of a goal, but a normative tenet criticising the attainment of an end outside its deontology, even if this end is ultimately more profitable for society.

Indeed it is a sisyphian task to find a ruler who sincerely abhors selfish attitudes since this is an innate trait of human nature according to Political Realism. That may be the reason why the ruler embracing this doctrine should possess divine qualities. Albeit a rare fact, this does not signify that we can arrive at its true essence, by simply misquoting Political Realism. It could be argued that the politically realist ruler shares a common characteristic with the Platonic ruler. The prince should be entirely deprived of any sort of materialist motives or desires or even, live a pleasant life, like the common people do. He should not own a fortune and live in opulence, he should not have bonding personal relationships

with friends who may understand his intentions and manipulate him. This leader, like the stoic sage, should voluntarily abstain from the human passions that common people, like his subordinates, give in to. The prince should live his life having only one purpose: to ensure that all of his subordinates can live their own lives contentedly.

Since humans tend to seek pleasure and avoid whatever distresses them, it is obvious why it is difficult to find such a prince. No one would choose to undertake such an onerous task, especially if they had the power and the opportunity to use their supposed industriousness for their individualistic indulgence. It is a common belief that Political Realism is an unscrupulous tenet, but this claim would be closer to the truth if the ruler it upholds was an ordinary man. We cannot denigrate the theory and eschew the emulation of such behaviour, however, because it is highly unlikely that we will ever meet such a person, possessing unique and exceptional traits. In this respect, Political Realism is a peculiar Idealism focusing on practical application in the real world rather than on the study of the “true word of ideas,” which lies beyond experience, accessible only through contemplation.

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# Empedocles on Ensouled Beings

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## **Abstract**

*The paper analyses fragmentarily preserved views of Empedocles, that, in the author's opinion, represent the antecedents of deviations from the anthropocentric vision of the world and anticipate the majority of later attempts at scientific, philosophical, and legal modifications of the status of all living beings. Empedocles, namely, claims that all beings think, i.e., that they have understanding or consciousness. He is, moreover, portrayed as a proponent of the thesis that plants as well have both intellect and the ability to think, and that they are driven by desire and have feelings, sadness and joy. According to him, the idea that the whole nature is akin not only has a vital-animal meaning but, to a certain extent, a mental meaning. Empedocles urged his disciples to abstain from consuming ensouled beings, since it is in the bodies of these beings that penalized souls reside. He believed that he himself was one of them who had been killed and eaten, and that it is by purification that prior sins in connection with food should be treated. Empedocles' case shows that humans are living beings that err, and that they owe to animals justice based on mutual kinship. Aside from living a pure life, practicing the recommended katharmoi, and abstaining from flesh in any version, the path to the salvation of the soul leads through two additional dimensions. The first is being revealed in the important phrase of the sage from Acragas that one should fast from evil. And secondly, the wealth of divine thoughts is connected with being happy, just as those who have vague opinions about the gods are wretched. Eventually, the "Sicilian Muse" believed that if people live in a holy and just manner, they shall be blessed in this life, even more so after leaving this one, because they will achieve happiness that will not be temporarily, and be able to rest for eternity.*

**Keywords:** *Empedocles; ensoulment; whole nature is akin; justice; katharmoi; abstaining; incarnation; happiness*

The search of antecedents in levelling the differences between humans and other living beings, stems from the very origins of science, i.e., from the “fathers” of philosophy, on the basis of whose extant fragmentary manuscripts it can be established that they anticipated most of the latter modalities of non-anthropocentric approaches. In short, the standing point of venerable Presocratics belongs to an age when there was no serious distinction between the body and the soul, the organic and the inorganic.<sup>1</sup> Rather, they were inclined to accept some kind of mixture of corporeal and mental elements, as in their time it was difficult to imagine the body (σῶμα) without a soul (ψυχή) or the soul without matter (ύλη). The first originators, consequently, understood thinking (φρόνησις) as something corporeal similar<sup>2</sup> to sensation (αἴσθησις),<sup>3</sup> and generally believed that something can be understood and perceived by what is similar to it (γινώσκεισθαι γὰρ τῷ ὁμοίῳ τὸ ὅμοιον).<sup>4</sup> As an anticipated consequence of this approach comes the assertion by certain Greek thinkers of this era that not only humans, but also all other beings have consciousness, intellect, and are able to think.<sup>5</sup>

Any research as this one that focuses on Empedocles can only reveal that he believes that the wit in men increases according to what is present (πρὸς παρεὸν γὰρ μῆτις ἀέξεται ἀνθρώποισιν),<sup>6</sup> and his fragment 108 serves to confirm the thesis that thought<sup>7</sup> is corporal and under the influence of

<sup>1</sup> As it is evident from DK 86B7, Aristotle, *De anima*, 405a 19-21, and Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 1: 24, for example. Consult: Željko Kaluđerović, *Bioetički kaleidoskop* (Zagreb: Pergamena, Znanstveni centar izvrsnosti za integrativnu bioetiku, 2021), 21-38.

<sup>2</sup> On the notion of similarity and the various ways it has been perceived and examined, see Virginia John Grigoriadou, Frank A. Coutelieris, and Kostas Theologou, “History of the Concept of Similarity in Natural Sciences,” *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 6, no. 1 (2021): 101-123.

<sup>3</sup> See: Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1009b 12-31; Aristotle, *De anima*, 404a 29-30, and 427a 17-22.

<sup>4</sup> Consult: Aristotle, *De anima*, 404b 8-405b 10, and 405b 13-19.

<sup>5</sup> Parts of this paper have been published over the previous years in several shorter or longer editions and interpretations. Changes in content and style in the version at hand were made in order to summarize the text, to reflect necessary refinements caused by subsequent insights, due to the availability of additional literature and my own translation solutions, both of important terms and concepts and certain quotations from the source material, as well as for the purpose of achieving a clearer and more fluid presentation.

<sup>6</sup> DK 31B106.

<sup>7</sup> Theophrastus, in his comments on Empedocles, says the people in the last instance, think by their own blood, because in it all body parts and all the elements are most completely blended (διὸ καὶ τῷ αἵματι μάλιστα φρονεῖν ἐν τούτῳ γὰρ μάλιστα κεκρᾶσθαι (ἐστὶ) τὰ στοιχεῖα τῶν μερῶν). DK 31A86, 10. Sicilian himself speaks as if the organ of cognition is blood. DK 31B105.3: “For the blood about the hearth is thought for men” (αἷμα γὰρ ἀνθρώποις περικάρδιόν ἐστι νόημα). Translated in: Jonathan Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 156. See besides: DK 31A76; Erwin Rohde, *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and the Belief in Immortality among the Greeks* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1925), 380.

corporal changes: “Insofar as they become different, to that extent always does their thought too present different objects.”<sup>8</sup>

The view that for “Sicilian Muse” (Σικελαί [...] Μοῦσαι)<sup>9</sup> thought and sensation<sup>10</sup> are only special cases of the universal principle that the like impacts the like, is well illustrated in the following fragment: “For by earth we see earth, by water water, by ether bright ether, and by fire destructive fire, Love by Love and Strife by dismal Strife.”<sup>11</sup>

The thinker from Acragas also claims that all beings think, namely that they have understanding or consciousness, and adds that this is so by the will of chance (τῆμιδε μὲν οὖν ἰότητι Τύχης πεφρόνηκεν ἅπαντα).<sup>12</sup> Related to this is his claim from the end of fragment 110: “That they all have thinking and [have] [its] share of thought.”<sup>13</sup>

In the introduction to this fragment it is even possible to find the thesis that all parts of fire (πυρός), whether they are visible or not, can have thinking (φρόνησιν) and the ability to think (γνώμην), rather than a share of thought (νώματος). Sextus Empiricus adds: “It is even more astounding that Empedocles held that everything has a discernment facility, not only living beings but plants as well.”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 156. The Greek text reads: ὅσον <γ> ἄλλοιοι μετέφυν, τόσον ἄρ σφισιν αἰεὶ καὶ τὸ φρονεῖν ἄλλοῖα παρίσταται. DK 31B108. These two fragments (DK 31B106 and DK 31B108) are again mentioned in Aristotle’s manuscript *De anima* (Περὶ ψυχῆς), 427a 23-25.

<sup>9</sup> As Plato called Empedocles in the *Sophist*. Plato, *Sophist*, 242d-243a. In Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, 1: 714-715; 726-732, similarly, Lucretius celebrates Empedocles as the most outstanding representative of the rich Sicilian soil.

<sup>10</sup> Consult: Aristotle, *De anima*, 417b 19-26; Anthony A. Long, “Thinking and Sense-Perception in Empedocles: Mysticism or Materialism?” *The Classical Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (1966): 256-276.

<sup>11</sup> Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 154. The Greek text reads: γαίμη μὲν γὰρ γαῖαν ὀπώπαμεν, ὕδατι δ ὕδωρ, αἰθέρι δ αἰθέρα δῖον, ἀτὰρ πυρὶ πῦρ ἀίδηλον, στοργὴν δὲ στοργῆι, νεῖκος δὲ τε νεϊκεῖ λυγρῶι. DK 31B109. See: DK 31B107. Consult more about the “roots of everything” (πάντων ῥιζώματα), videlicet, Love and Strife (Φιλία καὶ Νεῖκος) in the co-authored study: Željko Kaluđerović, and Orhan Jašić, “Empedoklovi koreni svega, Ljubav i Mržnja,” *Pedagoška stvarnost* 60, no. 2 (2014): 216-229.

<sup>12</sup> DK 31B103.

<sup>13</sup> The Greek text reads: πάντα γὰρ ἴσθι φρόνησιν ἔχειν καὶ νόματος αἴσαν. DK 31B110. Translated by Željko Kaluđerović. See: DK 31A86, 23. Empedocles’ view, can be relatively easily correlated with Parmenides’ view that “all things have some kind of cognition.” (πᾶν τὸ ὄν ἔχειν τινὰ γνώωσιν). DK 28A46 (translated by Željko Kaluđerović). As far as Eleatic philosopher is concerned, specifically the relevance of his views for subsequent establishment of non-anthropocentrism, paradigmatic is fragment 16 (DK 28B16).

<sup>14</sup> The Greek text reads: “Ἐμπεδοκλῆς ἔτι παραδοξότερον πάντα ἠξίου λογικὰ τυγχάνειν καὶ οὐ ζῶια μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ φυτὰ.” DK 31B110. Translated by Željko Kaluđerović. That this is not such an unusual view as Sextus Empiricus writes, is confirmed by passages of Pythagoras (DK 21B7), quoted paragraphs of Parmenides (DK 28A46; DK 28B16), as well as fragments from Anaxagoras (DK 59B12; DK 59A101; DK 59A115; DK 59A116), Archelaus (DK 60A4),

The philosopher from Sicily, moreover, in the (Pseudo) Aristotelian manuscript *On Plants* (*Περὶ φυτῶν*)<sup>15</sup> is presented, together with Anaxagoras and Democritus, as a proponent of the thesis that plants (*φυτά*)<sup>16</sup> have both mind (*νοῦν*) and the ability to think (*γινῶσιν*): “Anaxagoras, however, as well as Democritus and Abrucalis, said that [plants] have mind and intelligence.”<sup>17</sup> In addition: “Anaxagoras, then, along with Abrucalis [i.e., Empedocles], said that they [namely plants] are driven by desire and argued that they have feelings, sadness and joy.”<sup>18</sup>

These views show that according to Empedocles, who even more explicitly asserted it than Pythagoras,<sup>19</sup> the idea of kinship of all living beings<sup>20</sup> not only has a vital-animal meaning, but to a certain extent a mental meaning also.

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Diogenes of Apollonia (DK 64B4), and Democritus (DK 68A117; DK 28A45; DK 68B5, 7; DK 68B198; DK 68B257). The thesis that, according to Empedocles (as well as Parmenides and Democritus), all animals have a kind of ability to think also appears in the secondary literature (*καθ' οὗς οὐδὲν ἄν εἴη ζῶιον ἄλογον κυρίως*) (DK 28A45). Consult: DK 31A96.

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *On Plants*, 815b 16-17.

<sup>16</sup> See again the following fragments about plants (and trees): DK 31B77; DK 31B78; DK 31B79; DK 31B80; DK 31B81.

<sup>17</sup> The Latin text reads: “Anaxagoras autem et Democritus et Abr. illas intellectum intelligentiamque habere dicebant.” DK 31A70. Translated by Željko Kaluđerović. “Abr.” is abbreviation of “Abrucalis” and refers to Empedocles. Aristotle, *On Plants*, 815b 16-17, actually says: ὁ δὲ Ἀναξαγόρας καὶ ὁ Δημόκριτος καὶ ὁ Ἐμπεδοκλῆς καὶ νοῦν καὶ γινῶσιν εἶπον ἔχειν τὰ φυτά.

<sup>18</sup> The Latin text reads: “Anaxagoras autem et Abrucalis [d.i. Empedocles] desiderio eas [näml. plantas] moveri dicunt, sentire quoque et tristari delectarique asserunt.” DK 31A70. Translated by Željko Kaluđerović. Aristotle, *On Plants*, 815a 15-18, says: “Ἀναξαγόρας μὲν οὖν καὶ Ἐμπεδοκλῆς ἐπιθυμία ταῦτα κινεῖσθαι λέγουσιν, αἰσθάνεσθαι τε καὶ λυπεῖσθαι καὶ ἡδεσθαι δια εἰ αἰοῦνται.” Anaxagoras also asserts that plants are animals (*ζῶα εἶναι*), and as evidence of his claim that plants can feel joy and sorrow, he mentions the shedding and growth of their leaves (*τῇ τε ἀπορροῇ τῶν φύλλων καὶ τῇ αὐξήσει τοῦτο ἐκλαμάνων*). DK 59A117; Aristotle, *On Plants*, 815a 18-20.

<sup>19</sup> Pythagoras' recognition of his friend's soul (*φίλου ἀνέρος ἐστὶν ψυχὴ [...] ἔγνω*) embodied in a dog (*σκύλακος*) (DK 21B7) illustrates the transfer of personal identity on the *ψυχὴ*, which means that a personality somehow survives in the migrations of the soul (*παλιγγενεσία*) and that there is a continuity of identity (Consult: DK 31B129, and the final pages of this article). The conclusion that can be derived, at least implicitly, is that ensouled (living) beings (*ἐμψύχων*), therefore animals, but also certain plants, in a sense, are conscious beings. See, Evangelos D. Protopapadakis, *From Dawn till Dusk: Bioethical Insights into the Beginning and the End of Life* (Berlin: Logos Verlag, 2019), 24-29.

<sup>20</sup> The phrase “all nature is akin” (*φύσεως ἀπάσης συγγενοῦς οὐσης*) appears in Plato, *Meno*, 81a-d, truthfully attributed to priests and poets. The same idea and conception of the world as *cosmos* is also found in an instructive section in the dialogue Plato, *Gorgias*, 507e, in which the words “wise men” (*σοφοί*) at the beginning of the passage probably refer to the Pythagoreans and perhaps to Empedocles. For the concept of kinship in the Pythagoreans and the Stoics see Michail Mantzanas, “The Concept of Moral Conscience in Ancient Greek Philosophy,” *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 2 (2020): 65-86.

In his verses the poet (ἐποποιός)<sup>21</sup> and wonder-worker (μάντιν)<sup>22</sup> Empedocles also advocates bloodless sacrifices by spilling water, honey, oil and wine on the ground, i.e., he writes about the old times when love and compassion for the kin were above anything else, about abstinence from killing, and about treating other living beings as members of one's own household. Instead of putting living beings, viz. animals, to the knife, people sought to propitiate queen Cypris (Κύπρις βασίλεια, Aphrodite) by sacrificing<sup>23</sup> myrrh, frankincense, honey, and simulacra of animals: "And painted animals and subtly perfumed oils."<sup>24</sup>

In these times everything used to be tame and gentle (κτίλα) towards man, including beasts (θῆρες) and birds (οἰωνοί).<sup>25</sup> The sacrifices which the philosopher from Acragas (Ακράγαντας) mentions do not include the destruction of plants<sup>26</sup> either, which is also probably due to the fact that in fragment 117 he claims: "For already have I become a boy and a girl and a bush and a bird and a silent fish in the sea."<sup>27</sup>

Empedocles believes that trees represent a primordial form of life (*first living things*, πρῶτα τὰ δένδρα τῶν ζώων),<sup>28</sup> which had

<sup>21</sup> DK 31A2.

<sup>22</sup> DK 31A1.

<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Porphyry notes that only those sacrifices should be made that do not hurt anyone because sacrifices, more than anything else, must be harmless to everyone. For sacrifice (θυσία), he reports, as its name implies, is something holy (όσία) (ή γαρ θυσία, όσία τίς έστι κατὰ τοῦνομα). Porphyry, *On Abstinence from Killing Animals*, 2: 12.

<sup>24</sup> Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 160. The Greek text reads: γραπτοῖς τε ζώοισι μύροισι τε δαιδαλεόδομοις. DK 31B128. Plato writes correspondingly in the *Laws* talking about the mores of ancient people and their Orphic way of life, consuming only what is non-ensouled (not alive: ἀψύχων) and abstaining from everything ensouled (alive: ἐμψύχων). Plato, *Laws*, 782c-d.: "They honored their gods with cakes and meal soaked in honey and other such pure sacrifices, but abstained from flesh, counting it criminal to eat it" (πέλανοι δὲ καὶ μέλιτι καρποὶ δεδευμένοι καὶ τοιαῦτα ἄλλα ἀγνὰ θύματα, σαρκῶν δ' ἀπέειχοντο ὡς οὐχ ὄσιον ὄν ἐσθίειν).

<sup>25</sup> DK 31B130.

<sup>26</sup> John Burnet, quoting and paraphrasing Aristotle, *On Plants*, 817b 35, (DK 31A70), writes that plants arose in an imperfect state of the world, that is, at a time when Strife was not so prevalent as to differentiate the sexes. Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 242.

<sup>27</sup> Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 157. The Greek text reads: ἦδη γάρ ποτ ἐγὼ γενόμεν κοῦρός τε κόρη τε θάμνος τ οἰωνός τε καὶ ἔξαλος ἔλλοπος ἰχθύς. DK 31B117. This fragment confirms that the other Italian "Pythagorean" (Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 13: 54-55) believed in *palingenesis*, scilicet he held the view that one's soul may transmigrate both among humans and among animals and plants. In DK 31A31, 2, this principle is called *metempsychosis* (μετεψωματώσει). Consult DK 31B115, 7, and DK 31B127. Werner Jaeger says that the universal animization, which the Orphics taught about, here includes something comprehensive, which understands all things and is akin to all things. Werner Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 147.

<sup>28</sup> DK 31A70.

survived even to his time. Moreover, trees had existed even before the Sun spread and the day and night were distinguished.<sup>29</sup> The doxographer Aëtius,<sup>30</sup> who conveys the thoughts of the “Milder Muses” (Μουσῶν [...] μαλακώτεραι),<sup>31</sup> assumes an analogy between plant and animal life, and confirms it by using the adjective *living* (ζῶα) for trees, an adjective exclusively used for animals. One could assume that Empedocles was convinced that there was no sharp genetic difference between the plant and the animal world.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, he doesn't hesitate to proceed to comparisons and analogies that today may seem strange, at least. For example, he asserts that “tall olive trees [...] bear eggs first (ὠιοτοκεῖ μακρὰ δένδρεα πρῶτον ἐλαίας),”<sup>33</sup> i.e., seeds and eggs are of identical nature.<sup>34</sup> Or, that the hair, the leaves, the scales and the thick feathers of birds are the same thing (ταῦτὰ τρίχες καὶ φύλλα καὶ οἰωνῶν πτερὰ πυκνά),<sup>35</sup> while to the philosopher from Sicily the ear is a fleshy sprout (σάρκινος ὄζος).<sup>36</sup>

<sup>29</sup> In the Bible, in the first book of Moses, *Genesis*, in comparison, it is said that the night and day, were distinguished and named on the first day and the Sun on the fourth day of creation, while grass, plants and trees were created not earlier than on the third day. See: *Genesis*, 1: 4-5, 1: 14-18, 1: 11-12.

<sup>30</sup> Aëtius' thoughts are taken from the so-called *De Placita Philosophorum* (Συναγωγή τῶν Ἀρεσκόντων), 5: 26, 4; respectively from Hermann Diels, *Doxographi Graeci* (Berolini: Opus adademiae litterarum regiae Borussicae praemio ornatum. Typis et impensis G. Reimeri, 1879), 438.

<sup>31</sup> Plato, *Sophist*, 242d.

<sup>32</sup> Plutarch reports that Democritus' disciples (and Anaxagoras' and Plato's disciples) thought that a plant is an animal that grows from the soil (ζῶα ἔγγεια). DK 59A116. Unnamed disciples of the aforementioned philosophers believed, in other words, that there was no substantial difference between plants and animals, except that the plants are rooted in the soil. In fragment DK 31B62, the “wind-stopper” (ἀλεξανέμας, κωλυσανέμας) from Sicily records that before men and women obtained their offspring through classic reproduction, there was an age when human-like beings arose from the earth, but without specific “limbs” such as sexual organs. DK 31A13, DK 31A14. Namely, today's humans are the descendants of creatures that once emerged from the earth equipped with the means to prolong their species. Consult further: DK 31A72; David Furley, *The Greek Cosmologist*, Volume I: *The Formation of the Atomic Theory and its Earliest Critics* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2006), 96-97.

<sup>33</sup> DK 31B79.

<sup>34</sup> This is why Theophrastus said that the words of the founder of the *Italian* medical school (Galen, *Method of Medicine*, 1: 1) and rhetoric (Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 9: 57) were not wrong (Theophrastus, *De causis plantarum*, 1: 7, 1). On the dilemmas of whether the physician (ιατρός or maybe ιατρό-μαντις “the psysician-seer”) from Acragas (DK 31B112.10-12) really grounded a medical school or not, as well as on the attempt to base medicine on philosophical postulates, see: James Longrigg, “Philosophy and Medicine: Some Early Interactions,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 67 (1963): 147-175.

<sup>35</sup> DK 31B82.

<sup>36</sup> DK 31B99.

In the fragment 140 Empedocles stipulates that one should abstain wholly from the leaves of laurel (δάφνης φύλλων ἅπο πάμπαν ἔχεσθαι) possibly aiming at reducing the consumption of laurel, while his reference to *wretches, utter wretches* (δειλοί, πάνδειλοι) in the next fragment<sup>37</sup> may possibly have the same aim, since it bans even touching broad beans (κύαμος)<sup>38</sup> with bare hands. Laurel (lat. *Laurus nobilis*), Apollo's sacred plant (alongside palm and olive), is considered the king of plants, exactly as the lion is the king of animals. Empedocles argues that, within their own species, laurel and lion are the best habitats for the human soul (ἐν θήρεσσι λέοντες ὀρειλεχέες χαμαιεῦναι γίγνονται, δάφναι δ' ἐνὶ δένδρεσιν ἡυκόμοισιν).<sup>39</sup>

Empedocles urges his disciples to abstain from consuming any ensouled (living) being (ἐμψύχων), since eaten bodies of living beings (ζώων) are where penalized souls (ψυχῶν κεκολασμένων) reside. He believes that he himself is one of them, the one who has been killed and eaten, and that it is by purification (καθαρωῶν) that prior sins (ἀμαρτίας) in connection with food (τροφὴν) should be treated.<sup>40</sup> In one of the remaining fragments of his work *Purifications* (Καθαρωί),<sup>41</sup> Empedocles claims that to sacrifice a bull and eat its parts is *the greatest of abominations* (μύσος [...] μέγιστον) for man.<sup>42</sup> Anyone who gets his hands dirty with blood shall experience the fate of the *evil daimones* (δαίμονες οἷτε), that is for 30,000 years<sup>43</sup> he shall wander outcast far away from the blissful, leading a hard life, and shall incarnate in the forms of many mortals. He believes that exactly this is what he himself

<sup>37</sup> DK 31B141.

<sup>38</sup> A list of possible explanations for why the Pythagoreans abstained from broad beans (lat. *Vicia faba*) can be found in Laetius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 24: 69.

<sup>39</sup> DK 31B127.

<sup>40</sup> Consult DK 31B139: “Alas that the pitiless day <did not destroy> me first, <before> with my claws I practised the terrible deeds of eating” (οἷμοι ὅτι οὐ πρόσθεν με διώλεσε νηλεὲς ἤμαρ, πρὶν σχέτλι ἔργα βορᾶς περὶ χεῖλεσι μητίσασθαι). Translated in Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 144. Shortly before citing this fragment, Porphyry, following the Pythagorean trail, declares that those whose sensation (αἴσθησις) is averse to the destruction of beings of other species (ἀλλοφύλων ἄπτεσθαι ζῶων ἀπέκλινεν), mind (νοῦς) evidently will abstain from injuring those of the same kind (πρόδηλος [...] ὁμοφύλων ἀφεξόμενος). Porphyry, *On Abstinence from Killing Animals* 2: 31. Compare: *Ibid.*, 3: 20.

<sup>41</sup> On the themes and dilemmas regarding the poem *Katharmoi*, see: Maureen Rosemary Wright, “Empedocles,” in *Routledge History of Philosophy Volume 1: From the Beginning to Plato*, ed. Christopher C. W. Taylor, 161-191 (London, and New York: Taylor & Francis, 2005), 162-164. Compare: Stephen T. Newmyer, “Animal Emotions in the Presocratics,” *Vichiana* 60, no. 2 (2023): 11-25.

<sup>42</sup> DK 31B128.

<sup>43</sup> This τρίακτα χιλιάδες χρόνια is three times ten thousand years, while ἐτῶν μυρίων (one *myriad*) according to Plato (*Phaedrus*, 248e) is the time required for the soul to return to the place it came from. See: DK 31B119; DK 31B120; DK 31B121.

currently experiences: “Such is the road I now follow, an exile from the gods and a wanderer.”<sup>44</sup> The subject of being exiled from the divine home is also taken up afterwards by Plotinus<sup>45</sup> and Porphyry,<sup>46</sup> while to Plutarch<sup>47</sup> it serves as a consolation in the face of political persecution.<sup>48</sup> The upshot is, according to the sage from Acragas (Ακραγαντινος σοφός),<sup>49</sup> that the sin responsible for the end of the golden era of tranquility and general leniency has been killing and eating animals.

Empedocles’ approach sheds light on the view that men are living beings that make mistakes and that they owe to animals the justice that is based on their mutual kinship. When Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* (τέχνη ρητορική)<sup>50</sup> distinguishes between particular (ἴδιον) and universal laws (νόμον [...] κοινόν), chooses to call the later *laws of nature* (κατὰ φύσιν). The explanation of the laws of nature is associated with the general understanding of what is just and what is unjust in harmony with nature, which, according to him, has been recognized by all nations.<sup>51</sup> The Stagiritis believes that with Empedocles it is just that very kind of law, i.e., that the philosopher from Μεγάλη Ἑλλάς was referring to that right when forbidding the killing of ensouled (living) beings, since it would be contrary to reason if for some this was considered just, and for others unjust (τοῦτο γὰρ οὐ τισὶ μὲν δίκαιον τισὶ δ’ οὐ δίκαιον).<sup>52</sup> Empedocles and Pythagoras claim that there can be only one legal norm that applies to all living beings, and that those who have hurt any living creature

<sup>44</sup> Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 113. The Greek text reads: τῶν καὶ ἐγὼ νῦν εἰμι, φυγάς θεόθεν καὶ ἀλήτης. DK 31B115. Geoffrey S. Kirk, and John E. Raven think that Strife (νείκει) is the cause of man’s fall. Geoffrey S. Kirk, and John E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 353.

<sup>45</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, 1: 6, 8; 4: 8, 1. For more on this line of thought see Anthony Arthur Long, and Despina Vertzagia, “Antiquity Revisited: A Discussion with Anthony Arthur Long,” *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2020): 111-122.

<sup>46</sup> Porphyry, *On Abstinence from Killing Animals*, 1: 30.

<sup>47</sup> Plutarch, *On Exile*, 607c; *De Iside et Osiride*, 361c.

<sup>48</sup> Compare also: DK 31B121; DK 31C.

<sup>49</sup> DK 31B134.

<sup>50</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1373b 6-17. This is one of a total of two places in the preserved corpus of Stagiritis, where fragments from *Katharmoi* are quoted. The second reference is found in Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1457b 13-15 (this allegation refers to the following tags: DK 31B138, and DK 31B143).

<sup>51</sup> In this context, Aristotle cites an example from Sophocles’ *Antigone* (456-457): “Not of today or yesterday it is [law of nature], But lives eternal: none can date its birth” (οὐ γὰρ τι νῦν γε κάχθές, ἀλλ’ αἰεὶ ποτε ζῆ τοῦτο, κούδεις οἶδεν ἐξ ὅτου φάνη). Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1373b 12-13. Translated in English by Rhys Roberts in *The Complete Works of Aristotle II*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 2187.

<sup>52</sup> Regarding Aristotle’s own concept of animals, consult the author’s text: Željko Kaluđerović, “The Master of Those who Know’ and ‘Those’ who cannot Know,” In *Formal Speeches* (Athens: National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, 2023).



shall receive punishments that cannot be redeemed: “But this, a law for all, through the broad ether ever extends and through the boundless sunlight.”<sup>53</sup>

Their followers repeat that men are kin not only to each other or to the gods, but also to living beings that lack the gift of reason (ἄλογα τῶν ζώων). What is common to all and connects them is breath (πνεῦμα), a kind of soul that permeates throughout the entire *cosmos* and unites men with the rest of the creation.<sup>54</sup> Hence, when humans indulge in killing and eating animal flesh, they commit injustice and are disrespectful to the deities (ἀσεβήσομεν) to the same extent as when they kill their own relatives (συγγενεῖς). For that reason the Acragantian philosopher (as well as the philosopher of Croton) advise humans to abstain from feeding on or killing ensouled (living) beings, both arguing that “those who drench altars with warm blood of the blessed.”<sup>55</sup> commit sacrilege.

The doctrine of the transmigration of the soul (μετενσωματουμένης)<sup>56</sup> implies that humans are literally killing their relatives (*bereave them of life*, θυμὸν ἀπορραΐσαντε), to wit, that the

<sup>53</sup> DK 31B135, and Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 158. The Greek text reads: ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν πάντων νόμιμον διὰ τ' εὐρυμέδοντος αἰθέρος ἡνεκέως τέταται διὰ ἀπλέτου αὐγῆς. This passage is a kind of introduction to the following two fragments (DK 31B136, and DK 31B137).

<sup>54</sup> See: DK 58B30. According to Richard Sorabji, there are three grounds for our kinship with animals: same elements (Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, 24: 108; 30: 169), same breath (Sextus, *Against the Mathematicians*, 9: 127-129), and reincarnation (DK 31B117; Plutarch, *On the Eating of Flesh*, 997e; Sextus, *Against the Mathematicians*, 9: 129). Richard Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals: The Origins of the Western Debate* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 131. This view constitutes a form of metaphysical realism, namely the view that “the world consists of some fixed totality of mind-independent objects such that there is exactly one true and complete description of the way the world is.” See Åke Gafvelin, “No God, no God's Eye: A Quasi-Putnamian Argument for Monotheism,” *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 6, no. 1 (2021): 83-100.

<sup>55</sup> DK 31B136. Translated by Željko Kaluđerović. The Greek text reads: βωμὸν ἐρέυθοντας μακάρων θερμοῖσι φόνουσι. About “a man of immense knowledge” (ἀνὴρ περιώσια εἰδώς). DK 31B129, 1. Iamblichus reports in a related way (Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, 24): “And he himself [Pythagoras] lived after this manner, abstaining from animal food, and adoring altars undefiled with blood” (καὶ αὐτὸς οὕτως ἔζησεν, ἀπεχόμενος τῆς ἀπὸ τῶν ζῴων τροφῆς καὶ τοὺς ἀναιμάκτους βωμοὺς προσκυνῶν).

<sup>56</sup> Literally this word (μετενσωματόμοι) means “to be put into another body (of the soul).” In *The Histories* (2: 123), Herodotus conveys the information that supposedly, the Egyptians were the first to think about immortality and the transmigration of the soul. Interesting is his note, near the end of the paragraph, that this opinion was adopted by certain Hellenes, some earlier and some later, and that they behaved as if they invented it themselves. Despite knowing their names (Pythagoras or Empedocles?), the “father” of history writes that he will not mention or name them (Consult in addition: DK 14,8). Carl A. Huffman believes that, apart from the version about the Egyptians, it is also possible that Pythagoras himself is the creator of that doctrine and that, according to him, it is more likely that its origin is from India. Carl A. Huffman, “The Pythagorean Tradition,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy*, ed. Anthony A. Long, 66-87 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 70.

one who eats flesh (σάρκας ἔδουσιν) may eat one's son, exactly as the son may eat his own father, or that children their mother in her new form (μορφήν [...] ἀλλάξαντα).<sup>57</sup>

On the other hand, for some, the series of incarnations has a different ending. Aside from living a pure life, practicing the recommended *katharmoi*, and abstaining from flesh in any version, the path to the salvation of the soul leads to two additional dimensions. As for the first, as Plutarch claims, it is tremendous and divine the saying of Empedocles that one should *fast from evil* (τὸ νηστεῦσαι κακότητος).<sup>58</sup> And as to the second, the wealth of divine thoughts (θείων πραπίδων) is connected with being happy (ὄλβιος), just as those who have vague opinions about the gods (σκοτόεσσα θεῶν [...] δόξα) are wretched (δειλός).<sup>59</sup>

If, therefore, one becomes clearly aware of the nature of the divinity, this means, given the aforementioned attraction of like by like,<sup>60</sup> that to know the divine is to be assimilated to it, and that there must be a divine element in one. In other words, to know the divine means to become divine, and the divine cannot be registered by any of our bodily senses, or “Cannot be brought close in our eyes or grasped by our hands, by which the greatest highway of persuasion leads to the mind of men.”<sup>61</sup> This happens because: “For it is not furnished with a human head on its limbs, there are no two branches springing from its back, no feet, no swift legs, no hairy genitals.”<sup>62</sup>

In the fifth line of the same fragment one can find the connection of the *pneuma* with the criticism of the poet's stories about anthropomorphic gods,<sup>63</sup> referring to the holy (ιερῆ) and

<sup>57</sup> DK 31B137.

<sup>58</sup> DK 31B144. The sentence is taken from Plutarch's work *On the Control of Anger*, 464b.

<sup>59</sup> DK 31B132. In this fragment, there are indications of the contrast between Parmenides' “Way of Truth” (ἀλήθεια) and “Way of Seeming” (δόξα), light (φάος), and night (νύξ). DK 28B9. Compare as well the table of contraries attributed to Alcmaeon of Croton. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 986a 23-26, but also Democritus' distinction between “genuine” (γνησίη) and “dark” (σκοτίη) forms of knowledge (γνώμη), DK 68B11.

<sup>60</sup> See: DK 31A86.1.

<sup>61</sup> DK 31B133, Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 119. The Greek text reads: οὐκ ἔστιν πελάσασθαι ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἐφικτόν ἡμετέροις ἢ χερσὶ λαβεῖν, ἥτιέρ τε μεγίστη πειθοῦς ἀνθρώποισιν ἀμαξίτος εἰς φρένα πίπτει.

<sup>62</sup> DK 31B134, Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 140. The Greek text reads: οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀνδρομέη κεφαλῆι κατὰ γυῖα κέκασται, οὐ μὲν ἀπαι νώτοι οὐ δύο κλάδοι ἀίσσονται, οὐ πόδες, οὐ θοὰ γοῦν(α), οὐ μήδεα λαχνήντα. Consult: DK 31A23; Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 8: 57.

<sup>63</sup> Liken with Xenophanes' fragments DK 21B14, DK 21B15 and DK 21B16.

ineffable (ἄθεσφατος) mind (φρῆν): “Rushing with rapid thought over the whole world.”<sup>64</sup>

Empedocles writes that souls who have achieved a high stage of purification, especially those who have reached the level of apotheosis, are incarnated in the highest forms of humanity: “Finally, they are seers and hymnodists and doctors and princes among earth-dwelling men; and then they arise as gods, highest in honour.”<sup>65</sup>

This fragment, and to a certain extent some others,<sup>66</sup> implies that the so-called δαίμων<sup>67</sup> is the host of personal identity;<sup>68</sup> the body is not. It is only *an unrecognizable garment of flesh* (σαρκῶν ἀλλογνῶτι [...] χιτῶνι),<sup>69</sup> which the *daimon* wears and discards. The term δαίμων<sup>70</sup> is in a sense equivalent to the term *soul*.<sup>71</sup> By calling the soul *daimon*

<sup>64</sup> DK 31B134, Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 140. The Greek text reads: φροντίσι κόσμον ἅπαντα κατὰίσσουσα θοῆσιν. This fifth line is emphasized in a quotation from Sextus Empiricus’ work *Against the Mathematicians*, 9: 127-128. (DK 31B136).

<sup>65</sup> DK 31B146, Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 157. The Greek text reads: εἰς δὲ τέλος μάντιες τε καὶ ὕμνοπόλοι καὶ ἱηροὶ καὶ πρόμοι ἀνθρώποισιν ἐπιχθονίοισι πέλονται, ἔνθεν ἀναβλαστοῦσι θεοὶ τιμῆσι φέριστοι. In the introduction to this fragment, Clement writes that the Acragantian even claimed that the souls of sages become gods (τῶν σοφῶν τὰς ψυχὰς θεοὺς γίνεσθαι). Compare with: DK 31B21, 12.

<sup>66</sup> DK 31B115, 7.; DK 31B117; DK 31B121; DK 31B127.

<sup>67</sup> The Greek masculine and feminine noun δαίμων has several groups of meanings: “god,” “goddess,” “the Deity,” “the Divine power,” “by chance,” “the power controlling the destiny of individuals,” “fortune,” “the good or evil genius,” “souls of men of the golden age,” “departed souls,” “ghost,” “spiritual or semi-divine being,” “evil spirit, demon.” See: Henry G. Liddell, Robert Scott, Henry S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 365-366.

<sup>68</sup> Consult: Jonathan Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers: The Arguments of the Philosophers* (London, and New York: Taylor & Francis, 2005), 82. Some authors (see Kirk, and Raven, 357) think that fragment DK 31B133 and the two lines of fragment DK 31B134, both on trail of the philosophically-minded poet from Colophon (DK 21B23, DK 21B24, DK 21B25, DK 21B26), may equally suggest the opposite. Maureen Rosemary Wright explicitly states that there is no implication that the *daimon* is an immortal soul that persists as an identifiable individual. Maureen Rosemary Wright, *Empedocles: The Extant Fragments* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995), 273-274.

<sup>69</sup> DK 31B126.

<sup>70</sup> *Daimon* appears in various forms in the following places: DK 31A14 (δαίμόνια); DK 31A31 (δαίμόνων); DK 31B9, DK 31B10 (δυσδαίμονα); DK 31B59 (δαίμονι δαίμων, δαίμων); DK 31B115 (δαίμονες οἷτε, δαίμονας); DK 31B116 (δαίμονας); DK 31B122 (δαίμονες); DK 31B126 (δαίμων); DK 31B147 (εὐδαίμονιαν).

<sup>71</sup> See: William K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Volume 2: *The Presocratic Tradition from Parmenides to Democritus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 263-265. Guthrie, more precisely, with some restraint, writes that it is one of the two dimensions of the notion of the soul. The *daimon* is the divine aspect in man that is alien to the body (Another dimension of understanding the soul is that it combines faculties of sensation and thinking, which depend on the blood and other bodily organs).

rather than a *psyche*,<sup>72</sup> the Sicilian philosopher probably wanted to emphasize the divine nature of man.<sup>73</sup>

Eventually, if people live in a holy (ὁσίως) and just (δικαίως) manner, they shall be blessed (μακάριοι) in this life, and will be even more blessed (μακαριώτεροι) after leaving this one, because they will achieve happiness (εὐδαιμονίαν) that will not be temporary, and will rest eternally, as *Empedocles' philosophical poem puts it* (ἡ φιλόσοφος Εὐπεδοκλέους λέγει ποιητική): “At the same hearth and table as the other immortals, relieved of mortal pains, tireless.”<sup>74</sup>

The bottomline is that Empedocles was convinced that there is an intrinsic affinity of the entire φύσις,<sup>75</sup> therefore without coming up with many specific norms and regulations, but based upon deep belief in his closeness with other *empsycha*, he refused to harm and feed upon them. By acknowledging similar or identical emotional and intellectual traits to all living beings, this legendary figure from *Magna Graecia*, who spoke of himself as if he were *an immortal god, no longer mortal* (θεὸς ἄμβροτος, οὐκέτι θνητός),<sup>76</sup> paved the way for a huge shift in the scientific, philosophical, and legal appreciation of the status of non-human living beings, a shift that reached its peak during the last half of the previous century.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>72</sup> The word ψυχὴν is found only once in the preserved fragments of the Acragantian philosopher (DK 31B138), and is commonly thought to mean “life” there. Consult: Richard D. McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates* (Indianapolis, and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2010), 286.

<sup>73</sup> Eric R. Dodds states that the *daimon*'s function is to be the bearer of man's potential divinity and actual guilt. Eric R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley, and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951), 153.

<sup>74</sup> DK 31B147, Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 157. The Greek text reads: ἀθανάτοις ἄλλοισιν ὁμέστοι, αὐτοτράπεζοι ἐόντες, ἀνδρείων ἀγέων ἀπόκληροι, ἀτειρεῖς. See: DK 31B21, 12. Allegedly this fragment, especially its first part, suggests the survival of the individual soul too after it has escaped from the cycle of birth. Francis M. Cornford believes that individuality does not reside in the four known elements (water, fire, earth, and air) but in mixed portions of Love and Strife, which remain combined as long as the soul is impure, and migrates to other bodies. Francis M. Cornford, *From Religion to Philosophy: A Study in the Origins of Western Speculation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 239.

<sup>75</sup> Several times, both in secondary and original fragments (DK 31A14; DK 31A22; DK 31B61; DK 31B66; DK 31B72), it is given explicitly that Sicilian is a philosopher of nature (φυσικός; φυσιολόγος). For relatively recent discoveries related to his poem *On Nature*, consult: Richard Janko, “Empedocles, *On Nature* I 233-364: A New Reconstruction of P. Strasb. gr. Inv. 1665-6,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 150 (2004): 1-26. The notable *Strasbourg Papyrus*, material that brings new insights to the study of Empedocles, can be found together with a translation of other fragments by Richard D. McKirahan in: *A Presocratic Reader*, ed. Patricia Curd, 75-99 (Indianapolis, and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2011).

<sup>76</sup> DK 31B112, 4.

<sup>77</sup> Unlike Empedocles concept and the ideas of several other ancient thinkers, current legislations most commonly establish the basic principles of animal welfare protection on the

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reputed patocentric concept. They speak of the “universality of pain,” and besides the pain, suffering, fear, and stress, it is usually added that animals can feel panic as well. See: Željko Kaluđerović, “Animal Protection and Welfare: Contemporary Examinations,” in *Modernity and Contemporaneity*, eds. Evangelos D. Protopapadakis, and Georgios Arabatzis, 81-101 (Athens: The NKUA Applied Philosophy Research Lab Press, 2022).

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# The Essence of Nature and Dialectical Naturalism

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### Abstract

*In this paper, we examine how nature is defined and perceived and address the conflict between constructivism and essentialism. By exploring modern perspectives on the concept of nature that stem from the field of social sciences, we will review the analysis of Murray Bookchin's dialectical naturalism regarding the very essence of nature. We argue that dialectical naturalism offers a dynamic developmental concept of nature that goes beyond the context of constructivism and supports that the truth of nature can be conceived.*

**Keywords:** *dialectical naturalism; social ecology; environmental philosophy; constructivism*

## I. Introduction: Starting with the social sciences

The issue that concerns us in this article is how humans approach the concept of nature. This question, however, can only be examined in relation to the question of man's relationship with nature. In the 1960s, the issue of the anthropocentric conception of the world was the prevailing view that claims that the physical world exists to serve humans. However, the debate over the question of man's place in nature goes way back and presupposes a pattern, which was perhaps different, rather than

contradictory. This is very much the case today. Thus, we usually resort to the “human-nature” dichotomy that is familiar to modern western societies. This view profoundly prevailed in the thoughts of great philosophers, such as Aristotle, and reached the twentieth century, forming fundamental beliefs, such as the right of usucaption of the planet by humans.

The issue of the confrontational relationship between man and nature, or between society and nature, has not only interested the history of philosophy, but also social sciences, especially anthropology, which depicted that the conflict between “man-nature” or even “society-nature,” is not as old as humans themselves, nor is it as self-evident in every culture and every historical period.<sup>1</sup> Examining this issue has led some anthropologists to investigate whether this controversy is a common human characteristic or a characteristic specific to Western civilization. There are abundant examples of a unity perception such as that of the Chewong tribe that lives in the rainforests of Malaysia, which does not place humans in the top rung of the creation, but rather within all plants, animals, and spirits; these native people believe that everything is conscious.<sup>2</sup> There are also examples of tribes that practically reject the opposing human-nature relationship, such as the hunters of the Waswanipi Cree peoples in northwestern Canada who do not distinguish humans from other animals, to whom they may even attribute personhood status.<sup>3</sup> The strict distinction maintained by Western ideology is a conspicuous demerit of a different perception of things. As Tim Ingold writes,

If people themselves profess to be aware of only one world, of persons and their relationships, it is because seeing their own social ambience reflected in the mirror of nature, they cannot distinguish the reflection from reality.<sup>4</sup>

This particular observation also coincides with inferences from the field of ethology, which reports analogies between human relations and the relations of non-human animals. In any case, such a view does not

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<sup>1</sup> Philippe Descola, and Gisli Palsson, “Introduction,” in *Nature and Society: Anthropological Perspectives*, eds. Philippe Descola, and Gisli Palsson, 1-21 (London, and New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Signe Howell, “Nature in Culture or Culture in Nature? Chewong Ideas of ‘Humans’ and Other Species,” *Nature and Society: Anthropological Perspectives*, eds. Philippe Descola, and Gisli Palsson, 127-144 (London, and New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> However, there are discussions regarding whether Native Americans were ecologists in the way the modern environmental movement claims they were.

<sup>4</sup> Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London, and New York: Routledge, 2000), 49.

allow the inclusion of other kinds of relationships that seem perhaps more interactive, such as the relationship of a tree to the forest, or less interactive and seemingly static like the relationship of a rock to a tree. These situations seem to be excluded from the context of “relationships” and accumulate in the category of “nature.”

Heidegger believed that building presupposes dwelling.<sup>5</sup> By that he meant that people alter their surroundings after their inhabitation. Ingold goes one step further and argues that man perceives his environment, or in other words, the world is meaningful through its inhabitation, and therefore, the transformation of the space to be inhabited does not precede.<sup>6</sup> In fact, Ingold believes that this also stands for non-human animals but with a significant difference in the way in which human from non-human animals modify and appropriate their environment. As regards to the statement of anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s that man “is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun,”<sup>7</sup> Ingold points out that, for non-human animals, web threads represent a relationship between themselves and an object or some characteristic of the environment, that is, a relationship that arises because of their own “practical immersion in the world and the bodily orientations that this entails.”<sup>8</sup>

On the contrary, man creates another level of mental representations, a second level of meanings through which he processes reality. Non-human animals see in the world things that are ready to be used, while humans see in these objects the possible uses through the meaning they can give them. For example, Ingold writes that foxes settle into the roots of a tree to sleep, while the lumberjack adapts the mental image to the way he perceives the object, before taking action.<sup>9</sup> Ingold cites some examples of mechanical and supposedly biologically recorded behavior in non-human animals, such as the beaver-built nest, whose design “is incorporated into the same program that underwrites the development of the beaver’s own body: thus the beaver is no more the designer of the lodge than is the mollusk the designer of its shell.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, Ingold, seems to rule out any possibility of non-

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 145-161.

<sup>6</sup> Ingold, 173.

<sup>7</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5.

<sup>8</sup> Ingold, 177.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 175.

human animals escaping the genetically inclined, since, as he writes “In all likelihood the human maker of string bags has an idea in mind of the final form of construction, whereas the weaverbird almost certainly does not.”<sup>11</sup>

Ingold proposes a comprehensive revaluation of human beings’ perception of themselves, as well as their relationship with nature. He suggests that we see man not as a complex entity consisting of body, mind and culture, but as a state of creative development within a growing field of relationships. These relationships are not exclusively human relationships, that is, what we call social relationships (disregarding the sociability of non-human animals) but the broader “ecological relationships.” Human relationships are a subset of ecological relationships, which include the set of interactions between human and non-human beings.<sup>12</sup>

It is true, however, that the idea of the term “environment” widens rather than narrows the gap between humans and nature. Albeit, humans should be familiar with what surrounds them, the use of this term signifies a deep anthropocentric conception, since we consider nature not as something that is self-existent, autonomous and has intrinsic value, but as something that exists in relation to us humans, and consequently for us humans. This is also etymologically validated, as the English word *environment*, which comes from the verb *environ*, which means *surround*. Thus, nature is transformed into something that simply “surrounds” humans and is deprived of its autonomous entity and its self-worth. Michel Serres believes that the use of the term “environment” presupposes that we consider ourselves the center of the world and masters and possessors of nature at the same time.<sup>13</sup> This perception of the world reflects the anthropocentric conception and has deep philosophical and religious roots. Both Aristotelian philosophy and the Judeo-Christian tradition, two of the most fundamental ideological pillars of modern Western civilization, presuppose such a conception.

The issue that arises from what we have stated so far is whether these perceptions of nature bear indeed some truths for nature itself or are just human mental forms. Is the acceptance of the explicit or implicit participation of humans in the co-shaping of the natural environment by social scientists, an admission of their realistic

<sup>11</sup> Ingold, 360.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>13</sup> Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract* (Ann Arbor, MA: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), 33.

conception? A philosophical discussion about a constructivist or essentialist conception of physical reality will bring us one step closer to answering this question.

## II. The influence of constructivism

Michel Foucault, in his work *Les mots et les choses* (*The Order of Things*), describes an image in which a painter works while the viewer is in front of him, seeing only the back of the painting.<sup>14</sup> The painter stares at the viewer and paints. The viewer cannot see what the painter is painting, but he sees the painter very clearly. At times the painter's gaze intersects with the spectator's gaze. The spectator is rather the object of study of the painter; it is the subject of his painting. But the painter is the object of study of the spectator. Eventually we realize that the spectator is us. But who is the painter? Can we assume that the painter is the scientist or the philosopher and that we are the scientific or philosophical object? And if so, then we can perhaps reasonably assume that all we can know is the look of the painter, the subjectivity of the scientist and the philosopher and nothing more.

Therefore, we are led to another hypothesis, that people's perception of nature may be merely a social construction, and that our perception of nature is socially and ideologically mediated. This is the theory of social construction, and it has infused the debate about our relationship and the image we have of nature; in fact, the debate about the way humans see nature is of main focus to constructivism, since proponents of this theory believe that our perception of nature is a socially constructed system. This is a concept that has influenced both philosophy and the social sciences: "Nature is increasingly being seen as a social construction. Social science can no longer suppose the objectivity of nature as an unchanging essence."<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, essentialists consider that there is an objective, true substance, which we are able, and indeed, we manage to perceive. Moreover, essentialists believe that things work a certain way in nature, not because of any external constraints that force them to behave that way, but because they are intrinsically determined to work that way.<sup>16</sup> More importantly on the perception of nature, constructivism

<sup>14</sup> Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 19-24.

<sup>15</sup> Gerard Delanty, *Social Science* (Buckingham: Open University, 1997), 5.

<sup>16</sup> Brian Ellis, *The Philosophy of Nature: A Guide to the New Essentialism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 3.

becomes even more emphatic since nature usually refers to the idea of an objective external reality, which is directly perceived through the senses, without the intervention of meaning. Therefore, the crucial question in the context of the essentialist-constructivist controversy is whether nature is purely natural. Is it an unchangeable substance that we are able to represent objectively or, possibly, what we consider natural, nature itself is a social and conceptual construction?

Indeed, constructivism exerts an irresistible charm. Historical studies on the subject of man's perception of nature over time, point in the direction of constructivism. Collingwood's classic *The Idea of Nature* is a prime example of this approach. Collingwood proposes a tripartite distinction on how we see nature, through a purely historicist approach. This approach recognizes a first phase that includes the Greek cosmological period and concerns the perceptions of the ancient Greeks, which focused on the perception that nature is inspired by the mind, by spirit. The second phase concerns mainly the sixteenth and seventeenth century and it is a reaction to the earlier Platonic and Aristotelian views on nature with emphasis on a mechanistic understanding of nature. Finally, Collingwood refers to a third phase, which he characterizes as the "modern view of nature," and is more inspired by the spirit of evolution.<sup>17</sup> Such an approach clearly shows a direction according to which the respective view of nature is imposed by historical conditions, which in turn are shaped by a series of philosophical, scientific or even, we could argue political factors. The advent of mechanical philosophy, for example, during the seventeenth century, gravely influenced our perception of nature, as a well-tuned watch.

Even Thomas Kuhn's paradigm theory is headed in this direction. The paradigm shift he analyses in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* is essentially reversal of the way scientists interpret the phenomena they observe. This again, is a constructivist approach, as nothing in this Kuhn scheme assures us that scientists capture the essence of reality. Thus, Kuhn is fatally driven to subjectivity.<sup>18</sup>

The problem of constructivism is even more acute in the matter of nature, since our conceptions of the idea of nature affect all aspects of scientific thought and everyday life. The difference in this issue thus, is

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<sup>17</sup> Robin G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), 133-177.

<sup>18</sup> Certainly, this does not mean that both constructivists and essentialists do not admit that objective reality exists independent of people. It is true that even those who embrace constructivism do not ignore the fact that reality is one and only, nor do they necessarily slip into solipsism. In other words, they recognize that reality exists and has certain properties, which are impossible to be perceived in an objective way.



clear, since, “while the essentialist holds that the natural is repressed by the social, the constructionist maintains that the natural is produced by the social.”<sup>19</sup> We see this problem in ancient Greek thought when Xenophanes argued that no human would ever be able to learn the truth about the gods or other matters, and even if one knew the truth he could not realize it. For all things, Xenophanes said, there are only opinions.<sup>20</sup> So let’s now examine what radical philosophy has to offer in this debate. Could Marxism resolve this matter?

It is not so clear whether Marxism could support one side or the other. Marx sees nature as the “inorganic body” of human-modified by the latter; however, this does not mean that he does not recognize nature as an objective and accessible to him reality that precedes human. After all, this seems to be in line with a materialistic approach that wants the Being to be interwoven with Nature. Engels criticized Hegel’s subjectivity, arguing that the latter’s mistake was to assume that the laws of dialectics are imposed on nature and history as laws of the intellect, when, in fact, they should be inferred from both nature and from history.<sup>21</sup> When the intellect is not imposed on nature, as in Hegel’s view, but is inspired and meditated on it, then we can consider that subjectivity is beginning to lose ground.

On the other hand, newer Marxist approaches, such as the one offered by Althusser, advocate a constructivist approach. Althusser’s analysis of the concept of Marxist ideology is based on the logic of the denial to approach an objective external reality in the context of ideology. Each ideology forms a framework of apparent reality in which people believe, and consequently, every sphere of human activity moves within the ideological grid. Nothing can exist outside ideology and everything is given meaning by it. Althusser writes:

We may add that what thus seems to happen outside ideology (to be very precise, in the street) really happens in ideology. What really happens in ideology thus seems to happen outside it. That is why those who are in ideology, you and I, believe that they are by definition outside ideology: one of the effects of ideology is the practical denegation of the ideological character of ideology by

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<sup>19</sup> Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 3.

<sup>20</sup> Sextus Empiricus, *Against Professors*, 7:49.

<sup>21</sup> Friedrich Engels, “Dialectics of Nature,” in Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, 313-734 (New York, International Publishers, 1987), 356.

ideology. Ideology never says ‘I am ideological.’ One has to be outside ideology, in other words, in scientific knowledge, to be able to say ‘I am in ideology’ (a quite exceptional case) or (the general case) ‘I was in ideology.’<sup>22</sup>

Althusser certainly does not exclude the field of ideology or science, which consciously operates in this ideological context, and therefore, we can also conclude, the study of nature.

How useful can said approach be for environmental philosophy? We are in this point of time that the planet faces huge ecological challenges; ecological movements are being formed, such as the climate justice movement, nature’s rights or animal rights, philosophy ought to engage more dynamically with the issue of our relationship with nature, as the way we see nature plays a decisive role in the way we function in nature. If the way we view nature is subjective, and if we are therefore unable to grasp the reality of nature then what nature should we protect? We believe that philosophy, and, in this case, environmental philosophy needs to come closer to modern environmental movements. Its findings must be able to be appropriated and exploited by the people who are fighting today for the future of the planet and its inhabitants, human and non-human animals. We believe that dialectics can offer a solution to this dilemma, in a creative and productive way for modern radical environmental thinking. The dialectic that will help in this direction is not that of Hegel, who identified the Idea with Being, and considered Nature and Spirit as ways of manifesting the Idea. Nor is it Marx’s dialectical materialism or Engels’ dialectic of nature. Perhaps it might come from Murray Bookchin’s dialectical naturalism.

### III. The contribution of dialectical naturalism

Murray Bookchin is a philosopher who greatly influenced environmental philosophy and the environmental movement. His ideas today can help shape a more coherent view of nature and offer vision to the modern environmental movement.

Bookchin argues that nature is not just what exists around us. Nature is essentially an evolutionary process, an evolutionary development to be precise, an eternal process that starts from the simplest and reaches the most complex. It starts from the elementary and reaches the complex. As Bookchin writes, it starts with the primary

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<sup>22</sup> Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism, Ideology and Ideological States Apparatuses*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London, and New York: Verso, 2014), 191.

energy pulse that led to the Big Bang and reaches the most complex animal forms on our planet. As we understand it, this is not a linear or circular progression, but a cumulative one. At the same time said progression, the more it's passed into more complex forms, the more it composes a social framework, that is, it acquires a social character since it constitutes social relations. That is why nature is a "cumulative evolutionary process from the inanimate to the animate and ultimately the social [...]." <sup>23</sup>

However, this progression is not teleological as Aristotle would claim. In other words, this is not a path that will lead to a specific goal. But neither is there such a strong element of chance, as in modern physics. "Dialectical naturalism is an attempt to grasp nature as a developmental phenomenon, both in its organic and social realms. All organic phenomena change and, even more important, undergo development and differentiation. The form and reform, while actively maintaining their identity until, barring any accident, they fulfill their potential. But since the cosmos, seen in an overview of its evolution, is developmental as well, dialectical naturalism approaches the world as a whole from a developmental perspective. Its various realms – inorganic, organic, and social– are distinct from each other, and yet they grade into one another." <sup>24</sup>

In addition, Bookchin accepts Hegel's distinction between the two different meanings of reality, direct present empirical reality (*Realität*) and dialectical reality (*Wirklichkeit*). The second reality, unlike the first, contains the possibility, and also consists of the perfect fulfillment of a rational process. <sup>25</sup> To use Bookchin's example, in an egg we see nothing but *Realität*, but according to *Wirklichkeit*, there is also the possibility of the transformation into a bird. Therefore, the possibility in Bookchin is not the purpose (end, *telos*) of Aristotle. Things can either become something different or they can turn into nothing; their path is not predetermined.

Bookchin argues that in nature there is necessity and freedom. There are a number of possibilities that have led the planet to be what it is today. The second nature, society did not simply evolve, but chose, in other words, to take the form it holds. It is humans' will to shape a natural landscape into a park. Living beings are not mere spectators

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<sup>23</sup> Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom, The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Montreal, and New York: Black Rose Books, 1991), xx.

<sup>24</sup> Janet Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics* (Boston: South and Press, 1991), 117.

<sup>25</sup> Murray Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology, Essays on Dialectical Naturalism* (Montreal, and New York: Black Rose Books, 1995), 23.

of evolution, nor are they pawns called upon to play a predetermined role in the flow of natural history. The most distinct case is that of the human species. People can now shape evolution not only unconsciously but also consciously. Therefore, Bookchin not only sees necessity in nature; he also sees freedom and participation. Thus, according to his theory, he seeks the roots of culture and of the social element of evolution, in nature. He is interested in the escalation of biological development that accumulated from natural to social.<sup>26</sup>

This progression certainly is also converse. Bookchin argues that the context in which we look at nature has social characteristics but does not rule out the possibility of approaching the real essence of nature. He writes that “the way we view our position in the natural world is deeply entangled with the way we organize the social world.”<sup>27</sup> For example, a feudal society sees in the world a strict hierarchy, rights, and obligations. But this does not mean that the way of viewing is subjective, but that we draw examples from nature to organize society. In his suggested social ecology, however, the relationship between society and nature is harmonious. The social is potentially a fulfillment of the latent dimension of freedom in nature.<sup>28</sup> Thus, by dissolving the traditional dimension between society and nature, or between biological and cultural, he argues that these elements share characteristics of development, such as diversity. Another feature is the participation of all the components in a whole. Society developed through the communities of non-human animals and reached its current form with the existence of institutions.<sup>29</sup> In fact, it is this characteristic of institutionalization that separates the communities of other animals from the societies of humans. Bookchin’s naturalism also has to do with the correlation he makes between natural and social evolution. As in natural evolution, so too in social evolution, we must go beyond the image that diversity and complexity yield greater stability and emphasize that they yield greater creativity, choices, and, of course, freedom.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, as Bookchin noted, it would be more accurate to regard nature as a field of constant change, as a cumulative development of increasingly diverse and complex life forms, and of the inorganic world

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<sup>26</sup> Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology*, 85-86.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

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

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-93.

that pulsates and interacts with them.<sup>31</sup> Human activity is also a product of natural evolution, thus it cannot be condemned in advance. The idea of a pure, virgin nature cannot stand, since nature is not a passive state that simply accepts the actions of others. Plants and animals interact daily in its context and transform it as they constitute nature; nature is not something separate from them. Along with other animals, humans transform nature, regrettably to such an extent that it threatens life itself on planet Earth. As Bookchin writes,

This notion, which suggests that human beings and their works are intrinsically ‘unnatural’ and, in some sense, antithetical to nature’s ‘purity’ and ‘virginity,’ is a libel on humanity and nature alike.<sup>32</sup>

From an anthropological perspective, such an approach brings us closer to Ingold, who preaches a comprehensive reevaluation of humans ourselves, our relationship with nature, but also nature itself. He suggests that we see a human being not as a complex entity consisting of body, mind, and culture, but as a place of creative development within a growing field of relationships. These relationships are not exclusively human relationships, that is, what we call social relationships (ignoring, of course, the sociability of non-human animals) but the broader “ecological relationships.” Human relationships are a subset of ecological relationships, which include the set of interactions between human and non-human beings.<sup>33</sup>

To sum up everything it is stated so far, there are two useful conclusions about Bookchin’s philosophy that can help in the dispute between constructivism and essentialism. The first is that social constructions, as well as, social contexts that affect our perspective, do not necessarily trap us in a one-dimensional and historically imposed view of physical reality. The second, which is directly related to the first, is that humans are not trapped in these contexts because they can change themselves while being completely conscious of natural evolution. Humans consciously create, change, modify, transform, destroy, pulverize, eradicate, and re-create much of what is around them. They are not apathetic and non-participating viewers of history. Their active participation from an environmental point of view, while it may be catastrophic, it brings them closer to the essence of nature.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 341-342.

<sup>33</sup> Ingold, 5.

This does not necessarily mean that they understand it. However, it does mean that they are not just viewers but active participants, or to be more precise, they break down the distance that constructivists present between them and nature.

In addition, it should be emphasized that this aspect of Bookchin's theory is both visionary and liberating. As mentioned above, where Hegel saw only necessity and coincidence in nature, Bookchin sees necessity and freedom. Ultimately, nature in Hegel is the expression of the Idea, and in fact, by its realization through nature the Idea achieves absolute freedom. In Bookchin, however, coincidentalism gives way to choice and even greater freedom. After all, he believes that dialectics is a path from abstraction to differentiation.<sup>34</sup> Murray Bookchin argued that humans can choose and create a "free nature" that transcends both purely animal "first nature" and social "second nature." Nature is an evolutionary field that can be full of either autonomy and freedom or of competition and self-destruction.<sup>35</sup>

The fact that we have so far chosen the latter as a human species does not mean that we are by nature competitive and self-destructive. The options are wide open and before our very eyes. This element of freedom must play an important role in our perception and narrative of nature, giving it a liberating meaning. People are part of this evolution, as well as, part of a narrative, as constructivists would agree. But the existing dynamics for change and their participation in it, as well as the possibility of choice cannot contribute in any case to any subjectivity. It is as real as their choices. At the same time, there is Bookchin's liberating and radical view, opposite to Hegel's view, that the choice to form a rational and ecological society can free us from the limits that oppressive and hierarchical societies impose on our understanding of nature.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, in Hegel, the reality of nature appears only as an aspect and as a result of the intellect. As Marx pointed out: "Hegel accordingly conceived the illusory idea that the real world is the result of thinking, which causes its own synthesis, its own deepening, and its own movement; whereas the method of advancing from the abstract to the concrete is simply the way in which thinking assimilates the concrete and reproduces it as a concrete mental category."<sup>37</sup> Thus, nature remains essentially a product of the intellect, and its dialectic is limited to a beginning

<sup>34</sup> Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology*, 112.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-87.

<sup>37</sup> Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Salomea W. Ryazanskaya (Moscow, and London: Progress, Lawrence & Wishart, 1981), 122-123.

and an end of the Idea. Thus, Hegel favors a subjective conception of nature. Instead, Bookchin sees human as an active agent who knows and intervenes, who is himself a part of nature and not just a subjective observer.

Moreover, for Bookchin, nature is not a form of expression of the mind, as in Hegel, but the spirit is an offspring of nature. The spirit develops and evolves over time, and that is why it has its own evolutionary history.<sup>38</sup> The spirit is authentic and can comprehend its own story; it can understand the conditions and aspects of its development. The clearer gaze it is on this introspection, the clearer it is when it is about to perceive and enter into the essence of nature.

Bookchin's view is realistic because it offers a different view of the dialectical relationship between human and nature. Moreover, an element that was not sufficiently appraised by revolutionary dialectical philosophers such as Marx or Engels is the element of *motion* (kinisi). For example, the importance and value of movement, in which he insisted that Aristotle to explain the creation and operation of the universe in *Physics*,<sup>39</sup> is not utilized as it should be in modern dialectics. We cannot overlook the fact that today the natural sciences emphasize the element of motion and change. Dialectics is the pre-eminent theory that emphasizes the element of becoming, change, destruction, composition and rebirth. But the movement itself is an important fact in the controversy between constructivism and essentialism.

If we dwell a little on the element of motion, as understood by Bookchin's dialectical naturalism, then perhaps we can clearly see the essence of nature and overcome the obstacles that constructivism puts in front of us. We think the answer lies in the images of nature that constructivism offers us. Another problem we find in the constructivist approach to nature is that it offers us static and fragmentary shapes for nature. The images we have of nature are like static glimpses of moments. For example, environmental historians talk about the romantic nature of the Renaissance and represent/photograph a specific period of time with specific characteristics. Even the concept of evolution from one period to another is presented as part of a wider frame, a larger image. It is likely that in the case of evolution, this big image is moving, showing us these different phases just like the magic images in the known children's old game, "The View-Master." When turned left, right, up or down they show something different. But even these images are characterized by immobility because they enclose the selected elements. After all, in the

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<sup>38</sup> Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology*, 81.

<sup>39</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, 241b 34-267b 26.

context of constructivism, it is acceptable that specific elements are selected, based on each narrative about nature. But this is only a part of our reality and narrative.

Dialectic focuses on the evolutionary course of things capturing the constant dynamics of reality. It can explain the interrelation of all those fragmentary elements that make up reality. It can build a seemingly chaotic patchwork into an organic and cohesive whole. Even a holistic approach to theories of environmental ethics, such as Arne Naess' deep ecology or Aldo Leopold's Earth ethics, can work better in this dialectical context, although Bookchin himself saw them as rivals in his own right, social ecology.

#### IV. Conclusion

Overall, the phrase "essence of nature" seems by itself tricky and inaccessible. The efforts of science and philosophy to approach it have been titanic. The crucial question, however, as to whether it is possible to make this substance known is not answered by scientific approaches or relativistic and subjective perspectives. We need a system that will provide an outlet to current concerns, particularly an environmental philosophy that can bridge the gap between theory and practice of modern environmental movements. Murray Bookchin with his social ecology and dialectical naturalism overcomes the dilemmas of the constructivist approach to nature and brings us one step closer to vanquish the dichotomy between man and nature, while responding to the demands of the global environmental movement. The current situation of the planet mandates we alter our ideology regarding the world which includes how we perceive the environment as well as non-human animals. Practical ethics is crucial at this point in time so as to ensure environmental sustainability and the viability of our own existence. Thus, applying this philosophical framework to specific environmental contexts, social and intellectual purposes could be advantageous for a responsible interaction with our planet.

#### **Author contribution statement**

Both authors contributed equally to the conception, design, and authorship of this paper. Both authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.



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# Between and Betwixt the Other Theatre and the Theatre of the Other: Performativity as (Re) presenting, Show and Self- Awareness in the Myth of Barba\*

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## **Abstract**

*This article deals with the legendary figure of Eugenio Barba as a paradigmatic case to demonstrate the difference between the other theatre and the theatre of the other. Its main objective is to discuss the juxtaposition of performativity as (re)presenting, showing, and self-awareness by narrating the myth of Barba. The argument is presented through six interconnected caveats: the legend and its myth; The Moon rises from the Ganges: the story inside the myth; the critique of western civilization: an insider's story of self-reflexivity; the other theatre is not the theatre of the other; the life-world of the myth of Barba; and finally, performing otherness, othering performance. The article is addressed mainly but not exclusively to readers with a background in cultural anthropology, performance studies, theater studies, hermeneutics, phenomenology, history of civilization, literary theory, colonialism, and representation of the other.*

**Keywords:** *performance; performativity; self-awareness; otherness; othering; consciousness; theatre; reflexivity; critical anthropology; colonialism; representation*

## I. The legend and its myth

**E**ugenio Barba is a living legend for contemporary world theatre. A legend that emerged and was established in the second half of the twentieth century, he still fascinates its global audience. A legend inextricably linked to a peculiar 'myth,' in the ancient Greek

\*Throughout this paper I use the prefix 're-' to indicate repetition as well as withdrawal. The prefix re- in parenthesis, with or without a hyphen, signifies reflexivity and the possibility of awareness as a result of (reflexive) repetition or withdrawal.

meaning of the term, a 'shared discourse of truth.' Like almost all ancient myths, the myth of Barba contains a 'sacred,' that is a 'realistic,' narrative. This is the narrative of performing arts, and theatre and dance in particular. Thus, the peculiarity of this myth owes its symbolic uniqueness to its form and content, to its narrativity. The legend tells of Barba wandering in the ceremonial and cultural traditions of the unknown world 'out there,' away from his birthplace and his familiar culture. The wanderings lead to 'mythical,' i.e., archetypal, encounters of the western with the non-western component, initially with 'Asian' and later, with 'Brazilian' and 'African' traditional artistic formations. Despite the heterogeneity of these encounters, the narrative movement of the myth, as a discourse of truth, revolves steadily around a key thematic axis. It is the axis of self-knowledge. The reflexive principle of the ancient Greek aphorism 'know thyself' constantly inspires and strengthens the soul of the mythical hero. As another explorer of the postmodern age, he travels to the unknown to 'discover' the 'true' in life and art in his own life and in the lives of others, in his own art and in the art of others. And it is from this constant reflection that the central idea of the myth derives: the search for a new theatre, for a theatre focusing on the Other.

In the myth of Barba, the central hero co-stars with an equally basic character: his significant Other. The Other of Barba is not fixed but emerges each time with a different face, name, or form, as a real, symbolic or imaginary (re)presentation of the strange, of the unknown. Iconoclastic and at the same time creative, the mythical discourse features the idea of re-considering the 'familiar' from a different, i.e., non-familiar, point of view, which can play an important role in establishing an alternative approach to life and art as well as to contemporary theatre and dance. Closely connected with the myth is the diverse troupe of characters that frame it. The ardent supporters and dedicated collaborators of Barba, with the close social relationships they have developed among themselves, form an extremely tied and stable community to which the global dynamics of the myth is much indebted, in particular the setting up and wider dissemination of its discourse of truth. The community of performers-collaborators, with its exemplary behaviour and pioneering work, has made a decisive contribution to the establishment of Barba in the consciousness of its members and the broader audience of contemporary theatre as a legendary revolutionary who was both an innovative researcher and a distinguished reformer mainly of the stage component of the theatrical Being and becoming.

The mythopoetics of Barba's legend is based on a blending of heterogeneous cultural, artistic, and ideological elements. His myth is the myth of a modern superhero of the arts achieving a feat. He brings to life something great, something exceptional, which goes beyond the scale of human ordinariness. In search of the unknown Other, he transverses various arts and cultures, and in this endeavour, he encounters heterogeneous historical perceptions and social practices that enrich his reality and broaden his imagination. Thus, he ends up bringing together, by his own will and logic, numerous persons and elements from diverse traditions. The legend of Barba was systematically made by himself and his collaborators in the context of a contemporary theatrical mythology which is dominated by the idea of 'pre-expressive' training of theatre and dance performers in order for actors and dancers to discover and develop their innate physical and mental potential. The principle of 'pre-expressivity'<sup>1</sup> became an archetypal feature of the myth, as it was associated with the ability of performers to transform with the help of their heightened physical and mental state of being through acting the perception of everyday life. Thus, with their thorough performative training, they created a non-ordinary or unusual – existing in its own right – and, eventually, unique, stage reality. Barba's pre-expressive methodology for his own Other Theatre was decisively influenced by ideas and practices of foreign student-performers he encountered as he wandered in the exotic 'East' by his very first contact with the Indian dance-theatre.

The methodology of 'pre-expressivity' draws ideas and practices from traditional artistic formations but does not depend on them, as it aims to transcend the habitual perceptions and institutionalized practices of any establishment. Barba contends that the repetitive methodology of pre-expressivity emerges as a ritualistic mythical modality that actively contributes to the performance of the extraordinary, as an aesthetic achievement. With the strict, constant and uninterrupted repetition of certain physical and mental movements, a common, actually experienced and at the same time collective, practical philosophy of an expressive method is attained. In this context, the subject (the performer) is initiated into the idea and performance of 'Being,' learning to contrast and consciously juxtapose it with the corresponding ideas and performances of 'Having.' Using pre-expressivity as a symbolic vehicle, Barba illuminates the minds of

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<sup>1</sup> Eugenio Barba, *The Moon Rises from the Ganges: My Journey through Asian Acting Techniques* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Lluís Masgrau, "Introduction: Eugenio Barba and Traditional Asian Theatres," in Eugenio Barba, *The Moon Rises from the Ganges: My Journey through Asian Acting Techniques*, ed. Lluís Masgrau, 7-36 (New York: Routledge, 2015).

his performers-students and other collaborators by introducing them into the idea of ‘surrendering’ prior to the performing show of ‘delivering’ a play as an act of (re)presenting on stage. The archetype of pre-expressivity is a sacred symbol – a means of expression and at the same time a state of consciousness – for the mythical hero and his community. The specialized usage of this symbol on stage enables performers to activate through their own intensified mental and physical mobility the co-movement or emotion of the audience: that is, to create a unique (outside the usual and everyday reality) stage performative identification, which may lead the audience of (re)presentational performance to ecstasy. Concerning the conception and realization of this plan, Barba directs and interprets, on and off stage, explores and discusses, alone and in collaboration with others, the field of new theatricality as a living, energy-centred condition of being-in-the-world, a condition of self-realization. He recognizes his totemic ancestors in great figures of contemporary western theatre such as E. G. Craig, A. Tairov, V. Meyerhold, J. Copeau, Ch. Dullin, A. Artaud, B. Brecht, and J. Grotowski.<sup>2</sup> However, Barba differentiates himself from all these reformers in terms of practice and ideology through the constitution of an alternative genealogical myth for the Other Theatre, which is his own version of new theatricality. In the myth of Barba, great personalities, and prestigious institutes of traditional Asian performing arts, mainly theatre and dance, co-star with him, as the main narrative characters.

The myth of Barba belongs to a special category of cultural myths that narrate the feats of the central hero against the established order of things. Barba vigorously fights the theatrical foundation of his time, its self-referentiality and ethnocentrism. At the same time, he proposes a new conception and practice of contemporary theatre, which does not have a western national character but a global and cross-national one. To this end, he uses a complex methodology based on systematic exploration and combinatorial teaching, interdisciplinary research, and intercultural collaboration with other performers, and, eventually, on the actual co-production of plays with other, considered as ‘equal’ to Western theatre, high-art or not, yet renowned ‘non-Western’ dance-theatre traditions, initially Asian and later Brazilian and African.

## II. The Moon Rises from the Ganges: The story inside the myth

The book *The Moon Rises from the Ganges: My Journey into Asian Techniques* is a selection of texts written by Barba from various periods, in which he presents his relationship with traditional Asian theatre,

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<sup>2</sup> Masgrau, 11.

mediated through his trips to India, a country he travelled. Some of these texts were published as independent papers and are republished with a new logic in the book next to new texts. Old and new texts together constitute a narrative that unfolds like the personal journey of the author to the eternal unknown Other. In *The Moon Rises from the Ganges*, the Other emerges from this journey as a unique consciousness of both life and art: a journey-symbol through which the new theoretical ideas and practices of the traveller are crystallized in a self-narrative about himself jointly with his co-travellers, his significant 'Others.' An imaginary journey, like the journeys of great discoveries, it is full of contradictions and utopian conceptions, impasses and promising moments that are noted *a posteriori* as ultimate transcendences of Being and Having. Beyond anything else, this particular narrative-journey plays up Barba's insatiable desire to encounter and utilize the unknown Other: what he understands as the truly 'real' Other, beyond the habitual conventions and bargaining or self-serving impasses of the established, 'familiar' Other. The 'journey' (re)presents the social and psychological urge that prompts the central hero of the narrative to seek, locate and analyse other people's traditions, always reflecting on his own world's familiar conceptualizations. This attitude often results in an instrumental relationship with the emergent Other: a relationship that is based on the aesthetic utilization of the non-familiar Other in the perspective of the post-modern familiar. This instrumental utilization of the Other leads the narrator to selective appropriations, often in an arbitrary way, of fragments that are constitutive parts of historical entities and cultural wholes of great non-western traditions. These traditional fragments are appropriated and reformulated with Barba's own hybrid recipe into new diversified formations of knowledge and combinatorial synergies. *The Moon Rises from the Ganges* is a timeless journey into Barba's idiosyncratic and iconoclastic fiction, an actually lived journey into the Other of the East that records the archetypal encounter of alternative western theatre – the Other theatre – with Asian traditional dance-theatre.

The myth of Barba is a complex hybrid created by long and steady incubation through a cross-breeding of a multi-collection of varieties; in this formation the role played by the various individual hybrids that emerged from time to time from the central hero's personal encounters with the diverse cultural and artistic formations of the significant Others was decisive. The common thread that narratively and interpretively connects the components of these transitory mixtures and final compositions is the idea of pre-expressivity, the methodology for the

new stage performativity. This element serves as a non-negotiable milestone for the myth around which and for which the multi-collection narrative unfolds. This component archetypically refers to the personal experience of the hero regarding the Kathakali dance-theatre tradition in the state of Kerala, in Southwest India. And this is how Barba's eclecticism and poetic license help to shape the mythopoetics of the narrative. The river Ganges, sacred to Hindus (from where the 'moon' of his book incidentally rises) is in northern India and not in southern India, where the state of Kerala administratively belongs. The two vast geographical regions of India, North and South, are divided into distinct cultural sectors by a historical differentiation of the Indian continent in terms of philosophy and language and, among other criteria, letters, and the arts. The artistic tradition of the North is known as *Hindustani* while the Southern is known as *Karnatak* (e.g., Indian music is generally distinguished into *Hindustani* and *Karnatak* music). The double reduction by means of synecdoche from Kerala to India and from India to Ganges is not a naive superficial connection but signifies a deeper reality: the connection of art with the sacred and of the poetics of art with the poetics of the sacred. In using this hybrid synecdoche, Barba follows perhaps unconsciously a reflexive tradition of European civilization that flourished mainly with Romanticism: Orientalism. Orientalism, as Edward Said pointed out in his book of the same name, constitutes to this day – for the western world and all those who were influenced by this ideological matrix of mysticism – an imaginary political framework that defines a western type (re)presentation of the non-western Other.<sup>3</sup> Reflexive Orientalism, imbued with the exotic for the West 'East,' permeates from end to end the whole myth of Barba. The rebel hero is opposed to names and forms, to established traditions of art and culture of his own world, without, however, fundamentally contesting the very mechanism of ideological conceptualization and legitimization of the power of (re)presentation.<sup>4</sup> Barba did not content himself with a hybrid blending of a multi-collection of varieties, i.e., a synthesis of diverse formations from non-Western (Asian) traditions of dance and theatre. He also proceeded with a non-ethnocentric initiative on the exotic sacred Other, developing a long and sincere relationship of

<sup>3</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

<sup>4</sup> Pavlos Kavouras, "Folklore and Tradition. Perspectives and Transformations of a Modernist Ideological Formation," in *Folklore and Tradition: Issues of Re-Presenting and Performance in Music and Dance*, ed. Pavlos Kavouras, 9-25 (Athens: Nissos, 2010); Pavlos Kavouras, "Ritual Act and Dramaturgy. The Idea of Folklore in the Age of Ethnic," in *Folklore and Tradition: Issues of Re-Presenting and Performance in Music and Dance*, ed. Pavlos Kavouras, 227-250 (Athens: Nissos, 2010).



co-existence and active cooperation with renowned institutions and performers from these traditions.

### III. The critique of Western civilization: An insiders' story of self-reflexivity

In conceptualizing the Other or the 'different' in relation to the Same, Barba does not move away from the deep structures of Western civilization he inherited from the familiar environment of his own cultural habitus.<sup>5</sup> The ideological reaction to the familiar, even the questioning against the subliminal realizations of the sacredness of the familiar does not automatically imply an awareness of the embodied alterity of the Other, that is the view of any imagined Other's own perspective of him/herself. The question remains open. Who observes and who composes? Who knows and who manages the knowledge of the Other? Who creates new structures and practices with hybrid content and format? For whom and why? What does 'alterity' serve in such a perspective of self-rearrangement of reality for the hero of the myth of the dispute of the establishment? Where are they, the 'Others,' the collaborators of the hero in the discourse of truth in which he himself is the main protagonist? Do these Others have an independent voice, or are they *de facto* bound to bearing voices mediated by the perception of the hero-narrator? And if so, are they constantly forced to negotiate the boundaries and margins of the expressivity of their voices, their own spontaneous reactions and reflections stemming from the awareness of their life-worlds, with those of the western collaborating Other? Despite his democratic aspirations, this Western Other continues to be the undisputed leader and manager, the *primus ante pares* among his Others. This motley subject with his hetero-referential ego-consciousness emerges as a legend that achieves the feat of transcending the western deep structures regarding otherness with the help of an imaginary catalyst: the 'equal' non-western Other.

This discussion is not new. One can look for its foundations in many thinkers and cultural traditions of the western world. Apart from Edward Said (1935-2003), whose *Orientalism* has already been mentioned, there are two older writers and thinkers of Modernity, the pioneer Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), whose political philosophy influenced the progress of the Enlightenment throughout Europe. These two seminal thinkers

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<sup>5</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

signify the existence of a great (as a numerical size and theoretical magnitude) genealogy of distinguished people of reflexivity and artistry. They systematically criticized European civilization as an imperialistic formation based on the production and reproduction of knowledge with reference to the non-Western Other, by analysing in detail the ideological (re)presentation of the Other as an imaginary object of the western subject. As Said demonstrated in his study on Orientalism, the West systematically constructed its 'eastern' Other through its own symbolic and imaginary representations of the East out-there: the societies of and the people living in Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East. But like any systematic knowledge about the 'Other,' Orientalism had diverse political connotations with which it served the hegemonic power of the Western imperialists and colonialists in many ways. The critical narrative about Orientalism is not limited to the political poetics and responsibilities of the West, both its rulers and the common people. It expands and includes the role of local rulers, courtiers, and the bourgeoisie of the eastern world itself, who introduced the spirit of Western Orientalism into the culture of their wider society. Any critical approach to Orientalism as a total phenomenon potentially carries a marginal awareness of the relationship between politics and culture, actually lived experience and (re)presentation, the Self and the Other. This awareness has as a direct consequence the decolonization of the thought and action of the embodied Others – of the specific Others who were subject to the real, i.e. economic, political, and military power of Western colonialism and dependent objects of the symbolic (re)presentations of the western imaginary. It is 'marginal,' because it is radical and at the same time enlightening. A reflexive as well as political rebellion, it reliably and clearly documents the hegemonic conception of Western culture regarding the ideological manipulation of the relationship between knowledge and power. It foreshadows a prospective of liberation from the established habitus of such a subservient and at the same time subliminal constitution of the Eastern Self as a Western Other.

Said's orientalist view was largely incorporated by post-colonial cultural anthropology in its attempt to foreground the social and cultural formations of different peoples with their own historical and actually lived experiences and not through the (re)presentational ideas and practices of western modernity and post-modern globalizing colonialism. Social and cultural anthropology was established as a discipline in the field of the humanities and social sciences in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; therefore, it cannot be considered historically and ideologically a

discipline that is unaffected by colonialism and the principles of Western Orientalism.<sup>6</sup> However, the critical view of Western culture through in-depth references to Western colonialism and ‘objective’ (re)presentations of the non-Western Other had already begun to appear in the European literature and the arts since the 16<sup>th</sup> century by bold thinkers such as Montaigne and Shakespeare; it reached the full form of an open critique of the social and cultural establishment of the ‘developed’ Western world with Rousseau’s socialist ideology.

These critical views provided a fertile historical and literary ground for a radical exploration through science and art of the non-Western Other as an autonomous Other, and not exclusively as the ideological construct of a Western (re)presentational logic. One of the last humanists of the Renaissance, Montaigne distinguished himself in letters as a sceptic, whose critical discourse creatively intertwined the ‘Same’ with the ‘Other.’ Through his *Essays* – a pioneering publication for literature of his time – he established critical reflexivity as a peculiar and radical discourse of truth.<sup>7</sup> In the essay *On Cannibals*, he uses subtle irony to criticize the ethnocentric stereotypes and hypocrisy of European civilization by reflecting on a ‘ceremonial’ (for the French) meeting of the exotic ‘cannibals’ (for the French) Tupinambá from the New World (Brazil) with the young French king and his courtiers in Rouen. It is worth noting that the impact of the essay was such that it even touched William Shakespeare who incorporated Montaigne’s idea of the ‘Cannibal Other’ as Caliban (an anagram for Cannibal) in his play *The Tempest*.<sup>8</sup> The literary idea of the ‘noble savage,’ which was later wrongly attributed to Rousseau, i.e. the man who has not been alienated by the European civilization, inspired many thinkers who strongly criticized the Western hegemonic establishment. Anthropological reviewers were important exponents of this movement, among many others; their empirical ethnographic works underscored the cultural diversity of ‘primitive’ peoples encountered and recorded by Western colonialism as well as beyond the colonial matrix.

A philosopher, writer, composer and music theorist, Rousseau was a pioneer of socialist theory and an important forerunner of the

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<sup>6</sup> See, James Clifford, and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography: A School of American Research Advanced Seminar* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986); George E. Marcus, and Michael M. J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958).

<sup>8</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. David Lindley (Cambridge, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

European Enlightenment. In his essay *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* (1750),<sup>9</sup> he criticized vehemently the countervailing relationship between the morality of citizens and the development of letters and the arts, systematically reprimanding the established morals – the dominant structures of expression and living practices of his day. His revisionary critique of the progress and superiority of Western hegemonic civilization was transformed into a programmatic discourse on social change: a ‘pedagogical’ project guided by the joyful becoming of modern man into a virtuous and fulfilled individual.

Rousseau’s theoretical contribution to the field of established music science was equally significant. With his *Dictionary of Music* (1767),<sup>10</sup> he broadened considerably the field of comparative musicology by making reference to other musical traditions, in addition to ‘high or art’ (classical) European music, which until then monopolized the interest of musicologists. Rousseau distinguished western art music from all ‘other’ musics by proposing a taxonomic typology of the latter based on three categories of music as follows: a) ‘high-art’ or ‘art’ music from the great Eastern civilizations; b) ‘folk’ music of the peoples of Europe; and c) ‘primitive’ music, in which he lumped together all other forms of musical expression of humanity, regardless of style, geographical origin and time period. Rousseau’s *Dictionary* undoubtedly marks a unique initiative of its time, an iconoclastic innovation. The broadened perspective of the musical Other, featuring the dimension of (musical) alterity definitely challenges and undermines the conservative view of the universality of the value of classical European music and European civilization for humanity. However, this innovative *Dictionary* did not cease to be an endogenously self-referential and, eventually, a Euro-centric creation, because it was written on the basis of a multi-collection logic of classification (hence bearing a self-referential mechanism of recognition and identification) of the ‘unknown’ musical Other with reference to the western Self. The taxonomic logic of alterity in the *Dictionary* is exhausted in an accumulation of information without critical remarks about the actually lived and historical-cultural specificity of the various, global and diachronic, musical formations that constitute the expanded subject matter of the new, according to Rousseau, comparative musicology.

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<sup>9</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts and Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men*, trans. Ian Johnston (Arlington, VA: Richer Resources Publications, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *A Dictionary of Music*, trans. William Waring (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale ECCO, 2010).

#### IV. The Other Theatre is not the Theatre of the Other

Montaigne, Rousseau and Said launched at different times their criticisms of European civilization as self-reflexive views of their life worlds. But how are these rebellious thinkers of the West connected to Barba? In his foreword to *The Moon Rises from the Ganges*, Barba refers to the theatrical sun of the great reform of European theatre from the early twentieth century as the sun that always rose from the West, namely from the *Moskva* River. And he argues that this sun of change illuminated the two moons, each signalling in a different way his own (Barba's) re-vision of western theatre. The first was *Commedia dell' arte*, the popular Italian improvisational comedy that had been popular in Europe since the sixteenth century; it was mainly based on the personal technique and stage means of actors, rather than the playwright and the director of the play. The second moon illuminated by the reform sun from the Moskva was, as Barba notes, 'exotic and distant': the traditional Asian theatres. In other words, he had two sources of inspiration for his critical reflection on life and art: the moon of the *Commedia dell' arte* and the moon of traditional Asian theatres. In the first case, the moon refers practically and symbolically through *Commedia* to the pre-classical European folk theatre in its entirety. In the second, the moon marks a peculiar transcendence, as the traditional Asian dance-theatre stands next to the established western theatre as a homologous art form, as both are 'high art' traditions; yet it is still an 'exotic,' foreign and unknown artistic creation – a fundamental Other – as it comes from a completely different cultural environment to that of Western civilization.

Barba's thought converges in many respects with that of Montaigne, Rousseau, and Said. Convergence is mainly due to the common critical view of Western civilization. On the one hand, there is a discussion on the theatrical, musical, or cultural establishment, and on the other hand, on the ideological expansion of the current hegemonic map of European domination attempting to include the 'unknown' or 'exotic' Other. The identification and remedy of the problem point at foregrounding the idea of the 'different' in relation to the familiar western, which is articulated together with a radical questioning of the structures and practices of the ruling class, as well as with a new ethical orientation governed by at least a theoretical respect for any form of unexplored (for the western familiar) alterity. Barba anoints as significant partners in his myth of new theatricality, *Commedia dell' arte* and the traditional Asian dance-theatres. This choice foregrounds

*de facto* the symbolic significance of alterity in the Other Theatre's rebellious move: firstly, it is based on a non-'high-art' European Other as 'popular and improvisational' (through reference to Commedia), and secondly on a 'high-art' non-European (Asian) Other.<sup>11</sup> Barba's radical innovation lies in the fact that both references to 'different' theatre are treated as equals with the dominant western, 'high' or 'art' theatrical Being and as a source of inspiration for a new theatrical prospective.

One might ask, in analogy with Montaigne and Rousseau, how does Barba treat the 'primitive' or 'primordial' components of actually lived humanity in relation to the cultural and political hegemonic establishment of his own world? This issue does not leave him indifferent. However, he does not deal systematically with this dimension of alterity as he has neither the time nor the educational constitution to study it thoroughly. It is widely known, mainly from numerous studies of cultural anthropologists from the early twentieth century,<sup>12</sup> how ritual acts and myths are for 'primitive' societies a symbolic field of expression and re-negotiation of everyday life, of initiation into and sacred interaction with the extra-ordinary, non-everyday Other where performativity can be either a show-centred reality or not.<sup>13</sup> Ritual acts as show – or non-show – centred instances of performativity are not unknown in modern western theatre, as for example in Grotowski's *Poor Theatre* (1968).<sup>14</sup> The component of primitive or primordial innocence in contradistinction to the alienation of European civilization – the

<sup>11</sup> Although Kathakali is a highly structured and performatively quite demanding artistic genre, should not actually be classified as a high-art form in analogy to the classical western forms of dance and theatre as this distinction between 'high' and 'low' does not really apply to any of the great popular traditions of performing arts in India.

<sup>12</sup> There is an extensive ethnographic literature on primitive rituals, their symbolism and social usage dating back mainly but not exclusively to the time of the American school of Franz Boas, the British school of Bronislaw Malinowski and the French school of Marcel Mauss until today, including post-World War II critical reflections of Western civilization through the looking glass of primitive cultures and their ritual performances. See, for instance, Georges Balandier, *Political Anthropology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972); Diamond Stanley, *In Search for the Primitive: A Critique of Civilization* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1974); Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982).

<sup>13</sup> Paul Radin, Karl Kerényi, and C. G. Jung, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* (New York: Bell Publishing, 1956); Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1969); Clifford, and Marcus, *Writing Culture*; Steven M. Friedson, *Dancing Prophets: Musical Experience in Tumbuka Healing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (London, and New York: Routledge, 2006); Michael Rudolph, *Ritual Performances as Authenticating Practices: Cultural Representations of Taiwan's Aborigines in Times of Political Change* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2008). See also, Pavlos Kavouras, "An Allegorical Anthropology of Trickster, Cain, and Music," *Mediterranean and European Linguistic Anthropology* 3, no. 2 (2021): 60-101.

<sup>14</sup> Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968).

'primitive' Other of Montaigne, Shakespeare, and Rousseau – was the catalyst for Grotowski; it functioned as a ritualistic path to self-realization, due to his own long and dedicated commitment to Indian esoteric philosophy. On the contrary, for Barba, an instrumental management of the foreign, different to the dominant western, 'ritualistic' self-discipline of the student-performers was enough. Yet this management was completely dissociated from the esoteric aspect of the reflexive exercise, which had as its purpose the control of mind-movement through the methodology of Yoga. Barba's attitude towards the theatrical and dance traditions of India, with which he came in contact on his first voyages, was also based on the reduction of the spiritual whole to the aesthetic part, especially the kinaesthetic aspect of it. In 1963, following 'unconsciously,' as he says, the light of the Ganges moon, when he visited India for the second time, he knew nothing about Indian theatre and dance. His stay in Kerala for three consecutive weeks allowed him to observe closely and sufficiently learn the exercise system of the students of the famous school of dance-drama tradition of Kathakali, Kerala Kalamantalam.<sup>15</sup> During his contact with Kathakali in Kerala, Barba, after admiring the dedication and discipline of the local students, dissociated the external aspect of training from its inner component, discarding the reflexive part of the learning system of the specific school. He discerned, specifically, the significance of the subconscious constitution of a physical and mental self-knowledge on the part of the performers in serving as a pre-expressive basis for the joint development of a new dance-theatrical technique of great expectations regarding stage performing.

Barba's synthetic ingenuity and rebellious nature enabled him to formulate successfully a number of hybrid proposals aimed at introducing a new perception and management of theatrical art. Living and creating for personal and historical reasons in such an anti-hegemonic environment, Barba gradually developed, with enviable consistency, a peculiar form of eclecticism regarding contemporary theatre, having as his main project-making partner in this endeavour the 'great,' that is 'high-art,' Asian traditions of dance and theatre. By isolating the techniques of kinaesthetic discipline and repetitive subliminal training from the broader social and cultural reality of the students, as well as from the special requirements of the foreign traditional performing arts schools, Barba permanently detached the actually experienced daily discipline of the students from the

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<sup>15</sup> Kathakali is one of the most famous forms of physical theatre that tells stories using dance as its main vehicle of expression.

historically grounded reflexivity of a transcendental prospective of training. He balanced skilfully this arbitrary artistic reduction with the development of a collective instrument of cooperation with highly acclaimed in their own societies exponents of the eastern traditions of dance and theatre. This instrument functioned as a peculiar social, artistic, and cultural framework of constant reference to the new theatricality: a world of experts coming from both traditions (western and eastern), with a great 'high art' experience in life and creativity founded on a peculiar variation of a familiar reality. This collective instrument was set up on a purely Western basis. Created by Barba himself, both the *Odin Teatret* (founded in 1964) and the *International School of Theatre Anthropology* (ISTA, founded in 1979), despite their 'openness' to other structures and collaborating agencies, were created from the beginning and functioned steadily in accordance with the perceptions and practices of Western civilization.<sup>16</sup> This is because in itself the alternative orientation of the theatrical approach proposed by Barba remained, in its deepest structure and fundamental logic, a Western construct. Barba changed the theatrical signifiers by proposing a new hybrid synthesis, without, however, changing the bundles of signifieds that these signifiers conveyed on both a symbolic and imaginary level for the western audience at least. The heterogeneous dynamics of the new signifiers was performatively based on their own arbitrary, idiosyncratic hermeneutics without historical-cultural depth. Fascinated by the energy the actors and dancers emitted on stage, Barba's hybrid semiotics derives mainly from his life experience in Kerala although he knew nothing about these traditions, techniques, stories, and the religious content of the plays. He transformed this exotic for Western theatre, reconstituted due to its otherness, 'vitality' of the Asian Others, whom he adored, into a pivotal methodology and practice that became a symbol of the new theatricality. A symbol for the Other Theatre that was perfectly compatible with the main features of the *Commedia dell' arte* – emphasis on improvisation, professional physical technique, as well as media and stage interventions by the performers themselves. Choices and reforms essentially targeted the artistic and social establishment, expressed by the logocentric theatre of literary scripts and rulers-directors.

Barba's relations of friendship with several of the Asian dance and theatre teachers as well as with other collaborators (of different nationalities), contributed significantly to the formation of a close

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<sup>16</sup> Ian Watson, *Towards a Third Theatre: Eugenio Barba and the Odin Teatret* (New York: Routledge, 1993).



social network that had all the attributes of a utopian transnational community. This community, living and creating far from the western theatrical establishment, played a key role in supporting, maintaining, and enhancing the popularity of the Barba legend. *Odin Teatret* and especially the establishment and functioning of the *International School of Theatre Anthropology* (ISTA) mark a decisive turn in the life of the legendary hero. The ‘moon of the Ganges’ ceases to inspire with its magical attraction the nomadic heart of the wandering traveller, who no longer seeks the truth and meaning of life in his mental and tangible journeys from the West to the East and vice versa. He is now a sedentary traveller instituting a new ‘unknown country’ guided by a supra-western (in the rhetorical sense of transcendence) sun. This is the sun of ecumenical togetherness. The prefix ‘supra-’ has a double meaning usually signifying transcendence and excess. In this context, ‘supra-western’ means primarily an ecumenical logic transcending all kinds of western nationalism and ethnocentrism. It also means an extremely western, deeply westernized, and westernizing conceptualization of the ecumenical. And of course, the two meanings define as a postmodern hybrid of interpretation the multifaceted notion of ‘globalization,’ the various connotations of which ideologically and practically underscore the appropriation of the ecumenical as an actually lived component, its objectification and finally its manipulation as an independent commodity.

#### V. The life-world of the myth of Barba

Barba set up a complete life-world – a ‘country’ or ‘homeland,’ as he calls it – grounding it on a common modality of living and acting and endowing it with a shared symbolic language. This language refers to a set of principles, rules and practices whose embodied exponents – the performers, who literally and metaphorically live in this country – repeat intentionally and fervently until they acquire a subconscious pre-expressive skill. This is the initiation rite and symbolic mark of belonging in Barba’s life-world. The social organization and cultural functioning of the community are tailored after the individualistic structures and agencies of archetypal utopian collectivities. The new theatre was first established as the *Eurasian Theatre* and later as the *Theatrum Mundi* (*Theatre of the World*). This is a development that goes even further away from the actually lived connection of theatre and the performing arts with their embodied social and subliminal cultural contexts. The emphasis on an individualistic technique as a common collective methodology of the new performativity

is not essentially a new invention but a multifaceted ‘bricolage’<sup>17</sup> of movements and training practices combining creative ‘appearing’ with combinatorial ‘Being.’ This is a postmodern hermeneutical usage of the modernist notion of the ‘establishment.’<sup>18</sup>

When there is a structural division of labour between the artists who perform the work on stage and the audience that watches it in an orderly, socially acceptable way, silently and without interrupting the performative realization, (re)presenting is a kind of monologue.<sup>19</sup> The institutionalization of (re)presenting as a monological (one voice, one logic) modality of expression and communication was the prelude to the objectification of the performing arts and their ensuing commodification.<sup>20</sup> In monological (re)presenting the sensorial and symbolic domains of a stage performance – the sound and visual components of the show on stage – are mainly set up and managed by the performers. Monological performance is a historical development of dialogical performance, the modality of which is central in ritual acts, whereby performers and the public realize and formulate together the production of the performative event. Monological (re)presenting through its centralized and centralizing hegemonic orientation is intertwined with the economic power and the political ideology of the social establishment of humanity across time and culture.

The monological authority of (re)presenting provoked a multitude of ideological and artistic reactions, which had as a common appeal

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<sup>17</sup> The French word ‘bricolage’ refers to the idea of creating something from diverse things that happen to be available and, by extension, the idea of constructing a reality using mixed methodologies.

<sup>18</sup> For a reflexive discussion on the relationship between the historical condition of Western modernity and the option of interpreting reality through either a modernist or postmodern hermeneutics, see Pavlos Kavouras, “The Past of the Present: From the Ethnography and the Performance of Music to the Performance of Musical Ethnography,” in *The Present of the Past: History, Folklore, Social Anthropology*, 307-359 (Athens: Society for the Study of Modern Greek Culture and General Education, 2003); Pavlos Kavouras, “Allegories of Nostalgia: Music, Tradition and Modernity in the Mediterranean Region,” in *Boundaries, Peripheries, Diasporas*, ed. Gr. Paschalidis, El. Hodolidou, and Iph. Vamvakidou, 263-288 (Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> *Monologue* (from Greek *monos* ‘alone’ and *legein* ‘to speak’) and its derivatives are used here metaphorically, extending its literal meaning as ‘speech monopolizing conversation’ to refer to a historical condition of social reality whereby a particular hegemonic modality determines the shaping and management of discourses about experience, expression and communication. See Pavlos Kavouras, “Ethnographies of Dialogical Singing, Dialogical Ethnography,” *Music and Anthropology* 10 (2006): 1-41; Pavlos Kavouras, “Voices, Meanings and Identities: Cultural Reflexivity in the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the XXVIII Olympiad in Athens,” in *Making Music, Making Meaning*, 375-394 (International Association for the Study of Popular Music, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

the liberation of artistic creativity from the economic and political establishment. Grotowski's conscious return to the dialogical modality of the ritual act in European theatre may be considered as one such great reaction to the monological condition of staging as (re)presenting. Similarly, with his *Theatrum Mundi*, Barba enabled performers from different cultures and artistic traditions to perform together, without relying on their particular stylistic knowledge and learned heritage, but also without denying them. The paradoxical modality of such a combinatorial option leads to (and is led by) a postmodern logic of a 'hybrid mutation of heterogeneous constituents.' This hybrid logic of composing mutation is rhetorically substantiated by the hermeneutical glorification of alterity, ideally expressed through the collective invocation 'All together, equally, everyone as he/she can and as he/she knows.' Transforming the invocation into a bonding preamble for his performers and collaborators, mainly regarding their technical constitution and stage discipline, Barba has founded his Other or New theatre on the solid ground of a shared, improvisational and experimental 'professionalism,' outside the star system and the hegemonic establishment of conventional art culture.

The long-term collaboration of the actors that follow *Theatre Anthropology*, the *Eurasian Theatre* and lastly, the *Theatrum Mundi* is based on a rebellious and idiosyncratic conception of art as a life-world. This conception is closely linked to the creation and consolidation of a self-referential collectivity that functions socially and artistically as a utopian community. The performers-members of the community express with their embodied and symbolic Being a specific iconoclastic idea about a radical (re)definition of the conservative principles of life and the ensuing habitual attitudes towards theatrical art. To this end, all members of the community are actively engaged to setting up and using a unified symbolic language connected to physicality and stage presence. They cultivate a common philosophy for the theatrical technique, of a new, revolutionary, as they believe, physicality, which bases its stage-centred peculiarity on the semiotic domination of the signifier over the signified: to the free, in fact liberated, signifier, which derives no meaning or interpretation, no signifying context, from the historical, social, artistic or cultural signifieds of other signifiers from the countries and places of origin of the performers, bearing diverse embodied experiences and critical reflexivities. This is actually the rebellious qua anarchist spirit informing Barba's community of performers; an iconoclastic ethos which challenges the status quo of life and art at all levels of its inception: sensorial, symbolic and imaginary.

But why is the collectivity of the rebellious performers of Barba's life-world conservative? The 'Performers' Village,' as Barba himself

calls the community of his collaborators, is the title of the fourth and final part of the book *The Moon Rises from the Ganges*. The title bears special symbolic significance for the myth of Barba. With it is announced not only the writing completion of the book, but also the completion of the wandering journey of the legendary traveller. The incessant nomadic movement of the hero is terminated as a result of his sedentary option to stay permanently in Denmark and institute his own stable hearth of social and artistic cohabitation with the initiated faithful Other: his co-travelling village performers.

Describing the ‘Performers’ Village,’ after a long and systematic ethnographic field-research, the Danish social anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup maintains that this ‘village’ is not a ‘global’ one. She describes it as an islet of culture that has no globalizing but transcultural orientation. The Performers’ Village is an autonomous entity with a special topography, social organization and cultural ontology – an islet that cultivates the idea of ‘tradition of traditions,’ a truly transcultural reality. In her *Introduction* to the book on the Performers’ Village, Hastrup highlights the life and work of the ‘villagers’ by connecting them directly with the *International School of Theatre Anthropology*.<sup>21</sup> But perhaps Hastrup’s most astonishing contribution toward a deeper understanding of Barba’s myth is her perceptive description of the Performers’ Village with the help of a metaphor that connects it directly to an archetypal European model of a medieval chivalric community. According to this view, the Performers’ Village has a hierarchical power structure, in which the Leader excels over all, followed by the Elders, then come the Nobles and finally the Jesters. As Hastrup maintains, the Leader and the Elders form an inner conclave that diligently guards the ‘secret of art,’ which is the hidden core of the symbolic constitution of the community. The conclave convenes regularly to articulate and assess the emerging signs of the manifestation of the secret of art and discuss the prospective of a wider dissemination of the principles and aesthetic values of Barba’s *Theatre Anthropology*. The third hierarchical group – the Nobles – is in charge of the action, that is, the practical implementation of the interior perceptions of the Village. However, it is the fourth group – the Jesters – which spreads, as Hastrup holds, the ‘sacred’ message of the ‘Village,’ as the Other theatre, to the external world. This happens because the Jesters, by virtue of their (social) ‘nature,’ are constantly moving and encounter people from diverse communities and performative situations. In this last hierarchical category of the Village social organization, Hastrup includes herself as a social anthropologist.

<sup>21</sup> Kirsten Hastrup, ed., *The Performers’ Village* (Gråsten: Drama, 1996).

The contemporary medieval Village of Performers is a utopian formation developed around the sacred idea of the secret art of performing and completed socially and artistically, like any reticent organization, through a ritualistic action that aims to move the Others out-there-in-the-world – the uninitiated – and attract them to its Tradition. This vision has been realized in recent years by means of the initiatives of *Theatrum Mundi*. Of particular interest is the historical background of the term, as it refers semantically to a specific and timeless conceptual framework of Western literature and, more broadly, civilization. *Theatrum Mundi* is a metaphysical interpretation of and approach to the world whereby the signifier ‘world’ as a whole is not limited to its signified parts expressed by the acting subjects, i.e., the performers, and their diverse audiences. This is an ambitious yet conservative choice that implicitly orients itself toward Baroque metaphysics to reiterate a timeless view of life as ‘theatre.’ Aligned with the interpretations of humanity’s life-world as products of great high-art traditions, *Theatrum Mundi* has been associated with a variety of metaphorical references from classical Greek and Hellenistic literature, medieval Arabic and Persian literature to Western European modern dramaturgy. According to these views, the sensible world is a ‘theatre’ – a ‘theatre of shadows,’ in the sense of it being a false perception of reality, as in Plato’s myth of the cave. The experience of the world as a transient awareness in the form of ‘theatrical vanity’ is encountered in one of the maxims of pseudo-Democritus (2<sup>nd</sup> century BC): “The world is a scene, life a passage. You come, you see, you go.” An anonymous Alexandrian poet (5<sup>th</sup> century AD) offers a similar view of the world to that of pseudo-Democritus: “All life is a stage and a game.”<sup>22</sup> For the medieval Sufi mystics, e.g. the Persian poet Omar Khayyam (11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century AD), the world is like a “chess game;”<sup>23</sup> for the Arab-Andalusian mystical philosopher Ibn al-Arabi (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century AD), it is the “shadow of the Absolute,” an “illusion of the human imagination.”<sup>24</sup> Perhaps the most famous phrase that captures the timeless conception of the ‘world’ as a theatre of life in Western modernity is due to Shakespeare and comes from his drama *As you Like it*: “All the world’s a stage.”<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Palladas, the Alexandrian, *The Greek Anthology and Other Ancient Greek Epigrams: A Selection in Modern Verse Translations*, ed. Peter Jay (London: Allen Lane, 1973), Book X, epigram 72.

<sup>23</sup> Omar Khayyâm, *The Quatrains*, trans. E.H. Whinfield (London: Trübner & Co, 1883).

<sup>24</sup> Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism. A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>25</sup> William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. Michael Hattaway (Cambridge, and New York:

*Theatrum Mundi* marks the institutionalization, that is, the stabilization, of the nomadic experimentation and constant wandering of Barba's performers-collaborators into a permanent hearth which gathers and codifies, together with the other sedentary realizations of the Village, the history of its development from the actually lived experiences and practices, trials and feats of the former wandering explorers of the Unknown. Such a stabilization in movement is almost always followed by a standardization of new ideas and practices. The history of the Village is a hybrid discourse of mythopoetics, as well as a systematic account of many persons and events, situations, and perspectives. It bridges in a peculiar yet dynamic and consistent way the incessant moving of the heroes of the Barba myth inside and across the pre-bourgeois European traditions of art and culture on the one hand, and on the other, the timeless high-art and other popular traditions of the performing arts of various cultures, first from Asia and later from Brazil and Africa. The selective reference to the 'familiar popular Other' (Commedia) and the 'foreign high-art popular Other' (Asian dance-theatre) first and later to the 'foreign folk or primitive Other' (Brazilian and African dance-theatre) underlines in an exemplary manner the eclectic affinity that exists between Barba and Rousseau.

I believe that cultural anthropology in general and performative anthropology<sup>26</sup> in particular can make significant contributions to the understanding of the Barba myth by calling our attention to unseen aspects of his 'Performers' Territory' as a coherent whole: the *Village*, *Odin Teatret*, the *International School of Theatre Anthropology*, the *Eurasian Theatre* and *Theatrum Mundi*. There is no doubt that Eugenio Barba is a unique personality, an embodied hero who carried out the 'feat,' in the mythical sense of the word, to connect diverse elements of art and culture into a single whole which conceptually and practically exceeds the sum of the historical signifieds culturally conveyed by its performative signifiers. Barba has repeatedly stressed that his *Theatre Anthropology* is neither a form of cultural anthropology nor anthropology of performance, and that one should seek the theoretical and methodological aspects of his term in a biological rather than a

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Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> The term 'performative' indicates a performed as well as performing dynamics of anthropological inquiry. Such an epistemological performativity helps to establish a self-reflexive orientation toward the anthropological discourse as an emergent realization of its formation and presence – an anthropological critique of anthropology based on heightened awareness with respect to the juxtaposition and reshuffling of subjectivities and objectivities. See, Kavouras, "Ethnographies of Dialogical Singing;" Kavouras, "Folklore and Tradition."

historical, social and cultural basis.<sup>27</sup> Here, in my opinion, lies the secret of the ‘mystery’ – the sacred idea – of Barba’s utopian myth. This myth is built on the dissociation of physical behaviour and mental functioning from the actually experienced cultural traditions through which the moving human ‘body’ is signified by the life-world and is, in turn, signifying it, manifesting with its movement subliminal or dispositional realizations of an historically wrought expressivity. Equally fundamental to the dynamics of the functioning and perpetuation of the myth is the creation of an ideological collectivity of skilled craftsmen who possess, promote, and establish through their off-stage teaching as well as on-stage performances a philosophy of a common methodology, that of pre-expressivity. Evaluating Barba’s venture from a social and cultural anthropological point of view, the ethnographic analyst may find it weak and rather volatile, as he knows from his systematic training as an anthropologist that consciousness, whatever its form – tangible, symbolic or imaginary – does not exist outside historically specific and actually living socio-cultural conditions of reality. However, considered as a live entity – idiosyncratic, utopian, iconoclastic, or as one might call it – Barba’s enterprise is a microcosm made up of several people who are whole-heartedly dedicated to a common cause about life and art, a world that is special and quite real even to the uninitiated Others, to the wider audience of this myth. As utopian communities are a topic extensively studied in social and cultural anthropology, the anthropological methodology of performative ethnography could be particularly useful to a thorough exploration of the relations between performers and performative practices and to shedding more light on significant aspects of the Barba myth that remain unknown or obscure to this day.

Thus far Barba’s new theatre on the one hand and cultural anthropology on the other have been compatible only as discourses that present the historical and ontological uniqueness of each as the Other without raising questions about (re)presenting and authority. Such transfers of the anthropological life world to the theatrical and vice versa that safely highlight the uniqueness of each genre without touching on such sensitive issues as methodological orientations, power realities, (re)presenting imaging and transcendental consciousness are not satisfactory from a critical perspective of transmigrating between and betwixt theatre and anthropology.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> That is, strictly speaking, social or cultural anthropological.

<sup>28</sup> By transmigrating I mean being aware of moving into the Other’s territory of Being, moving from theatre into anthropology and vice versa; and also showing actively respect for the

## VI. Performing otherness, othering performance

Barba's Other theatre is founded on the kinaesthetic idiom of pre-expressivity, which is the technical platform of new performativity. Performativity is a reflexive as well as practical condition of acting aiming at initiating change, referring to the awareness and potentiality of the social poetics of performed and performing deeds.<sup>29</sup> Put otherwise, performativity is a state of mind signifying the process of subject formation, which creates that which it purports to describe. Thus, performativity is a reflexive modality of social acting involving a critical perspective of trans-subjective realities. Barba's new performativity is inextricably linked to pre-expressivity that is, the philosophy of long and uninterrupted, repetitive training by the performers in order to become aware of their physical and mental capabilities and to develop them further. Focusing solely on physical and mental training with the intention to attain a non-verbal pre-stage acting consciousness is an arbitrary deed, because in this way performativity is stripped of the multiple signifieds of its symbolic and imaginary references, of its conscious and unconscious, historical and cultural contexts. The methodological reduction of traditional performativity in its diversity into the new philosophy of a performative qua kinaesthetic technique inevitably leads to a radical formalism that treats the performativity in question as a perfect (from a technical point of view) condition of preparing prior to stage acting. Barba's understanding of performativity as pre-expressivity differs greatly from the perception and usage of the same term in contemporary anthropology, in which performativity is grounded on ethnographic research based on actually lived experiences and trans-disciplinary dialogue.<sup>30</sup> Anthropological performativity is about the reflexive understanding and management of subjectivity as performance, its expression and perception, interpretation and communication, whether conscious or not. Moreover, the anthropological term 'performance' refers to an action that is carried

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Other's knowledge of its life world.

<sup>29</sup> Pavlos Kavouras, "Empowering Theatre Training through Performative Awareness: The Dialogics of Reflexivity and Transcendental Consciousness," in *Challenges of the Mind: New Directions on Theatre Training*, ed. Christine Schmalor (Berlin: World Theatre Training Institute, 2020).

<sup>30</sup> Kavouras, "Empowering Theatre Training;" Kavouras, "Ethnographies of Dialogical Singing;" Kavouras, "Voices, Meanings and Identities;" Pavlos Kavouras, *Chlendi and Xenitia. The Poetics of Exile in Rural Greece (Olymbos, Karpathos)* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1990).



out according to some commonly accepted rules informed by two distinct yet interrelated components. One component is poetical and determines the way, the process and the outcome of the realizing aspect of the action.<sup>31</sup> The second dimension is rhetorical and is related to the art of ‘persuasion,’ which aims to manipulate the opinion of the audience so that it agrees with the opinion of the orator-performer. The dynamics governing the relationship between the realizing and assessing components of performance has been studied thoroughly by cultural anthropology in a multi-cultural and diachronic perspective. In contemporary anthropological theory, there has been a shift of focus from the empiricism of ‘performance’ studies to a dialogical perspective of the performative condition as a new methodological paradigm of ethnographic inquiry that transcends the study of performance itself. Thus, using performative and dialogical ethnography as an analytical tool can help us better understand Barba’s new performativity from a broader, trans-disciplinary and trans-cultural, reflexive point of view.

A performance may or may not have the constitution of a show, as the stage action of the performers in front of an audience is one of the performing conditions of (re)presenting, but not the only one. Many cases have been recorded around the world and over time where performances are not identified as shows, as they refer to inner practices of self-purification for the purpose of attaining illumination.<sup>32</sup> In other situations as in ritual acts, one can distinguish between an initiated group of participants and an uninitiated audience, but again the performance as a whole cannot be reduced to any one of its differentiating manifestations, to any specific act of (re)presenting as witnessed by those present at the performative event. Moreover, the notion of ‘presenting’ or ‘(re)presenting’ signifies a conscious reality in which the human mind in general and the mind of the performers in particular produce and manage, by being in a state of awareness, concrete ‘images’ about the ensuing reality of the emergent performance at all levels of mentality – sensorial, symbolic and imaginary.

(Re)presenting signifies the act or practice of mental imaging of an idea or thing by someone for another.<sup>33</sup> Human consciousness is inextricably linked to the object and subject of knowledge, expression

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<sup>31</sup> In the sense of poetics i.e., the art of making or creating.

<sup>32</sup> Illumination is the state of consciousness in which there is annihilation of Ego mentality, resulting to self-knowledge.

<sup>33</sup> See Th. Vostantzoglou, *Anti-lexicon of Modern Greek Language* (Athens: Domi, 1962); Kavouras, “Empowering Theatre Training.”

and communication.<sup>34</sup> It may be argued then that a performance is a particular act of presenting a ritual act or a play on theatrical stage. However, the notion of '(re)presenting,' as indicated above, also refers to the mind's inner act of imaging in its encountering with the sensorial reality, as well as the abstract contemplative functioning of consciousness.<sup>35</sup> These 'images' do not have a visual or other sensorial identification but constitute mental (re)presentations of consciousness in its manifestation as knowledge, expression and communication. Although the idea and comprehension of (re)presenting is amply signified by the phrase 'performative (re)presenting on/off stage,' I choose to use the term '(re)presenting' to refer only to the inner (mental) reality of (re)presenting and 'stage performing' or 'ritual performing' to account for performative (re)presenting in the cases of a theatrical play on stage or a rite taking place in a ceremonial space, respectively. With this distinction it is possible now to describe more precisely the dialectical relationship between the two forms of (re)presenting, the inner and the outer i.e., mental, and theatrical or ritual. Such a description is analytically significant as it endows (re)presenting reflexivity with the potential to unfold in a two-way movement from the inner to the outer and vice versa.<sup>36</sup> This way mental (re)presenting or 'imaging' may be juxtaposed to ritual, ceremonial or theatrical performing yielding a dynamic intertwining and constant trans-configuration, as in the interplay between philosophy and art.

Performativity also means the state of being performative in the double sense of being performed and performing oneself. The awareness of subjectivity as performance does not necessarily imply that its reflexive quality must be of a (re)presenting kind, either mental or theatrical, ceremonial or ritual. Stage performativity (and the same is true of 'imaging' or mental (re)presenting) depends on an intentional and self-centred action of the performer or thinker in which the action itself develops as a relation between its subject and object. In other words, performativity is connected to mental and stage (re)presenting through imaging. The performer casts images and at the same time manages a consciously fluid and often indeterminate awareness of

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<sup>34</sup> See Kavouras, "Empowering Theatre Training;" Kavouras, "Folklore and Tradition;" Kavouras, "Ritual Act and Dramaturgy;" Kavouras, "Ethnographies of Dialogical Singing;" Kavouras, "Voices, Meanings and Identities."

<sup>35</sup> Kavouras, "Empowering Theatre Training."

<sup>36</sup> This distinction is important in Greek because it allows the discernment between mental imaging and artistic performing, which are traditionally rendered by the same term (*ana parastasi* or (re)presenting).

his ego-consciousness as a symbolic and imaginary feat performed autonomously, outside of himself-the-actor, in front of an audience, on stage. Performativity as self-reflexive subjectivity manifested through performative awareness may be just an act of improvising or better an emergent presence, devoid of any imaging. Such performances are the self-reflexive or 'spiritual' exercises of the mystical traditions of the various peoples of the world, which aim at taming, harnessing and eliminating the performative Ego by annihilating imaging and, eventually, (re)presenting. In this esoteric dynamic, we must seek the obsession of Barba and his collaborators to discover the 'secret of performance,' which for them is pre-expressive physical and mental consciousness, the embodied awareness of acting prior to theatrical (re)presenting.

There are two ways to transcend (re)presenting or imaging in performativity. The first is cultural and is closely related to the states of mind of the performers and their audiences, through the prevailing 'structures of sentiment,'<sup>37</sup> as well as their shared embodied habitus. Cultural transcendence is embedded in the actually lived historicity of each artistic tradition and is manifested as an inherent and subconscious knowledge. Under certain performative conditions, which are historically and culturally determined, it can lead to a rupture of habitual consciousness through Ego's surrendering engrossment in the emerging That of its (re)presenting subjectivity. The momentary rapture caused by the mutual annihilation of the rhetorical confirmation of Ego through the transitory removal of its poetical faculty of (re)presenting or othering marks the emergence of a new performativity that signifies nothing other but itself.<sup>38</sup> Although such a performative transcendence is devoid of any (re)presenting, it does not last very long. Habitual consciousness and the cultural constitution of social reality compel the reflecting Ego to re-establish itself in a new mental and performative condition of imaging and (re)presenting.

The second way is mystical and is encountered in all the esoteric doctrines of the world. The mystical way of transcending Ego relies on the deliberate cessation of the constant activity of the human mind, by means of which a complete annihilation of imaging and (re)presenting as manifestations of Ego-consciousness is attained. The mystical way of taming and harnessing Ego-performativity is not unknown to Barba. The irony is that he came to know this methodology in the exotic guise of his imaginary otherness through 'India,' on his very first trip to the East, when he encountered Kathakali dance

<sup>37</sup> Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters* (New York: Schocken, 1979).

<sup>38</sup> Longinus, and William Smith, *Dionysius Longinus: On the Sublime* (Dublin: S. Powell, 1740).

and yogic practice. The performative techniques of the local students who impressed him so much, used cultural and esoteric techniques of taming and harnessing ego-performativity. Barba was aware of the value of the spiritual methodology of Yoga, as evidenced by his multiple references to the ancient Yoga system of the Indian mystic Patanjali.<sup>39</sup> Barba's choice to adopt only the outer, preparatory components of a holistic methodology of artistic and at the same time spiritual training is clearly an individual appropriation of an actually lived and embodied otherness. This is a case of manifestation of orientalism – instrumental, to be more precise, orientalism. The instrumental usage of the transcendental methodology of Katakhalī performativity and its transformation into a technical framework of pre-expressivity are deeply reductive acts, disconnecting and discarding the cultural historical bridging of (re)presenting with performativity and the reflexive juxtaposing of Ego-imaging with the enacted potentiality of Ego-transcending. Put otherwise, it is an act of appropriation violating the actually lived and embodied unity of an otherly (Indian, Katakhalī) manifestation of otherness alongside with its othering orientations.<sup>40</sup> The terms 'awareness' and 'renunciation' refer to two distinct yet interconnected processes of spiritual training that lead the practitioner, through meditation, actually to experience a non-dualistic state of consciousness.<sup>41</sup> Barba, like his mentor Grotowski, was well aware of the esoteric dynamics of Yoga. But unlike his great companion in theatre, Barba secularized and instrumentalised the spiritual methodology, as he did with the artistic and cultural traditions of the world with which he came in contact. Thus, as the horizon of training was radically changed, revealing a totally new prospective of physical training strictly for the sake of performative staging, transcendence of the (re)presenting and imaging of the moving Ego through spiritual enlightenment was lost for ever in Barba's condition of theatricality. Pre-expressivity emerged at the expense of transcendental consciousness and kinaesthetic awareness of pre-stage mobility prevailed against the self-reflexive potentiality of attaining through theatre training and theatre making the 'samadhi' state of 'undisturbed non mobility'.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> See, for instance, the entire chapter titled "Awareness and renunciation," in Barba, 2015; Patanjali, *Yoga Sutras. Kriya yoga and kaivalya yoga*, ed. S. V. Ganapati (Madras: Hindi Prachar Press, 1962).

<sup>40</sup> Otherness refers to the mental (and social) state of being an Other, whereas othering is the mental (and social) process of reflecting otherness and is also otherness itself. See, Kavouras, "An Allegorical Anthropology;" Kavouras, "Empowering Theatre Training;" Kavouras, "Ethnographies of Dialogical Singing;" Kavouras, "Voices, Meanings and Identities."

<sup>41</sup> This state is called 'samadhi' or illumination in Yoga.

<sup>42</sup> In a personal communication I had with Barba in September 2020, he said to me bluntly: "I do theatre, not yoga." I fully respect this view, but I still believe that the 'artistic' appropriation of a reflexive methodology that blends harmoniously the cultural historical component of an

The debate over transcending the established logic of stage performance through self-awareness finds strong foundations in the idea and practice of studios and laboratories in twentieth-century European theatre.<sup>43</sup> Theatrical labs placed special emphasis on ‘training’ as opposed to ‘performance.’ With training they emphasized the experience of life itself and not just stage reality. As such theatrical labs created the preconditions for a dynamic approach beyond (re)presenting, favouring a more aware and self-reflexive condition of theatrical being in the world. The concept of theatrical lab is closely linked to Barba’s theatre. However, the dimension of training as we have already seen does not go beyond a kinaesthetic cultivation and promotion of the individual physical element. In other words, the Ego of performance dominates the Ego of training, thus blocking the removal of its presence as such. Barba’s utilization of theatre laboratory reduces training to self (re)presenting through the self-affirmation of the stage Ego. Conversely, theatre laboratory in the hands of Grotowski and Brook elevated training to self-reflexivity and, eventually, self-annihilation.

One last remark: The iconoclastic legend of Barba shows a remarkable dedication to the arts of theatre and dance, without showing an analogous interest in literature and music. It uses oral or written speech, sounds and silences, rhythm, melody and harmony in a peculiar way that aims at utilizing the poetical and rhetorical methodology of literature and music in the stage context of a dance-theatrical performance. I believe that this choice is primarily due to Barba’s negative reaction to the hegemonic logocentrism of Western theatre, expressed through the predominance of the text or script in a stage performance and the authoritarianism of directing.<sup>44</sup> Barba’s attitude towards the authority of music as an autonomous art of sounds is similar to his approach to written discourse or directing habitus in theatre contexts. In Barba’s performances, music appears on stage as a spontaneous and improvisational partner, which is devoid of any cultural and reflexive connotations, as an ingenious supporter of the dance-theatrical becoming. This is because pre-expressive consciousness, which aims at perfecting physicality as

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actually lived humanity with the spiritual-transcendental one, and the subsequent management of the expropriated reality in such an instrumental way so as to satisfy the interests of the appropriator reflects vividly the hegemonic relation of the Western subject to his object – the objectified Other. See, Kavouras “An Allegorical Anthropology.”

<sup>43</sup> Mirella Schino, *Alchemists of the Stage: Theatre Laboratories in Europe* (Holstelbro, Malta, and Wrocław: Icarus Publishing Enterprise, 2009).

<sup>44</sup> This is a view that is fully in line with the improvisational and artist-centred professionalism of the *Commedia dell’arte*.

stage self-knowledge rules out in principle any artistry connected to musical enculturation and achieved humanity. No matter how much improvisation potentially or essentially frees us from the shackles of the establishment, it cannot undo the traditional art of a historical, artistic enculturation and autonomous creative practice. A formalist reshuffle is nothing but a severe reductionism, stripping artistic formations of their traditional significations with reference to social habitus and emergent self-reflexivity. Liberation from the hegemonic establishment of any art culture cannot be accomplished solely through an anti-hegemonic aesthetic with the help of a politics of form. Such a prospective must rely on actually lived experiences of artistry along with a policy of redefining the reflexive priorities and spiritual needs of humanity. By ‘humanity’ I do not mean the ethnocentric appropriation of the concept by Western civilization. I mean, first, the political coexistence of different peoples and cultures through art, and second, the self-reflexive prospective of a constant search for the cultural and spiritual significations of Selfhood and Otherness – what it means to be ‘human.’

Sounds and silences, collective and individual songs, vocal and rhythmical effects, pre-existing tunes and melodies, sonic improvisations: they all contribute to establishing the volatile soundscape of the new stage performativity, according to the coordinating dictates of the aesthetics of physicality and pre-expressivity. In contrast to the formalistic use of music by Barba, Grotowski and Brook (the other two of the historical trio of contemporary Western theatre reformers) incorporated music as a vocal or instrumental creation, as a song, as a soundscape and silence, as rhythm, but never reduced it to a stage component devoid of its cultural, reflexive and spiritual connotations.<sup>45</sup> However, understanding the importance of music or sound in general as an empowering constituent of stage performing enhancing receptivity on the part of the audience, Barba created the notion of the ‘complete actor,’ i.e. the performer who narrates, converses, sings and plays music, dances and emits in every possible way a ‘mysterious energy,’ as he called it, on and off stage. This mysterious energy is, according to him, theatre itself.

Eugenio Barba: A legend, a myth, a symbolic world of agencies and structures, a space-time continuum with a peculiar multi-modality,

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<sup>45</sup> The focus on self-reflexivity through ritual activity and the perspective of music as a concrete pathway leading the subject of music to the awakening of his or her spiritual consciousness was greatly influenced by the life and works of the esoteric philosopher G.I. Gurdjieff, whom Grotowski and Brook highly esteemed. See, for instance, Peter Brook, *Playing by Ear: Reflections on Sound and Music* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2019).

a rebellious cry against the western bourgeois and postmodern establishment in art and culture, the apotheosis of stage performativity at the expense of traditional (re)presenting, a utopian community with dedicated members who adopted the myth and worshipped its legend, contributing greatly with their life and work to creating and institutionalizing a unique landmark in the history of world theatre and the performing arts. So many lessons yet to be learned from the myth of Barba.

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# The Possibilities, Limits, and Complexities of Triage in COVID-19 Regime

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## **Abstract**

*The new and prevailing Corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic is an extremely contagious virus. Scientific research has gone far in the study and treatment of the virus. One of the things known about it at present is that its spread depends on social contact. In this paper, I consider the challenge that allocation of scarce medical resources poses in the fight against COVID-19. Millions have been infected, just as the number of diseased also runs in thousands. The allocation of scarce medical resources during the COVID-19 pandemic regime poses a challenge to healthcare providers. In attempting to save the lives of COVID-19 patients, how should we allocate ventilators or vaccines? Since ventilators, or as at present vaccines, are scarce compared to the number of patients that need it for survival, who should get one? To address this challenge, healthcare providers often resort to triage, especially in Emergency Departments (EDs) and intensive care units (ICUs). In this paper, I discuss the possibilities, limits, and complexities associated with the principle of triage in the distribution of scarce medical resources in the treatment and attempt to save the lives of COVID-19 patients. I contend that triage as a principle of distribution of scarce health resources fails in the distribution of scarce life-saving resources to COVID-19 patients. I aim to show that the triage protocol approach fails in terms of clinical and non-clinical evidence as well as regarding procedural issues associated with its application.*

**Keywords:** *COVID-19; complexities; medical utility; scarcity; social utility; triage*

## I. Introduction

**C**oronavirus (COVID-19) recently emerged as a new and novel coronavirus in China. Its rapid spread has gained national and international recognition, hence posing a global health emergency and challenge. The coronavirus disease, otherwise known as COVID-19,

is a highly transmittable and pathogenic viral infection caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), which emerged in Wuhan, China and spread around the world.<sup>1</sup> The management of the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of containment and treatment leads to severe scarcity of the needed medical resources. This is because the number of victims, just as we often have in other pandemics, outweighs the available resources. When the demand for medical treatment and resources significantly outweighs available resources, it becomes imperative to make drastic and urgent decisions about “who will and will not” receive these scarce resources. A significant challenge for healthcare providers is how to develop triage protocols to guide the allocation of scarce critical care resources during pandemic incidents, as we presently have in the COVID-19 regime. COVID-19 as a pandemic has engendered a situation whereby the number of patients jostling for scarce medical resources or treatment far outstrips the available resources. The scarcity of resources could be of critical care beds, shortages of mechanical ventilators, vaccines and other life-saving treatments or supports. It could be shortage of health personnel in comparison to the number of patients that needs attention. In some cases, it could be scarcity of one or all these resources. The scarcity of resources creates a situation in which too many patients demand available resources which cannot go round. This leads to the problem of “rationing” or “prioritization” of the limited available resources. Who should get and who should not get? This is how the principle of triage arises and becomes relevant to the treatment of COVID-19 as a pandemic. Triage is a principle of distribution of scarce health resources/medical treatment often aimed at maximizing the value of survivability. Triage is often described as a utilitarian principle for distribution of scarce medical resources based on the severity of patients’ conditions, especially in the ICUs, and the EDs. It is based on the opportunities or chances of survival of patients. The decisions of how to choose who should receive intensive care and who should not in a pandemic period (as with presently in the COVID-19 case) presents a panoply of legal, medical and moral problems. In this paper, I will focus on the moral dimensions of the problem.

In the ongoing fight against corona virus (COVID-19), virtually all the countries are faced with this problem of scarcity of medical resources as a result of the large number of infected patients. In this situation, physicians and other health workers often resort to the principles of triage as a distributive principle. What is triage? What are the prospects

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<sup>1</sup> Muhammad Adnan Shereen, et al., “COVID-19 Infection: Origin, Transmission, and Characteristics of Human Coronaviruses,” *Journal of Advanced Research* 24 (2020): 91-98.

of triage? How does it work? As a procedure of distributive justice, does triage accommodate moral equality and fairness in the fight against COVID-19? Are there some limits, as well as complexities to triage as a principle for distribution of scarce medical resources?

In this paper, I discuss the possibilities, limits, and complexities associated with the principles of triage in the distribution of scarce medical resources in the fight against the Corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic. In discussing this, I aim to demonstrate that triage fails considering the limits and complexities associated with it. I will show this failure in terms of clinical and non-clinical evidence, as well as the procedural issues associated with the application of triage. This becomes important because physicians and other health workers that apply the principle of triage during COVID-19 often assume that it is the best principle of distribution to be used for allocation of scarce medical resources in a pandemic like the COVID-19 one. It has also been erroneously assumed that it is problem-free since it is the best in a pandemic situation like COVID-19.

In pursuing this task, the paper is divided into five sections. The first section, this introductory aspect, presents the anatomy of the paper as well as what each section is about and what to be expected from each section. The second section carries out an elaborate discussion of triage as a principle of distribution of scarce medical resources generally. What triage is and the way it operates as a principle of distribution of scarce medical resources will be elaborated. The third section demonstrates the failure of triage as a distributive principle vis-à-vis its limits and complexities. In this section, it will be demonstrated that triage as a principle of distribution of scarce medical resources is relevant and attractive but bedeviled by several limits and complexities. The limits and complexities will be identified and shown to be responsible for its failure in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. This is against the view or assumption that triage is the best principle of application for the distribution of scarce medical resources in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. In the fourth section, an attempt will be made towards some recommendations. These recommendations will be with a view to suggest ways whereby the limits and complexities identified with the application of triage principle in a pandemic situation like the COVID-19 one could be overcome by improving triage to work better. This will be followed by the fifth but the last section, which is the conclusion where the major issues discussed in the paper will be summarized. I now turn to the next section for the discussion of triage as a principle of distribution of scarce medical resources.

## II. Triage as a procedure of distribution of scarce health resources

The question of “how do we justify the selection criterion of those who will receive priority treatment (especially during a pandemic) among a large group of severely ill-patients?” makes the principle of triage very relevant to medical practice. According to Iserson et al., “triage” is most commonly used to mean the sorting of patients for treatment priority in EDs and in multi-casualty incidents, disasters, and battlefield settings.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, for others, triage as an outgrowth of battlefield medicine, is the practice of sorting patients according to the urgency of their needs under emergency conditions in which such needs are likely to be urgent and medical resources scarce.<sup>3</sup> Etymologically, the term “triage” is derived from the French word *trier*, to sort, it was originally used to describe the sorting of agricultural products.<sup>4</sup> In medical practice, triage is used for the assignment of degrees of urgency to wounds, diseases or illnesses, to decide the order or treatment of a large number of patients or casualties. It serves as a principle of deciding the order of treatment of patients or casualties.

Triage is sometimes described as a process of determining the priority of patients’ treatment based on the severity of their condition when resources are insufficient for all to be treated immediately. It involves the evaluation and categorization of the ill, sick, or wounded when there are insufficient resources for medical care of everyone at once or immediately. It aims at deciding which patients should be treated first based on how sick or seriously injured they are. It further aims at sorting victims, as of a battle, pandemic, or disaster, to determine medical priority to increase the number of survivors. According to Childress, triage involves, first, a determination of the need for treatment and its probable success or futility and, second, the establishment of priorities for treatment and evacuation. Similar formal policies have been adopted for civil disasters, such as nuclear destruction and earthquakes. These policies often give priority to those who perform critical roles.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Kenneth V. Iserson, and John C. Moskop, “Triage in Medicine: Part 1: Concept, History, and Types,” *Annals of Emergency Medicine* 49, no. 3 (2007): 275.

<sup>3</sup> James F. Childress, “Triage in Neonatal Intensive Care: The Limitations of a Metaphor,” *Virginia Law Review* 69, no. 3 (1983): 547-561.

<sup>4</sup> Gerald R. Winslow, *Triage and Justice: The Ethics of Rationing Life-Saving Medical Resources* (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 1982), 169.

<sup>5</sup> Childress, 547-561.

Historically, the practice of triage arose from difficulties emanating from war, and it remains closely associated with military medicine. As opined by Iserson and Moskop, the earliest documented systems designed to distribute health care systematically among wounded and sick warriors date back only to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> Hence, medical utility has been the major impetus for and the major determinant of systems of triage.<sup>7</sup> According to Iserson and Moskop, beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, military surgeons developed and implemented the first battlefield triage rules in the West; little is known about triage elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> Most scholars attribute the first formal battlefield triage system to the distinguished French military surgeon Baron Dominique-Jean Larrey, Chief Surgeon of Napoleon's Imperial Guard.<sup>9</sup> Larrey recognized a need to evaluate and categorize wounded soldiers promptly during a battle. Based on this, his target was to treat and evaluate those requiring the most urgent medical attention. Sometimes, triage in war implies assigning priority to the worst off, rather than the best off.

Moreso, subsequently, John Wilson (British Naval Surgeon) was credited with the next major contribution to the military triage.<sup>10</sup> In 1846, in particular, Wilson argued concerning triage that to make their efforts most effective, surgeons should focus on those patients who need immediate treatment and for whom treatment is likely to be successful, deferring treatment for those whose wounds are less severe and those whose wounds are probably fatal with or without immediate intervention.<sup>11</sup> Larrey's proposal is that priority goes to the most seriously injured while Wilson's dictum is that the hopelessly injured should not be treated. However, triage in its primary sense is the sorting of patients for treatment in situations of at least modest resource scarcity, according to an assessment of the patient's medical condition and the application of an established sorting system or plan.<sup>12</sup> It is important to point out that Larrey's original intention was not targeted at triage as a principle of distribution of scarce medical

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<sup>6</sup> Iserson, and Moskop, 276.

<sup>7</sup> Childress, 551.

<sup>8</sup> Iserson, and Moskop, 276.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher R. Blagg, "Triage: Napoleon to the Present Day," *Journal of Nephrology* 17, no. 4 (2004): 629-632.

<sup>10</sup> David E. Hogan, and Julio Rafael Lairret, "Triage," in *Disaster Medicine*, eds. David E. Hogan, and Jonathan L. Burstein, 12-28 (Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Williams and Wilkins, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> James Watt, "Doctors in the Wars," *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 77, no. 4 (1984): 265-267.

<sup>12</sup> Iserson, and Moskop, 278.

resources. In reading his autobiography, one cannot help than to be fascinated by his outrage over the wanton and unnecessary loss of life caused by unsystematic, ad hoc and haphazard treatment of casualties in the Napoleon's Grand Army. In response to this, his primary concern was not to allocate scarce medical resources but to stop the wastage by developing a system of "prompt and methodical succor received by the wounded on the field of battle."<sup>13</sup> This was targeted at assigning treatment priorities to the wounded casualties at the battlefield.

In terms of systems and types of triage, the most common types are ED triage; inpatient (ICU) triage; incident (multicausality) triage; military (battlefield) triage; and; disaster (mass casualty) triage.<sup>14</sup> In brief, ED triage is designed to identify the most urgent (or potentially most serious) cases to ensure that they receive priority treatment, followed by the less urgent cases on a first-come, first-served basis. Inpatient triage has to do with decision making about patients that require hospitalization, but the assessment conditions are made according to some system or plan during scarcity of resources. The incident triage is designed to respond to an emergency that creates multiple casualties, whose numbers outstrip the available medical resources. The military triage is designed to determine treatment for injured or wounded soldiers in the battlefield. The objective of the military triage is simple and clear: to save the most salvageable so that they can contribute to the common good which is victory in the battlefield. The disaster triage is designed to determine who receives treatment and who will not after a natural (example, earthquake or volcanic eruption) or manmade disaster that leads to too many casualties in the face of limited resources. But hospital emergency provides yet a better setting for triage system. In a three-category system, a triage officer identifies a patient's need as "immediate" (posing a threat of death or serious physical impairment if not treated immediately), "urgent" (requiring prompt but not immediate treatment), or "nonurgent."<sup>15</sup>

Triage systems in most cases and situations have been tailored towards promoting the utilitarian principle of utility maximization which holds that an action is right if it promotes the greatest balance of good over evil for the greatest number of people, otherwise wrong. In line with this, Winslow asserts that triage systems characteristically are based on an implicit or explicit utilitarian rationale. They all have

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<sup>13</sup> Dominique J. Larrey, *Surgical Memoirs of the Campaign in Russia*, trans. John C. Mercer (Philadelphia: Carey and Lea, 1832), 109.

<sup>14</sup> Iserson, and Moskop, 278.

<sup>15</sup> Childress, 550.



been designed to produce the greatest good for the greatest number, to serve the common good, or to meet human needs most effectively and efficiently under conditions of scarcity.<sup>16</sup> Often times, this goal of targeting the production of the greatest good for the greatest number of people contributes to the limits and complexity of triage as a principle for the distribution of scarce medical resources in a pandemic hospital situation as it is the case with COVID-19 presently. This is the argument of the paper which will be pursued anon, in the next section. However, it is important to note that utilitarianism as a theory is not the only possible justification for triage. Triage could also be justified on right-based ethics. But in any case, it should be noted as well that I am not arguing for the justification of triage. That's not the focus of the paper. More on this claim subsequently. I now turn to the discussion of the argument of the paper.

### III. Triage Application to the Distribution of Health resources in the COVID-19 Regime: Possibilities, Limits, and Complexities

In this part of the paper, I discuss the possibilities, limits, and complexities of triage as a principle of the distribution of scarce medical resources during a pandemic period. COVID-19 is a pandemic ravaging humanity since December 2019, till present. Hitherto, there are some scientifically tested and confirmed vaccines (AstraZeneca, Johnson & Johnson, Moderna, Pfizer) for the cure, prevention and boosting of immune system against coronavirus. As a matter of fact, clinical trials for COVID-19 therapies have been completed. This is important because in the containment, treatment and the overall management of covid-19 pandemic, only the science-data and evidence are largely regarded as persuasive. As people are being affected in thousands in most countries of the world, health workers are being overwhelmed because the number of patients is outstripping the available medical resources. This has led and keeps leading health workers to adopt and apply the principle of triage in the treatment of COVID-19 patients in the real hospital situations, especially in ICUs of EDs. Physicians in such situations have resorted to the principle of triage believing it is the best option for such a situation. They resort to triage as the best method during scarcity of medical resources in a pandemic without paying adequate attention to its limits and complexities, as we have in the COVID-19 regime presently. This reinforces the importance of the argument of this paper to call the attention of the medical personnel

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<sup>16</sup> Winslow, 21.

as well as the decision makers to these limitations, complexities, and challenges.

There is no doubt that it is quite possible to adopt and apply triage system in a pandemic period as we have with the present COVID-19 pandemic. This possibility started in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with Surgeon Baron Dominique Jean Larrey; Chief Surgeon of Napoleon Guard, which was necessitated by the need to categorize wounded soldiers according to the severity of their injury to know who receives treatment first because of shortage of medical resources and personnel, as discussed in the previous section. This was also necessary to determine the level of salvageability of each patient or soldier to maximize the available resources. Since then, till the present, triage system has been in operation, in one form or the other, especially during pandemics, as we have today. However, there is a need to discuss its limits and complexities as impediments to the application of triage in the COVID-19 pandemic in particular and all pandemics in general. This task is the focus of this section of the paper and the entire business of the paper. In doing this, it is pertinent to note that I am not arguing for a utilitarian justification of triage principles rather I am arguing to demonstrate the limits and complexities of triage which could be utilitarian or otherwise.

First, the *modus operandi* of triage protocol is too complex to give us a specific direction in a pandemic period. Triage system focuses on the utilitarian rationale of distribution based on the production of the greatest good for the greatest number as the most effective and efficient approach to maximize scarce medical resources during a pandemic period. The utilitarian stipulation of “the greatest good for the greatest number” as the effective way of operating triage is too complex and diverse. It is not specific enough on how to determine which patient(s) constitute the greatest number. The requirement of the greatest good for the greatest number may vary from one locality to the other. To corroborate this view, Childress asserts that more significantly, the utilitarian rationale may vary depending on which individuals and groups are included in the blanket “greatest number.” The greatest good for one group, such as those needing medical care, may not be in the best interests of the society as a whole.<sup>17</sup> This is not just a problem to the utilitarian rationale of distribution which is embedded in a triage system. In addition to that, it leads to complexity and creates a limit for triage since it does not specify the category of patients that constitute “the greatest number” during a pandemic,

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<sup>17</sup> Childress, 551.

as we have presently in COVID-19. Such ambiguous and arbitrary stipulation does not help in an emergency like the COVID-19 one.

For example, the greatest number for one group, such as those needing medical care, may not be in the best interests of the society as a whole. Among COVID-19 infected patients, we have politicians, health workers, businessmen and women, civil servants, among others, all need urgent medical care and attention. Which group should constitute the greatest number that should enjoy the greatest good, such that the best interests of the society as a whole is represented and protected? This question is important because not all of them will get the needed medical care. The utilitarian principle of utility, which sometimes serves as the focus of triage in a pandemic period like the COVID-19 regime does not help. Among politicians, health workers and many other people, it is not clear whose interest serves the best interest of the society. This is complex to ascertain with utilitarian rationale recommended by a triage protocol. It also poses a limit to the operation of triage in a pandemic. Even if the line for the greatest number can be drawn, it is not the case that utility has the final say in the distribution of scarce medical resources in a pandemic. Silva et al. recognizes this by maintaining that “utility is not necessarily the first or sole ethics principle to consider when allocating resources such as ventilators in a pandemic influenza.”<sup>18</sup> Triage could also be justified from the point of view of right-based ethics or even from a contractarian viewpoint of justification. Hence, utilitarianism does not hold the sole key for the moral justification of triage as a distributive principle in a pandemic like COVID-19.

From the discussion of triage above, it is clear that the systems of triage target how to determine those patients that are “salvable” or “salvageable” because of their focus on effectiveness and efficiency. Maximization of the principle of salvageability is the focus here. But salvageability possesses two different meanings in terms of medical utility and social utility. For example, giving priorities to infected health workers in a COVID-19 regime is already emphasizing social utility because the focus will be that they should recover quickly and go back to their duty post assisting to take care of other patients, and the earlier, the better. Social worth or what White et al. described as “social value” refers to “one’s overall worth to society. It involves summary judgments about whether a person’s past and future contributions to

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<sup>18</sup> Diego S. Silva, et al., “Contextualizing Ethics: Ventilators, H1N1 and Marginalized Populations,” *Healthcare Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (2010): 32-36.

society's goals merit prioritization for scarce resources.”<sup>19</sup> Herreros et al. also asserts that the social value of any act or person depends on a myriad of factors, many of which are difficult to measure. Even if this putative social value could be measured, healthcare professionals are neither trained nor fit to make this assessment.<sup>20</sup> This creates a serious problem when social value becomes the yardstick or criterion for determining who should get scarce medical resources or attention when it cannot go round.

But when achieving medical utility becomes the focus of a triage system, we will surely have a different picture and result, the attention will shift from the value placed on the health workers to medical needs of every patient as an autonomous individual who also need medical salvageability and whose life matter just like the life of every other person. These two different views of salvageability as a utilitarian maximizing value lead to different moral values. According to Childress, medical utility recognizes the value of life; social utility recognizes the differential value of specific or general functions. The latter infringes the principle of equal regard for life. Appeals to social utility may be justified in some crises but there is a heavy presumption against them.<sup>21</sup> The point is that the application of triage to the distribution of scarce medical resources during COVID-19 does not specifically state whether medical utility or social utility should take paramount importance. This complicates the different senses of salvageability. The inability of triage to distinguish different senses of salvageability which it sets to maximize further leads to the complexity of triage as a principle of distribution of scarce medical resources in the COVID-19 regime. Also, “the principle of maximization of lives saved is insufficient in conditions of severe scarcity,”<sup>22</sup> as we have presently in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Often time, triage system is carried out in a way to accommodate the “common good.” But how do we define the “common good?” According to Jonsen and Garland, “the common good” includes, not only ends to be realized, such as fairness, to be expressed and respected but also involves other values that may not be defined from the

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<sup>19</sup> Douglas B. White, et al., “Who Should Receive Life Support during a Public Health Emergency? Using Ethical Principles to Improve Allocation Decisions,” *Annals of Internal Medicine* 150, no. 2 (2009): 132-138.

<sup>20</sup> Benjamin Herreros, et al., “Triage during COVID-19 Epidemic in Spain: Better and Worse Arguments,” *Journal of Medical Ethics* 46, no. 7 (2020): 455-458.

<sup>21</sup> Childress, 553.

<sup>22</sup> Sabine Michalowski, et al., *Triage in the COVID-19 Pandemic: Bioethical and Human Rights Considerations*, Technical Report (Essex: Essex Autonomy Project and the Ethics of Powerlessness Project, University of Essex, 2020), <https://repository.essex.ac.uk/27292/>.

beginning. To determine the “common good,” it becomes necessary to specify the relative weight of these various ends, values and principles. For example, how much weight should be accorded to the expression of the equal value of human life? This value may be so fundamental that it should not be sacrificed short of the exigencies, and even then, only when many lives or the community itself is at stake. Perhaps it should not be sacrificed at all in the practice of medicine.<sup>23</sup> Triage protocol often does not recognize the principle of fairness.

The limit and complexity of triage become evident as it does not recognize or respect the moral principle of fairness. In the application of triage protocol, there is no room for fair treatment of all the involved parties as individuals that deserve equal treatment. By disregarding and neglecting the principle of fairness in the allocation of scarce medical resources by triage, it consequently disregards and relegates the expression of the principle of equal value of human life. But human life matters and should matter equally. Triage protocol willingly sacrifices this principle. As we live in a morally pluralistic society, it is difficult if not impossible to agree on a set of criteria to establish that one person is intrinsically more worthy of saving than another. This leads to a big limitation to its application as an approach to distributing life-saving scarce resources to COVID-19 infected patients. This becomes important because of a huge difference between equal value of life and equality of life. Triage often focuses on equality of life, which is about social worth, to the detriment of equal value of life, which is about equal moral consideration. Triage system could not clearly handle the distinction between medical utility and social utility. A triage system that incorporates social utility must consider the patient’s medical need as well as general social worth. Triage fails in this regard because of its limit.

Triage also is limited in terms of the best chances of survival of patients in a pandemic. In most cases, triage focuses on the best chances of survival of patients as a criterion for allocating scarce medical resources. This method is good because it is not bad in itself; after all, it aims at achieving a good possible result for the society or public during a pandemic as we have in COVID-19 today. However, it comes with a limitation. Assigning priority to COVID-19 patients with the best chances of survival no doubt incorporates medical utility. This produces the greatest good for the greatest number of COVID-19 patients.

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<sup>23</sup> Albert R. Jonsen, and Michael J. Garland, “Moral Policy: Life/Death Decisions in the Intensive Care Nursery,” *Medical Dimensions* 6, no. 4 (1977): 27-35; Childress also recognized this point in Childress, 555-556.

A triage system that bases its exclusive predictions on the chances of survival faces some limitation. The limitation is that medical utility is only guided by medical outcomes. And medical outcomes cannot be predicted with accuracy. Particularly, in the fight against the present COVID-19, this limitation is real because not all issues related to COVID-19 are known, yet. The prediction of medical outcome in the COVID-19 regime is as restrictive as what is known about it presently is restrictive. Medical outcome is restrictive as the knowledge available about COVID-19 is. Also, the diagnosis and prognosis of COVID-19 patients do not only differ but change with time depending on the body mechanism of each patient. Some are symptomatic while others are asymptomatic even after testing positive to COVID-19. According to Wang et al., one of the major challenges in treating patients with Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is predicting the severity of the disease. They developed a new score for predicting progression from mild/moderate to severe COVID-19.<sup>24</sup> This changing condition and prognosis of each patient would not be able to be accommodated by a triage system, hence creates a limitation.

Furthermore, even at the level of prediction based on chances of survival, some patients will be excluded because they would have been written off. This, in a way violates the principles of equality and justice, whereas the real claim of each patient is that his or her life must be valued equally with others. Triage in this regard, negates or violates the principle of equal regard for human life. Sadly, the problem is further complicated when there is no agreed conception of justice to determine the focus of a triage system. In Kirby's words:

The allocation of scarce health resources poses significant challenges for decision makers. This is because there is no shared conception of justice for determining what health resources a person has a just claim to, and there is no existing social consensus regarding which ethics principles and values should inform health resource allocation.<sup>25</sup>

Triage using only chances of survival in the allocation of scarce medical resources is limited and insufficient. White and Katz acknowledge that "ethically, using only chance of survival to hospital discharge is

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<sup>24</sup> Ming Wang, et al., "Predicting Progression to Severe COVID-19 Using the PAINT Score," *BMC Infectious Diseases* 22, no. 498 (2022).

<sup>25</sup> Jeffrey Kirby, "Enhancing the Fairness of Pandemic Critical Care Triage," *Journal of Medical Ethics* 36, no. 12 (2010): 758.

insufficient because it rests on a thin conception of “accomplishing the greatest good.””<sup>26</sup> This is a big limitation in the application of the triage principle.

Another limitation and complexity of triage is on the degree of the urgency of treatment of patients during a pandemic like the COVID-19 one. Triage protocol is a delayed process. It takes some time to take patients through the triaging process. And sequel to this, patients’ waiting time may be extended. This is not good enough, particularly in some situations requiring the most urgent attention of physicians by COVID-19 patients. This leads to loss of hope in the system by patients and their relatives. When this happens, some patients struggle or look for a way to bypass the triage station during busy periods. This is possible because such patients are faced with emergency, or in other words a threat of death. As human beings, we have that natural instinct to look for alternative sources of survival.

A cursory look at the above arguments on the limits and complexities of triage protocol will reveal that the failure of triage is evident in clinical, nonclinical, and procedural aspects or criteria of triage. On clinical criteria in triage, the issues concern diagnosis and prognosis. Taking triage decisions based on diagnosis and prognosis will end up discriminating against some people; example; the aged or the elderly. It will not be fair to all COVID-19 patients since prognosis differs from patient to patient. Also, some patients are symptomatic while others are asymptomatic. A triage decision based on clinical considerations is likely going to lead to exclusion of some patients based on the assessment of overall fitness or frailty, cognition and mood, function, mobility, and co-morbidities. On the nonclinical criteria for triage decision, we have the application of some principles (randomization, priority to healthcare workers, priority to larger number of life years including quality adjusted life years and prioritization based on other social worth considerations).

Each of these nonclinical principles for arriving at a triage decision is complex and has some limitations. Such limitations include the inability of triage to identify vulnerable populations and deal with the prevailing health disparities among patients. This justifies the claim that the limits and complexities of triage has nonclinical support. The procedural issue of triage deals with the importance of fair and transparent decision making and the issue of blinded triage. Blinded triage is a triage process that involves the health and triage officers looking at only the case notes or files of patients without having to look at the individual patients to

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<sup>26</sup> White, et al., 132-138.

avoid bias. There are some advantages and disadvantages on this. For example, the advantages include the reduction of risk of subjectivity, enhancement of efficiency and consistency. The disadvantages also abound, such as the inability of triage officers or health professionals to identify specific and peculiar challenges of patients. This sometimes could lead to a serious problem. Triage (blinded or not) also fails on the account of procedural evidence. The next section deals with some recommendations for modification and improvement of triage to overcome the above highlighted limitations and complexities.

#### IV. Recommendations

However, to remedy and improve triage application from these limits and complexities in the COVID-19 pandemic in particular, and all pandemics in general, I suggest the following: (i) First, governments and policy makers should endeavor to prevent the scarcity of life-saving medical resources/treatments, especially during a pandemic like the current one. There should be a robust pandemic plan that adequately addresses all issues and accommodates all segments of the society even before the occurrence of a pandemic, with proper public enlightenment because it is said that “a stitch in time saves nine” and “a predicted war never consumes a cripple.” Having adequate preparation would go a long way in reducing the burden of a pandemic since a pandemic must at one point or the other occur. Along this line, there may also be a need for some countries to broaden the sense of medical and nursing practice as professions beyond what it is at present. This is important because, as human beings (physicians and non-physicians), we should never lose sight of that deep need in human nature to care for others, even during a pandemic like the COVID-19 one; (ii) if resources eventually become scarce, there is a need for a multi-value ethical framework that will corroborate and enlarge the application of triage principle. A single-principle strategy will not always be adequate. This is in line with the White’s et al. recommendation:

We propose an alternative to the single-principle strategy proposed by previous working groups—one that strives to incorporate and balance saving the most lives, saving the most life-years, and giving individuals equal opportunity to live through life’s stages.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.



This will go a long way to better take care of the moral complexities involved in the distribution of scarce life-saving medical resources in a pandemic which limits triage; (iii) there should not be a blind review of patients in triage protocol because it neglects the social condition and identities of patients. Also, triage system should not be based on the social worth of patients; rather triage decisions would be better if placed in the hands of triage teams rather than individual triage officers. Triage decisions should not be exclusively restricted to clinical decisions. Each triage protocol should have a solid clinical and ethical basis. People who are not health-care workers should be included in the team. This will increase the diversity of input into triage decisions. Also, in so doing, there will be greater efficiency, consistency, and foreseeability with regard to the application and implementation of the triage principle. In all these recommendations, there is a serious need for meaningful public engagement because we live in a pluralistic society and deciding on the allocation of lifesaving scarce medical resources during a pandemic is not just an expert scientific judgment but a value judgment as well. In addition, since it has been established that both individual and public behavior play important role in public health emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic, government at different levels with the aid of health workers should seriously enlighten the public and the general citizenry about the need for attitudinal change during pandemics. This is important since it has been identified that public health responses to infectious diseases require changes in individual behavior.<sup>28</sup> This, in no small measure, would go a long way in curtailing the spread of a pandemic like the COVID-19 one. And the lesser the spread, the better managed and contained. The more the spread, the more victims and the more there would be scarcity of resources hence bringing up the relevance of triage as a principle for the distribution of scarce medical resources. With these recommendations, I move to the next and last section of this paper, the conclusion.

## V. Conclusion

In this paper, I examined the use and application of triage system in the allocation and distribution of scarce lifesaving medical resources/treatments in an emergency pandemic period like the COVID-19 one. I argued that triage fails in its present form and structure because

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<sup>28</sup> Rubee Dev, et al., "Impact of Biological Sex and Gender-Related Factors on Public Engagement in Protective Health Behaviors during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Cross Sectional Analyses from a Global Survey," *British Medical Journal Open* 12, no. 6 (2022): e059673.

of some complexities and limits associated with its applications and operations, as argued above. I attempted to argue this position with the utilitarian greatest good for the greatest number principle; maximization of salvageability; common good; and chances of survival. The paper neither claimed nor argued for the justification of triage by utilitarianism. The complexities and limits of triage were proven to cut across the three stages of hospital situations, especially in ICUs and EDs; clinical stage, non-clinical stage, and procedural stage involved in the application of triage. I conclude that in pandemics, triage in its present form and structure omits morally relevant considerations that should be included into allocation decisions during a public health emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic. This is contrary to the assumption that triage as a principle of distribution of scarce medical resources during a pandemic like the COVID-19 one could be applied without some hitches. In view of this complexities and limits, some recommendations have been made to improve and remedy the application of the triage system during a pandemic, as we currently have the COVID-19 pandemic.

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# The Philosophical Background and the Adventures of Religious Studies: The Case of Greece

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### **Abstract**

*The teaching of Religious Studies in Greece has always been the subject of intense debate and controversy. The case law of the Council of State mandates a denominational course, allowing exemption only on the grounds of religious conscience. The Supreme Administrative Court even considered the introduction of a compulsory Religious Studies course for all students to be unconstitutional. In this sense, the Religious Studies course in Greece is seen as outdated, and an increasing number of students are seeking to be exempt from it. In a recent case, the Council of State, in an attempt to depart from its previous case law on the exemption, essentially referred the decision on the matter in question to the Greek Data Protection Authority, which was requested to give its opinion on the status of the currently applicable exemption. In the context of this contribution, we argue that: a) The Council of State erred in its approach of shifting the burden of this decision to the Data Protection Authority. b) These issues should not be decided by the courts or independent authorities but by the democratically legitimized legislature. c) Religious knowledge is an indispensable element of education and, as such, the Religious Studies course should have an encyclopedic, rather than a narrowly developed denominational character and remain compulsory for all pupils.*

**Keywords:** *religious studies; philosophy of education; philosophy of religion; conscience; exemption; personal data*

## I. The ongoing debate about the teaching of Religious Studies in Greece

The teaching of Religious Studies in Greece has always been the subject of heated debate and controversy. The case law of the Council of State mandates a denominational course, allowing exemption only on the grounds of religious conscience.<sup>1</sup> The Supreme Administrative Court even considered the introduction of a compulsory Religious Studies course for all students to be unconstitutional.

In this sense, the Religious Studies course in Greece is seen as outdated and an increasing number of students are seeking to be exempt from it. In a recent case, the Council of State, in an attempt to depart from its previous case law on the exemption, essentially referred the decision on the matter in question to the Greek Data Protection Authority, which was requested to give its opinion on the status of the currently applicable exemption. In the context of this contribution, we argue that:

- a) The Council of State erred in its approach of shifting the burden of this decision to the Data Protection Authority.
- b) These issues should not be decided by the courts or independent authorities but by the democratically legitimized legislature.
- c) Religious knowledge is an indispensable element of education and, as such, the Religious Studies course should have an encyclopedic, rather than a narrowly developed denominational character and remain compulsory for all pupils.

Even though it refers to earlier decisions, this issue is both intense and timeless, as it affects and touches upon the way Religious Studies have been traditionally perceived and taught in Greece, whilst posing new challenges for the future.

Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that Religious Studies are not inherently linked to religious practice but instead constitute a primarily secular pursuit. We refer specifically to the philosophical aspect of religion, which is referred to as the philosophy of religion. This academic field showcases the importance of Religious Studies.

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<sup>1</sup> See, indicatively, Council of State decision Nos. 660/2018, 926/2018, and 1749-1750/2020.

## II. From the Greek Council of State to the Hellenic Data Protection Authority

The Council of State recently made a decision (No. 1748/2022) that annulled a joint ministerial decision of the Minister and the Deputy Minister of Education and Religious Affairs<sup>2</sup> regarding exemptions for pupils from the Religious Studies course. The Council deemed the decision invalid because it failed to fulfill an essential procedural requirement of obtaining an Opinion from the Hellenic Data Protection Authority (HDPa). Subsequently, the Data Protection Authority issued an Opinion<sup>3</sup> stating that Orthodox Christians are also entitled to seek exemption from the Religious Studies course. Previously, only non-Orthodox Christians were eligible for exemption.

The Authority expressed Opinion 2/2022, according to which the exercise of the right to exemption from Religious Studies, in accordance with the current Greek Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), requires only a declaration by the parents or pupils concerned, simply stating that reasons of conscience prevent participation in religious education. In practice, this means that Orthodox Christians can now seek exemption from the course in question, regardless of whether they belong to the denomination that the course is currently centered around. This expands the right to exemption from the course to all pupils who have reasons of conscience barring them from attending it, rather than restricting it solely to non-Orthodox Christians.

In contrast to this Opinion, the Ministry of Education previously maintained<sup>4</sup> that only non-Orthodox Christians were eligible for exemption, while Orthodox Christians were not.

In compliance with Council of State decision No. 1748/2022, the HDPa issued an Opinion on the matter, finding that the provision of an Opinion on its part before the issuance of the Ministerial Decision constitutes an essential procedural requirement. Consequently, the absence of such an Opinion leads to the annulment of the act. Bearing in mind the above, the provision of an Opinion by the Authority was deemed as an essential procedural requirement (Article 48 of Presidential Decree No. 18/1989) before the adoption of the contested act,<sup>5</sup> according to the view assumed by the Court. The decision on

<sup>2</sup> See decision 61178/ΓΔ4/28.5.2021.

<sup>3</sup> See HDPa Opinion No. 2/2022.

<sup>4</sup> See decision No. 106646/ΓΔ4/2.9.2022.

<sup>5</sup> By virtue of Article 36, par. 4 of the GDPR, "Prior consultation," "Member States shall

whether this is an essential procedural requirement rests solely with the bench,<sup>6</sup> which went on to rule on the matter. In the interest of administrative efficiency,<sup>7</sup> only the omission of acts that constitute essential procedural requirements can serve as grounds for annulment,<sup>8</sup> rather than any breach of the rules of procedure. The criteria for determining whether a procedural requirement is essential are: (a) the importance of the procedural act for the protection of the person being administered, the orderly functioning of the administration, and the judicial review of the act, and (b) the impact of the omission of the procedural requirement on the regulations laid down by it.<sup>9</sup>

### III. Is the provision of an Opinion by the HDPa an essential procedural requirement?

The classification of the provision of an Opinion as an essential procedural requirement is not without its challenges. Along with broadening the scope of what is considered an essential procedural requirement, there are concerns that mandating the provision of an Opinion by the HDPa on any act may cause significant delays in the legislative process. As data protection affects every aspect of modern life, requiring an Opinion for every regulatory act could result in an overwhelming burden that would cause substantial legal uncertainty and potentially invalidate numerous decisions.

Furthermore, the mandatory nature of the Authority's Opinion could shift the decision-making responsibility to authorities outside the hierarchical pyramid, which are far removed from the mechanisms responsible for the attribution of political responsibility.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the position adopted by the Supreme Court concerning the provision of an Opinion by the Authority could be misinterpreted as passing on the onus of a difficult decision or even the burden of changing or developing its

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consult the supervisory authority during the preparation of a proposal for a legislative measure to be adopted by a national parliament, or of a regulatory measure based on such a legislative measure, which relates to processing.”

<sup>6</sup> Epameinondas Spiliotopoulos, and Vassilios Kondylis, *Administrative Law* (Athens: Nomiki Vivliothiki Publications, 2022), n. 500.

<sup>7</sup> Panos Lazaratos, *Administrative Procedural Law* (Athens: Ant. Sakkoulas Publications, 2013), note 725.

<sup>8</sup> Spiliotopoulos, and Kondylis, n. 500.

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

<sup>10</sup> Fereniki Panagopoulou, “Issues of Constitutionality of Independent Agencies in US: Their Extensions in the Greek Legal Order,” *Society of Administrative Studies* 6 (2004): 95-147.



previous case-law to the HDPa,<sup>11</sup> thus somehow rendering it a general Authority for the application of individual rights. Moreover, if the HDPa adopted a different position than the Court's previous case-law, which decision should the administration comply with? The answer to this is that it would need to comply with the decision of the Council of State; but which decision would that be? The one referring the matter to the HDPa or its previous case-law, where it issued an ad hoc ruling?<sup>12</sup>

If every pupil were allowed to seek exemption from the Religious Studies course on the basis of conscience, it could create a precedent for seeking similar exemptions from other courses. For example, if a parent could request exemption, on grounds of conscience, from the part of a course that teaches Darwin's theory of evolution, who could prevent them from doing so?

#### IV. The need for an encyclopedic, rather than a denominational, Religious Studies course

The road ahead is lengthy and fraught with difficulties. Opinion 2/22 of the HDPa was a step in the right direction, insofar as it provided an expert and insightful interpretation of how the Greek Constitution and the ECHR should be applied correctly. Consequently, it was established that providing an Opinion prior to issuing a Ministerial Decision was an essential procedural requirement, leading to the nullification of the previous, limiting Ministerial Decision. Therefore, it transpired that an exemption from the Religious Studies course, as it is currently structured and taught, should be available to anyone who objects to attending it on grounds of conscience. Even so, the Opinion did not (and, arguably, could not) address the crux of the matter, which is how a contemporary Religious Studies course should be structured and what it should contain in a culturally diverse country like Greece.

In this sense, it would have been preferable if the Court had been bolder from the outset by opting for an encyclopedic Religious Studies course, with emphasis on the Greek Orthodox Christian tradition, enriched with various other elements exploring different religions. Developing a sense of mature religious consciousness that contributes to the development of one's personality requires engaging in discourse

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<sup>11</sup> In accordance with Council of State decision No. 1479/2019, the request for an exemption from the Religious Studies course must have the following content: "Reasons of religious conscience do not allow (my or my child's) participation in the Religious Studies course."

<sup>12</sup> See, indicatively, Council of State decision Nos. 660/2018, 926/2018, and 1749-1750/2020.

with diversity.<sup>13</sup> Anyone who lives and, most importantly, attends school in Greece should be familiar with certain structural features of the formation of the Greek nation<sup>14</sup> and the foundations of European civilization, which are largely based on the Christian tradition.

Required religious knowledge can help people understand art and attitudes toward life. Most art is based on theological themes. For example, Verdi's *Nabucco* is based on the corresponding biblical story.<sup>15</sup> The conduct of other nations can also be explained by their religious traditions. A classic example is the insistence of Protestants on observing the canon and having savings, the abomination of abortion by Catholics, and so on. To understand these attitudes, one must understand the theological background of these people. This type of knowledge is just as important as historical, mathematical, and philological knowledge.

Therefore, one should not be entitled to be exempt from acquiring such knowledge, provided it is offered in an objective and critical manner. Additionally, knowledge and interpretation of the Bible can guide the interpretation of other sciences. For instance, Hermeneutics, which includes the interpretation of the Constitution as one of its branches, starts with the interpretation of Homer and Paleo-Diaspora texts. Karl Schmitt's political theology is based on religious foundations. Therefore, pupils should not make themselves "exempt" from necessary knowledge, which is essential for all those residing in the Greek territory to understand themselves and others.

In this light, the Religious Studies course can be conceived as a compulsory encyclopedic course for everyone, covering the history of the Old and New Testament and the history of the Church (not as mythology) and presented as factual Christian content, without a denominational or catechetical character. Most European countries follow this direction. This approach is an unbiased perspective of the religious phenomenon with an emphasis on the prevailing religion and Christianity from a quantitative standpoint. However, an open-minded outlook toward non-Christian monotheistic religions should also be maintained. This course should be mandatory for all students residing

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<sup>13</sup> Fereniki Panagopoulou-Koutnatzi, *The Contemporary Adventures of Teaching Religious Studies. A Moral-Constitutional Approach* (Athens: Papazissi Publications, 2021), 139.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>15</sup> But not only regarding the content, but also ontological concepts, such as time and space; for a seminal analysis see Risto Solunchev, "Ontology of Time as a Deconstruction of Space. An Essay on the Philosophy of Byzantine Music," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 4, no. 1 (2019): 109-122.

in Greece, as they should be aware of the significant role played by Orthodoxy in the history of the Greek nation and by Christianity in the wider context of European civilization.

#### V. The philosophy of religion and the necessity of Religious Studies

The problem of the study of religion is very closely related to that of the study of ethics. The central question of this problem is how one can examine something like religion, scientifically, without being subjective.<sup>16</sup> The fundamental principle of religious experience is subjective and the distinction between explanation and understanding is important. Accordingly, explanation refers to the positive spirit, whereas understanding refers to the humanities.<sup>17</sup>

To comprehend the human biosphere, the philosophy of religion posits a basic distinction between the sacred and the profane.<sup>18</sup> The religious cannot be merely simplified to a philosophical idiom: it requires the unifying role of experience in shaping both social space and distinct individuality. At the same time, the sacred is binary, given that it is transcendent but also immanent, as it concerns the celestial sphere but also the mundane, as the latter is constantly referred to in various ways and meanings.<sup>19</sup> It is a question of whether the ego is completed without an arrangement of the sacred element. If, however, this is indeed the case and religious experience requires an understanding from within, without reduction to positivisms, it transpires that religious studies, in their epistemological and encyclopedic form, become indisputably necessary.

The ritualistic aspect of the sacred, on the other hand, serves as a means of reflecting society back onto itself. However, this introspection is only comprehensible when we acknowledge that it pertains to the recognition of the sacred boundaries of both society and subjectivity.

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<sup>16</sup> An answer to the conundrum could be provided by an expert committee; Tsitas and Verdis in their article “Proposing a Frame of Ethical Principles for Educational Evaluation in Modern Greece,” *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 6, no. 1 (2021): 135-158, discuss the Delphi Method as a useful tool for this.

<sup>17</sup> For an excellent account of Hume’s view of “human science” see Natalia Borza, “Animating Sympathetic Feelings. An Analysis of the Nature of Sympathy in the Accounts of David Hume’s Treatise,” *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 4, no. 1 (2019): 31-60, especially 33ff.

<sup>18</sup> This line of demarcation between the sacred and the profane, though, is neither fixed, nor clear; probably the most iconic example for this would be the way alchemy has been conceived through time. See Athanasios Rinotas, “Alchemy and Creation in the Work of Albertus Magnus,” *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 3, no. 1 (2018): 63-74.

<sup>19</sup> Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

Thus, the religious experience yields a cultural inheritance, given that it is the origin of the iconography of various societies and the production of languages. Hence, understanding it requires a prior consideration of the concept of sanctity, as even absolutely mundane movements challenging the religious experience cannot be understood without prior knowledge thereof.

The religious experience, on the other hand, refers to another, secondary distinction that is absolutely necessary for the perception of social and public space, namely, the distinction between the pure and impure elements. This differentiation is central to understanding the phenomenon of social power and is based on the reality of two states: the manifest and the latent.<sup>20</sup> Repelling impurity is an often unconscious aspect of social behavior. Understanding the social function of impurity helps us comprehend aspects of the human biosphere that are hard to articulate. Again, it follows that religious studies emerge as an essential part of modern education.<sup>21</sup>

Another aspect of the issue is that the religious experience expands the primary fact of the Cosmos solely to the immanent element and direct attention towards the openness of the world, in the direction of the *totaliter aliter*. This aspect cannot be overlooked because it is not only constitutive of divine transcendence, but also of the transcendentalism of consciousness or the cultural being, outside of any determinism that is nothing more than a social imaginary in a reified form. Humanity is full of signs of the sacred, which are not symbols of submission but rather elements of freedom. The insistence on religious experience by most people demonstrates this fundamental fact. This core of humanity is not an element of regression, as recent history has shown, but a rooted belief of a theoretical and reflective nature. It is also in this sense that religious studies can be considered necessary.<sup>22</sup>

The primary objection that can be raised is that the religious experience is ultimately nothing more than a selfish need that involves

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<sup>20</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966).

<sup>21</sup> The newly established branch of Christian Bioethics by Tristram Engelhardt Jr shows the permanence of a Western pious anthropology; see Hugo Tristram Engelhardt Jr, "Christian Bioethics in a Post-Christian World: Facing the Challenges," *Christian Bioethics* 18, no. 1 (2012): 93-114. Also Ana S. Iltis, "Engelhardt on the Common Morality in Bioethics," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 3, no. 2 (2018): 49-59.

<sup>22</sup> The establishment of Christian Bioethics by Engelhardt Jr. is a quite telling example of the interplay between religious studies and other fields, with which the former may interact in a way that advances both. For Engelhardt's contribution to bioethics see, among others, Claudia Paganini, "We Live in the Ruins of Christendom: Bioethics in a Post-Engelhardtian Age," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 3, no. 2 (2018): 99-110.

two aspects: denying the beliefs of others and influencing others by invoking a high Authority that exists precisely to protect the influencer. This position belongs, as claimed, to a philosophy of suspicion and is exemplified in Nietzsche's philosophy.<sup>23</sup> Religious experience, in this respect, is nothing more than a disguised will to power and constitutes part of a general bad faith. This view aspires to achieve absolute adherence to philosophical immanence. This insistence challenges personal religion, a religion of revelation that aims at personal salvation. In this sense, religion refers to a form of utilitarianism and is disconnected from a general and grounded ethical stance. Hence, the religious experience does not constitute a dimension of the self but a loss of the self, a retreat to religious traditionalism and a surrender to the spirit of suffering.

Continuing this perspective is the view that religion is a general narcotic, a reward mechanism at the level of individual emotions. Society develops towards the secular spirit as the child slowly matures and becomes an adult human being. Religion is seen as the product of a child's fear and love of the father.<sup>24</sup> The tyranny of the father gives birth to rebellion, and guilt towards the symbolic rejection of the father figure gives birth to religion. Guilty consciousness is evident in the phenomenon of religious rituals. Religious rituals demonstrate guilt-induced obsessions through their repetitiveness, and constitute a diffusion of the psychopathological guilt-induced personality.

However, it is important to note that the philosophies of suspicion reduce religion to malevolence or psychopathology, contrary to the basic principle that religious experience is irreducible. One could argue that religion is responsible for creating and maintaining the utopian spirit, making it a cause rather than a derivative. Ultimately, these views constitute deeply engrained beliefs and must be protected under the right of free belief.

In our view, it obviously transpires from the above that religious studies constitute an integral part of the educational encyclopedism and the overall formation of the modern spirit. As such, religious studies should not be subject to executive decisions but rather democratic deliberation. By definition, and in accordance with what we described above, religious studies are part of the general social philosophy of a collectivity and should be entrusted to democratic institutions.

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<sup>23</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Carol Diethe, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>24</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, James Strachey (Boston: Beacon Press, 1913).

## VI. Leaving the last word to the democratically elected legislative bodies

When it comes to socially and morally controversial issues such as the teaching of Religious Studies, which often divides society based on philosophical, ideological, religious, and moral concepts rather than purely legal arguments based on the letter of the Constitution, the primary responsibility for decision-making is vested primarily in the democratically elected legislature. Accordingly, judges must limit their interpretative competence to strict legal criteria, to the control of the outer limits of legislative choice,<sup>25</sup> without exceeding their role as annulment judges.<sup>26</sup> Judges must exercise self-restraint to avoid turning an ideological and political choice made by the democratically elected legislature “either into a constitutional necessity or an excluded choice by virtue of constitutional mandate.”<sup>27</sup> Under this approach,

the common legislature in socially contentious matters has a broad range of different policy options, none of which can be perceived as being the only one that is constitutionally sound,<sup>28</sup>

as it has the authority of choosing among these options.<sup>29</sup>

### Author contribution statement

This is a re-worked and elaborated version in English of a paper published by Fereniki Panagopoulou-Koutnatzi in Greek in *Syntagma Watch* on May 9, 2022 (see References list below). Both authors contributed equally to the conception and design of this paper. Fereniki Panagopoulou has written Chapters I, II, III, IV and VI, and Georgios

<sup>25</sup> Spyros Vlachopoulos, *The Dynamic Interpretation of the Constitution* (Athens: Eurasia Publications, 2014), 84.

<sup>26</sup> Lina Papadopoulou, “Religious Education in Schools—an Overall Assessment of Case-Law,” *The Constitution Journal* 1-2 (2020): 866ff.

<sup>27</sup> Ioannis Drosos, “Ideology as an Illustration of Decision no. 660/2018 of the Council of State,” in *The Constitution in Progress, Volume in Honor of Antonis Maniatis* (Athens, and Thessaloniki: P. Sakkoulas Publications, 2019), 565ff.

<sup>28</sup> Haralabos Anthopoulos, “Constitutional Interpretation and Fundamental Rights. The approach of Dimitris Th. Tsatsos,” in *Constitution and Interpretation. The Contribution of D. Th. Tsatsos* (Athens, and Komotini: Ant. N. Sakkoulas Publications, 2008), 51ff.

<sup>29</sup> Fereniki Panagopoulou, “Some Thoughts on the Occasion of Decision No. 1478/2022 of the Council of State and Opinion No. 2 / 2022 of the HDPA Concerning the Exemption from the Religious Studies Course,” *Syntagma Watch*, last modified May 9, 2022. <https://www.syntagmawatch.gr/trending-issues/merikes-skepseis-me-afomh-thn-apofash-1478-2022-tou-ste/>.

Arabatzis has written Chapter V. Both authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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# Six Steps towards an Object-oriented Social Theory (O.O.S.T)

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## **Abstract**

*In the approach that sustains this entire essay, besides my own trajectory as a researcher, the path moves away from the orthodox tradition, the more Kantian one, incorporating in Social Theory a philosophical line for a long time forgotten, by including figures such as Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), the founding father, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947), Henri Bergson (1859-1941), Gilbert Simondon (1924-1989), Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) and many others. They would be the famous authors of vitalism, also known as philosophers of life (*Lebensphilosophie*), philosophers of process, or philosophers of affect. What are the implications when these figures invade the field of Social Theory, which characteristics can be found and, mainly, which advantages when compared with their more orthodox side and their insistent commitment to Kantian philosophy and its transcendental by-products (power, culture, ideology, discourse, etc)? Following this and other questions, six points will be considered as representative of what we call here an Object-Oriented Social Theory (O.O.S.T).*

**Keywords:** *object-oriented social theory; ontology; Bruno Latour; Graham Harman*

## I. Introduction

**W**e believe in a world that is sustained by people, by individual initiatives, in a liberal stance, by collective movements, in a Marxist approach, or by structures of *Power* and *Language*, in a more post-structural turn. In any case, *human* is always the criterion, the cause of causes, the reason for sufferings, crises, or even changes

and revolutions. Whether in individual or in structural terms, whether in phenomenological or functionalist interpretations, whether using a pragmatic or positivist criterion, the human is always there, always in the corner, behind the scenes, protecting us from the encounter with the most frightening word in Social Theory: *Contingency*.<sup>1</sup>

In this Kantian scenario, animals and objects enter only as supporting actors, as an effect, or even as a lifeless goo, waiting for humans to imprint meaning or to dissolve themselves phenomenologically throughout the four corners of the world. They are often seen as mere *tabula rasas*, anthropomorphic supports, never carrying a meaning of their own. A bird, or a simple object, as well as nature in general, is nothing more than a blank sheet of paper, at least this is how Rousseau's enlightenment works when he turns his eyes to the terrain of things. Vanity prevents us from thinking Social Theory beyond the limits of the *transcendental man*, as Gabriel Tarde (1843-1904) well recalled in the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>2</sup> or even Nietzsche.<sup>3</sup> It is obvious that we do not want to compare ourselves with animals or objects, since they have a lot of *Body* (*corps sans organes*), a lot of matter, a lot of contingencies, especially when we analyze the western tradition and its contempt for the *res extensa*.

In the approach that sustains this article, i.e an Object-Oriented Social Theory, the path moves a little away from the orthodox tradition, the more Kantian one, incorporating into Social Theory a philosophical tradition for a long time forgotten, involving figures such as Spinoza (the founding father), Nietzsche, Whitehead, Bergson, Simondon, Deleuze and many others, at least when we think about our main panels and publications here in Brazil. They would be the authors of *vitalism*, also known as *philosophers of life*, *philosophers of process*, or *philosophers of affect*. While my involvement with the Social Sciences course grew, I noticed a kind of continuity among contemporary authors such as Bruno Latour (1947-2022), Timothy Ingold (1948-), Jane Bennett (1957-), Donna Haraway (1944-), Brian Massumi (1956-), Karen Barad (1956-), Annemarie Mol (1958-), Manuel DeLanda (1951-), Doreen Massey (1944-), and many others, which pointed towards a new epistemological scenario. According to my own analysis, Object-Oriented Social Theory (O.O.S.T.) basically is the instant when philosophical vitalism meets social theorists along the way, forcing

<sup>1</sup> The underline is mine.

<sup>2</sup> Gabriel Tarde, *Monodology and Sociology*, trans. Theo Lorenc (Melbourne: Re.Press, 2012), 22.

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Richard Polt (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 32.

language to go down unexpected, often strange, yet full of possible paths. According to Levi Bryant, “there is, in this culture, a speculative tendency, deserving the title of ‘Spinozism,’”<sup>4</sup> a kind of alternative matrix behind the scenes of Social Theory. In other words, there is a “Spinozist lesson”<sup>5</sup> that must be learned, a vitalist commitment that needs to be made, which leads us straight into a new journey toward a new speculative field, a kind of “materialist speculation,” as Quentin Meillassoux (1967-) would say.<sup>6</sup>

In *Immaterialism: Objects and Social Theory* (2016), written by Graham Harman (1968-), we found for the first time the term *Object-Oriented Social Theory (O.O.S.T)*. Although its title refers to ‘Social Theory,’ it loosely connects with this field of inquiry, restricting itself only to occasional thinkers (such as Bruno Latour, Manuel DeLanda, and Marshall McLuhan), omitting any reference to classical debates (agency versus structure, institutions, power, public sphere, domination, etc.) The aim of this article is to extend this Harmanian project in three ways: 1) by bringing the debate itself into the field of Social Theory and all its classical and contemporary contours, 2) by including all Object-Oriented approaches, not just OOO,<sup>7</sup> and 3) by introducing Spinoza, and his new *post-humanist episteme*, as the founding father of an Object-Oriented Social Theory. In other words, O.O.S.T, as it is discussed here, has much broader contours than those imagined by Harman himself.

It is noteworthy to mention that this expression has never been developed in detail by Harman, excluding some references in few articles. In this sense, it would be interesting to expand its boundaries, looking at the implications of Object-Oriented Social Theory, as well as its possible outlines. There are, in fact, many defining characteristics of the O.O.S.T. that have been inherited from the vitalist lineage (post-humanism, flat ontology, irreducionism, ontologism, difference principle, aestheticism, anti-hileformism, etc.). Some of these features have been selected here, being nothing more than a small tasting of a menu that is not only deep, but constantly growing, as can be seen in the contemporary debates that still take place in classes, lectures, conferences, and books.

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<sup>4</sup> Levi R. Bryant, *Democracy of Objects* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2011), 248.

<sup>5</sup> Brian Massumi, *What the Animals Can Teach Us About Politics?* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 18.

<sup>6</sup> Steven Shaviro, *The Universe of Things: On Speculative Realism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 51.

<sup>7</sup> Other Object-Oriented Approaches include “New Materialism,” “Ontological Turn,” “Actor Network Theory,” and so on.

## II. The decentering of the human and the arrival of objects

Before diving into dense and metaphysical waters, true oceans that intimidate the bravest of humans, a curious question sprouts on the horizon: how to suggest an immanent, slippery, decentered language, how to put into practice all that *nature of Spinoza*, all that Nietzschean *becoming*, all that Deleuzian *body without organ*, i.e., how to work with something that cannot be represented, that is not exactly a content, a predicate, but a process, a movement? Social Theory, in this alternative ground, lies on a simple idea, the Greek tragic subject, one who understands language as a material and even didactic flow, carrying nothing abstract, not even any signifier. In this new alternative model, the greatest teaching is given by example, by the way experience is lived and language sustained. The level of openness that exists in this new trend is not a theme dissolved in the body of the text, but the text itself, its arrangements, its paths, deviations and contours. The vitalist universe, in this sense, is not a simple dip in analytical waters, as interesting as they may be, but a way of life. It is a change of attitude on the part of the researcher himself, a kind of trace that is observed not only in the content of what is said and done, but in the very form of this *saying* and *doing*. It is not so much something of the epistemological order, a journey of premises, thesis, and propositions, but a journey towards an ontology, at least in a Heideggerian sense where predicates are not welcome. What is lived replaces what is represented, and the practice of this scientist, instead of losing its focus, dispersed in an opening of possibilities, begins little by little to gain power, to fill itself with life, spreading through all spaces, invading every available domain. In other words, we realize that

There is a tendency to decentralize the human, describing the impact of the non-human in the form of technology and other non-human agencies on collectives involving human beings and how these agencies cannot be reduced to human intentions, signs, meanings, norms, signifiers, discourses, etc.<sup>8</sup>

Unlike the previous models, O.O.S.T does not replace one transcendentalism with another, one correlationism (*corrélationalisme*) with another, as if it would only exchange one axis of meaning with a more interesting one, in a kind of *epistemic cynicism*. This means that “there

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<sup>8</sup> Bryant, 248.

is no longer a transcendental term,”<sup>9</sup> no *a priori* support of meaning. Therefore the goal is not the replacement of the human with something nobler, however seductive that may seem. His unprecedented proposal arises from this break with the Kantian model, with its *Copernicanism*. Thus it enters into an alternative epistemological regime, towards a new space of interactions. In this new radical decentered model, there is no criterion that from the beginning determines the configuration of reality, nothing that suffocates it, nothing that takes away its vital energy, not even if it is the Transcendental Man. The rhizome (network) is flexible enough to hold several modalities of ‘being,’ multiple ontologies, from a sensitive world, in which the body is an important axis, to flows of pure materiality, inorganic universes, or even a tiny virus that suddenly appears. In the end, there is, in this scenario, a kind of opening to several horizons of meaning, several modes of existence, thus replacing the mania of transcendentalists for reducing the richness of encounters to a certain epistemic horizon, to a single reference of signification, what Graham Harman<sup>10</sup> called *Overmining*.

The phrase by Deleuze “everything I have written is vitalist, at least I hope it is”<sup>11</sup> is not a loose comment by a French philosopher, but a persistent characteristic, a sample of a very old and deep philosophical tradition, although it has long been forgotten behind the scenes in Social Theory. The orthodox and Kantian tradition, here also called *transcendentalist* or *correlationalist*, for a long time was more attractive in the eyes of the curious sociologist, since transcendentalism is functional, pragmatic, in offering clear contours to what happens, as well as defining the very identity of that same thinker. Not only is its *transcendentalism* convenient, but also often rigid, centralizing, and dangerous, as it is clear in the next section:

The formation of European sociological traditions was also mostly not exempt from the Kantian legacy, often reappropriating Kant’s insights through neo-Kantian conceptions that transposed the transcendental conditions of the known subject to quasi-transcendental or historical, social, cultural, and economic conditions.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>10</sup> Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Michael A. Greco, and Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 13.

<sup>12</sup> Martin Savransky, “A Decolonial Imagination: Sociology, Anthropology and the Politics of Reality,” *Sociology* 51, no. 1 (2017): 6.

Although so attractive and pragmatic, beyond its importance in classes, texts, even in this article, transcendentalism often claims a monopoly on meaning, while silences many voices along the way. The costs of this Social Theory are high, by revealing not only a dangerous pretension, on the border of vanity itself, but also an inefficiency in the face of contemporary (and hybrid) issues: social networks, the 2020-2022 pandemic, new identity movements, ecological crises, and many others.

It must be clear here that there is no boundary between *transcendentalism* (and its Kantian background) and an Object-Oriented Social Theory, as if it were a simple choice between two options, since transcendental structures are not only necessary, but also inevitable. Those transcendentals ensure the integration of both my own ego and the surrounding world itself, providing firmness, consistency, and completeness. Even this article would be completely impossible without an underlying axis of meaning, without a *transcendental horizon* (transzendentaler Horizont) to organize the flow of its words. Unlike several philosophical approaches, such as Meillassoux's, I do not believe that the major goal of our endeavor should be the complete "relinquishment of transcendentalism."<sup>13</sup> A Social Theorist, by having a slightly more empirical commitment, cannot turn his back on the importance of this matrix within conversations, conflicts, justifications, gossip, theories, etc. The real problem presented here is when this *transcendentalism* goes over the edge, when it starts to suffocate other instances of meaning,<sup>14</sup> be they human or non-human. This means that transcendental structures, with a kind of underlying Kantianism, are problematic only when they enact a certain kind of ontological monopoly, instead of guaranteeing the passage to other alternatives, possibilities, and encounters. The proposal of O.O.S.T. and of this article, therefore, boils down to a simple Latourian question: "what happens when we abandon this burden, this passion, this indignation, this obsession, this flame, this fury, this dazzling goal, this excess, this insane desire to reduce everything?"<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Catherine Malabou, "Can We Relinquish the Transcendental?" *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 28, no. 3 (2014): 243.

<sup>14</sup> Although it is not the purpose of this essay, it should be noted that there are political criticisms about Neo-Kantian model, as well as its transcendentalist unfoldings. One of these criticisms can be found in: *Around The Day in Eighty Worlds: Politics os Pluriverse* (Durham, and London: Duke University Press, 2021) written by the British sociologist Martin Savransky. In this work, he establishes a close link between colonial practices of violence (exclusion) and Neo-Kantian models of thought.

<sup>15</sup> Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France*, trans. Alan Sheridan, and John Law (Cambridge,

### III. The main characteristics of vitalism

Undoubtedly, it is possible to observe traces of vitalism in figures like Max Weber (1864-1920)<sup>16</sup> and George Simmel (1858-1918),<sup>17</sup> but only scattered traces still mixed with a classical version of Social Theory, with its evident Kantian characteristics.<sup>18</sup> On the contrary, what happens today, with emphasis on the figure of Bruno Latour, is a full return of *vitalism*, with all its decentered language structure, and not just scattered traces.

Since the introduction has been made, with its trajectories about to be traveled in depth, here I follow some defining characteristics of vitalism as a philosophical movement, at least some of its main marks. All of them also cross the repertoire of the O.O.S.T. theorists, presenting major ruptures with what existed until then. Every single feature described below justifies the new ontological opening in Social Theory for something far beyond the human, beyond its transcendental boundaries, including cars, tables, cats, roads, algorithms, ghosts, fictional characters, etc:

a. *Posthumanism*: This first characteristic is special and distinct from all the others, since it is not only a criterion, a theory, let alone an object of investigation. *Posthumanism* is a new *episteme*, a new field of possibilities, in which theories, objects, and techniques can sprout from the ground. This means that even approaches so different from each other, such as *OOO*, *process philosophy*, *new materialism*, and many others, share the same epistemological structure, the same common ground of possibilities. In classical Social Theory it is very common to believe that “human motives sharpen all our questions, human satisfactions are hidden in all our

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MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 157.

<sup>16</sup> Gabriel Cohn presents an interesting reading of the influence of Nietzschean thought on Weber. Moreover, Weberian passages such as: “becoming itself is indifferent to meaning” is a clear evidence of that connection. Julien Freund, *The Sociology of Max Weber*, trans. Mary Ilford (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966), 43.

<sup>17</sup> Simmel at the end of his career, mainly thanks to his close contact with the Nietzschean universe, also incorporated parts of vitalism within his own project of Social Theory, without the degree of radicalism that can be found in authors such as Latour, Ingold, Massumi and many others. Gilles Deleuze himself dedicates a small part of his book *What is Philosophy?* to Simmel and his Nietzschean antecedence: “Simmel is one of the rare thinkers to have probed the enclaves or margins of a society, which often seem to be unstable: the stranger, the exile, the migrant, the nomad.” Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 104.

<sup>18</sup> Thiago de Araujo Pinho, *Decentering Language: Deleuze, Latour and the Third Copernican Revolution in Social Sciences* (Feira de Santana: Zart, 2018), 12.

answers, all our formulae have a human trace.”<sup>19</sup> Even in the aesthetic field it is believed that “art [is] the way in which the human reactions to the world are articulated and fixed aesthetically.”<sup>20</sup> The human is presented here as an inevitable *transcendental*,<sup>21</sup> the *transcendental man*. He is always considered as the condition of possibility of thought, as well as the condition of existence of the world itself (in the Merleau-Pontynian sense). In O.O.S.T. the *human* is still present, no doubt, since it is an important detail on the frame of life, but now in a decentered or “de-transcendentalized.” As a result of a kind of vitalist turn, it is possible to observe what it is called *posthumanism*, a type of critique of the centrality of the human and its correlative aspect. Graham Harman has rightly reminded us, recalling Bruno Latour’s *We Have Never Been Modern*, that the classical model presents an ontology divided into two parts (50% reserved for humans and 50% reserved for everything else). The human was given the privilege not only of having an ontology all his own, which is already an enormous achievement, but also a much greater privilege: to define the other ontological spaces by reference to his own criteria.

That kind of humanistic vanity can be found everywhere. Even in religions like Christianity, humanistic traits appear all the time. The human is not just presented as if he were some creature, a simple organism produced by divine hands, but something special, much more noble. Unlike animals, Adam was created in the image and likeness of God (*Genesis* 1:27), carrying a bit of the divine within himself, while producing an insurmountable ontological difference:

Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that moveth upon the earth.<sup>22</sup>

The animals, created on Day Five, resemble man in that they were also formed from the ground (*Genesis* 2:19) and have the breath of life

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<sup>19</sup> William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (Lisbon: National Press, 1907), 109-110.

<sup>20</sup> Georg Lukács, *Writer and Critics and Other Essays*, trans. Arthur D. Kahn (New York: The Universal Library, 1970), 19.

<sup>21</sup> It must be noted that there are vitalist versions of pragmatism and of William James himself, as presented by Martin Savransky, Shaviro, and Stengers. In these unorthodox versions, James could arguably fall under the O.O.S.T.

<sup>22</sup> *Genesis*, 1:26.



(*Genesis* 1:30, 6:17, 7:15, 7:22; *Ecclesiastes* 3:19). But although the animals resemble man in certain aspects, man surpasses them because God breathed directly into man and because He made man in His own image. Moreover, this improvised divine, this piece of heavenly matter, was produced on the sixth day, crowning creation, just as it was given the privilege of naming everything its eyes were capable of seeing, especially the animals it encountered along the way.

Although humanism is a persistent matrix of interpretation since the beginning of Christianity, we can also see that in Social Theory. With O.O.S.T., on the contrary, the human became decentered, at the same time that its ontological vanity is broken in the name of another cosmic process. Indeed, perhaps not only has the human been decentered, having lost its Kantian centrality, but it is also possible that “we were never human.”<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the central point is not the loss of centrality, but its non-existence altogether. We were never as amazing as and as central as we believed.

b. *Realism*:<sup>24</sup> Instead of discussing the conditions of possibility (or existence) of the world, as neo-Kantians like to do, vitalist authors bet on the world as such, that is, on the hypothesis of its existence independent of humans or any kind of implied subjectivity. This means that we are here far beyond all imaginable neo-Kantian by-products, all their favorite transcendentals, such as *Power*, *Language*, *Culture*, *Ideology* (*Ideologiebegriff*), as well as the very concept of *Experience*. In other words, the very “phenomenological transcendental reduction,”<sup>25</sup> known as *epoché*,<sup>26</sup> and also the condition of existence of a subject dissolved in everything that exists, is not welcomed by the vitalist authors. Even this phenomenological pact, where subject (human) and object are dissolved and fused, is something constantly broken by the excessive and overflowing presence of a world that surpasses ourselves. This realism defended by authors like Deleuze, “does not present a flow of the lived immanent to a subject,”<sup>27</sup> but an autonomous dimension,

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<sup>23</sup> Donna Jeanne Haraway, “When We Have Never Been Human, What Is to Be Done?” *Theory, Culture and Society* 23, nos. 7-8 (2006): 136.

<sup>24</sup> I am aware that there is a “Marxist conception of realism” in Georg Lukács, *Essays*, 31, as well as a phenomenological version of realism, although I use the term only for those authors who go fully beyond Kant and his implications. That is, this concept is used here within the contours of an Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO).

<sup>25</sup> Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 51.

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

<sup>27</sup> Gilles Deleuze, and Claire Parnet. *Dialogues II*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, and Barbara

its own rhythm. In this sense, phenomenology, for vitalism, is an idealist philosophical tradition. This means that to speak of ontology (reality) is almost impossible at the borders of a phenomenological project, no matter how much it presents itself with a declared commitment to “go to the things themselves.”<sup>28</sup> If we intend to talk about ontology, or even a multiplicity of ontologies, the *Husserlian epoché*, also known as the basic method of any phenomenologist,<sup>29</sup> turns out to be a major obstacle that must be circumvented. If “[t]he real are gradients of resistance,”<sup>30</sup> this resistance is also directed to any attempt at transcendentalism, especially that phenomenological one and its transcendental reduction. By fusing subject (human) and object,<sup>31</sup> as if they were synonyms, while calling this undifferentiated realm “Ontology,” the phenomenological project monopolizes the possibilities of meaning, making it impossible to imagine a world without an implicated, dissolved subject (human). For this reason, the ‘world’ for phenomenology “is the absolute setting for ourselves and for all the things we experience.”<sup>32</sup> This means that not only structures and systems distort reality, with their epistemic and internalized products, but also practice itself at its most spontaneous and pre-reflective core. Despite what is offered in courses, classes, and books, neither of these alternatives has any kind of ontological advantage, since they both follow the same transcendentalist path, merely reinforcing a classical tradition that always walked the halls of Social Theory.

There are, no doubt, ways to “de-Kantianize phenomenology,” as well as other Neo-kantian approaches, by incorporating its premises within the boundaries of O.O.S.T. realism, as is quite evident in the concept of *sensual object* in Harman, of *belief* and *desire* in Tarde, or of *prehension* in Whitehead. The strategy is simple: we need to decenter the transcendentalist terminology, such as *experience*, *power*, *system*, *intentionality*, *body*, and all their implications, expanding beyond the boundaries of a philosophy of the subject that reserves to the human an indispensable role, implicit in every detail, in every bond. As Whitehead

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Habberjam (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1995), 22.

<sup>28</sup> Tom Sparrow, *The End of Phenomenology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 7.

<sup>29</sup> Morten Axel Pedersen. “Anthropological Epochés: Phenomenology and the Ontological Turn,” *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 50, no. 1 (2020): 13.

<sup>30</sup> Latour, *The Pasteurization*, 166.

<sup>31</sup> Merleau-Ponty states: “[...] in perception we witness the miracle of a totality that surpasses what one thinks to be its conditions or its parts [...].” Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (London: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 8.

<sup>32</sup> Sokolowski, 54.

would say, this means that maybe fire has “the power to melt gold,”<sup>33</sup> maybe “a molecule has a historical trajectory,”<sup>34</sup> or even “a stone feels the heat of the sun.”<sup>35</sup> Transcendentalism is bolstered by an insistent humanistic background structure, which prevents us from observing things beyond our cherished monopoly. Once removed, we can think of new possibilities within Social Theory itself, as well as interesting dialogues that can be made in it.

For example, coronavirus, which crossed the years 2020-2022 with unforgettable force, as a realistic element, surpasses our strategies of control and justification, not being just a result of some transcendental, such as Power, Language, Experience, Culture, Ideology, etc. Moreover, objects in O.O.S.T. have an unprecedented agency, not only decentering the role of the human, but also making it optional.<sup>36</sup> In other words, we are talking here about a world “[...] that needs no phenomenological subject, no human agent and no cultural set, to already be there (where?), doing the work of feeling.”<sup>37</sup>

c. *Anti-correlationism*: According to vitalist authors, not only Power, Language, Culture, Ideology and Experience do not have a monopoly on meaning, but no transcendentalist remnants should remain on the horizon. Subject (human) and world cannot be thought of as a single instance, as if they were correlated. This means that it is possible (and necessary) to talk about the world as an autonomous space, with its own rhythm and that does not necessarily cooperate with the human universe and its practical or theoretical transcendentalists. According to Meillassoux, the creator of the term *correlationism*, the correlationist attitude denies any realist horizon or its ontological commitment. In one of his classic texts, he states:

I call “correlationism” the contemporary opponent of any realism. Correlationism takes many contemporary forms, but particularly those of transcendental philosophy, the varieties of phenomenology, and postmodernism.

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<sup>33</sup> Michael Halewood, *A. N. Whitehead and Social Theory: Tracing a Culture of Thought* (London: Anthem Press, 2011), 33.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>36</sup> “For a long time it has been agreed that the relation between a text and [a subject] is always a matter of interpretation. Why not accept that this is also true between so-called texts and so-called objects, and even between objects themselves?” Bruno Latour, “On Inter-Objectivity,” *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 3, no. 4 (1996): 166.

<sup>37</sup> Savransky, *A Decolonial Imagination*, 11.

But while these currents are all extraordinarily varied in themselves, they all share, in my opinion, a more or less explicit decision: that there are no objects, no events, no laws, no beings that are not always correlated with a point of view, with a subjective access.<sup>38</sup>

The O.O.S.T. position, on the other hand, is “to advocate a realist ontology that refuses to treat objects as constructs or mere correlates of mind, subject, culture or language.”<sup>39</sup>

This “mundanity of the world”<sup>40</sup> is precisely what confers its autonomy, including, of course, its moments of frustration, rupture, and overflow, as the classic example of Heidegger and his famous broken hammer. It is necessary, for this reason, to avoid both the transcendentalism of the structuralists, and their introjected categories, as well as the transcendentalism of the phenomenological subject, constantly implicated in everything that exists. “For both Harman and Meillassoux, the ‘great externality’ of the world beyond correlation can therefore only consist of subjectless objects.”<sup>41</sup> This means an escape from various Neo-kantian derivatives, as well as from the classical intersubjectivity of authors like Alfred Schütz (1899-1959), Peter L. Berger (1929-2017), Erving Goffman (1922-1982) and Harold Garfinkel (1917-2011), towards a new (and eccentric) field of experimentation: *the interobjectivity*.<sup>42</sup> This means that the two classical approaches in Social Theory (structuralism and phenomenology), even if they appear as opposites, are part of the same philosophical tradition, of the same Copernican revolution, here called *correlationalist (transcendentalist)*. As a consequence, the combination of the two lines of thought, offered by the authors of synthesis, such as Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002), Anthony Giddens (1938-), and Jürgen Habermas (1929-), is not far from the Neo-Kantian fate of the other authors. Despite the attempts, and the merit involved in each of them, we remain stuck in German waters, in an eternal “*correlationist circle*” (*cercle corrélationnel*).<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London, and New York: Continuum, 2008), 1.

<sup>39</sup> Bryant, 26.

<sup>40</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: University of New York Press, 2010), 44.

<sup>41</sup> Shaviro, 50.

<sup>42</sup> Latour, “On Inter-Objectivity,” 240.

<sup>43</sup> Meillassoux, 1.

d. *Flat Ontology*: Everything here remains on the same level of ontological horizontality, which implies a certain suspicion of concepts such as structure, system, society,<sup>44</sup> that is, the refusal of anything that stands out from the vital flow, establishing levels, hierarchies and *a priori*s. We are talking here, therefore, of “a multiplicity and not a structure or system.”<sup>45</sup> According to this characteristic, there is nothing above or below reality, much less a beyond, a hereafter, or even a background. The only real thing is the movement itself, its ability to infect everything around it, no matter what. If systems and structures appear on the horizon, which they undoubtedly can, they become a simple assemblage (*agencement*), nothing more than always a posteriori and provisional products, rather than a paranoid and timeless matrix behind the scenes of everything that is done and said. In this model, there would be no ontological privilege directed toward the human and its derivatives, which greatly reconfigures our way of understanding social life and its dilemmas.

For Whitehead, unlike Heidegger, the coupling of the human world has no higher status than the duels between comets and planets, or between dust and moonlight. All relations are exactly on equal *footing*.<sup>46</sup>

In this model, there would be no privilege for the humans, or their transcendental categories, such as *Structure, System, Language, Power*, and many others, which greatly reconfigures our parameters of evaluation. This means that “social worlds remain flat at all points.”<sup>47</sup> By saying that all elements are “at the same footing,” Latour proposes a single ontological level which does not imply an ontic equality. Differences exist, no doubt, as in the distinctions between nature and culture, but these differences are not profound enough to install an ontological abyss, that is, two completely separate, irreducible and hierarchical worlds. On this ground of a flat ontology, “the stone is now conceived as a society

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<sup>44</sup> According to Latour, “arguments form a system or structure only if we forget to test them.” Harman, *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics*, 29.

<sup>45</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Seán Hand (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 18.

<sup>46</sup> Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 46.

<sup>47</sup> Latour, “On-Interobjectivity,” 240.

[...]”<sup>48</sup> or even “the atom is only explicable as a society.”<sup>49</sup> The implications of this reasoning are very interesting, as well as unprecedented, at least in the frontiers of Contemporary Social Theory, involving new ways of understanding the contours of science and its network of articulations. As a result of this flat ontology, it is impossible to define the relevance of an event right from the start, since they are part of the same undifferentiated plane. To understand if something is relevant, therefore, it is necessary to follow the path of experience, of its controversies,<sup>50</sup> observing its contrasts and contours, never establishing *a priori*s or any kind of transcendentalist background matrix.

In Whiteheadian terms, there is a need for a critique of what was called “bifurcation of nature,” that is, “a world divided into two realms that distribute and organize causes and effects, subjects and objects, facts and values, nature and culture, appearance and the really real, and so on.”<sup>51</sup> The 2020 pandemic, which also crossed the years 2021 and 2022, for example, jeopardized precisely this bifurcation, this belief that the human universe presents its own rules, superior and displaced from everything else. The Coronavirus has invaded our ontological purism, creating, perhaps, what Freud would probably call a “fourth narcissistic wound in our humanistic body.” The world with all its relevancies and irrelevancies, in O.O.S.T., is not an extension of some human expectation, even when that humans present themselves in a phenomenological, discrete, implicit way. “Whitehead goes so far as to say that concern is a ‘final factor’ of the world. It is not a content of human subjectivity.”<sup>52</sup>

e. *Difference*: In vitalism “we habitually observe by the method of difference.”<sup>53</sup> This differential principle, well developed in Deleuzian philosophy, is nothing more than the certainty that things “are not,” that is, they do not carry a fixed identity that drags itself along time (substance),<sup>54</sup> but are defined only by the link they establish with other things, in a circuit of exchanges and relations. There is, therefore,

<sup>48</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 78.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 3.

<sup>51</sup> Martin Savransky, *The Adventure of Relevance: An Ethics of Social Inquiry* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 213.

<sup>52</sup> Massumi, *What the Animals Teach us About Politics?* 198.

<sup>53</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 4.

<sup>54</sup> Graham Harman, with his Aristotelian perspective, is the only exception to this rule since he still embraces the notion of substance as an important concept.

“this rejection of the philosophy of identity.”<sup>55</sup> Similarly, within OOO (Object-Oriented Ontology), its authors “welcome this difference, remaining open to the possibility of surprise, refusing to reduce strange strangers<sup>56</sup> to simple fixed entities.”<sup>57</sup>

The principle of difference is not as unusual as it might seem at first sight, especially to those who know a little Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), and his general linguistics, although the principle of difference in vitalism is something ontological, and not the result of a semiotic abstraction called *signifier*.<sup>58</sup> In the attempt to understand what society is, for example, the goal is not the search for something stable, permanent, and detached from the flux of encounters, as in Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) and his sociology of transcendence, but the other way around. “There is no essentialism in this list, since each entity is defined only by its relations.”<sup>59</sup> In other words, there is nothing beyond the links established, no kind of hidden metaphysical treasure. Instead of an essence, we have an excess, a kind of surplus produced by experiences in themselves, in their spontaneous and decentered flow. The authors of O.O.S.T., therefore, “[...] are those who hold that the thing is not an autonomous reality apart from its interactions with other things, but is constituted by these interactions.”<sup>60</sup> This means that the identity of beings is either a fiction within a process of constant becoming,<sup>61</sup> or an extremely costly step that demands much energy and *perseverance*,<sup>62</sup> or even

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<sup>55</sup> Bruno Latour, “Gabriel Tarde and the End of the Social,” in *The Social in Question. New Bearing in History and the Social Sciences*, ed. Patrick Joyce, 1-125 (London: Routledge, 2002), 125.

<sup>56</sup> “Strange stranger” is the equivalent of the body without organs in Levi-Bryant’s Onticology, that is, an excess within the encounters themselves, a realist trait that goes beyond the convenient limits of the transcendental.

<sup>57</sup> Bryant, 268.

<sup>58</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (Columbia: Columbia University Press. 2011.), 118.

<sup>59</sup> Graham Harman, “Whitehead and Schools X, Y, and Z,” in *The Lure of Whitehead*, eds. Nicholas Gaskill, and Adam Nocek, 231-248 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 234.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* 234.

<sup>61</sup> Gilbert Simondon, *The Genesis of the Individual*, trans. Mark Cohen, and Sanford Kwinter (London: Zone Books, 1992).

<sup>62</sup> As Latour would say: “If identities exist among actors, it is because they have been constructed at great cost.” Latour, *The Pasteurization of France*, 162. Following the same reasoning, Latour continues: “In Whitehead’s vocabulary, Pasteur’s laboratory appears to us as an occasion offered to trajectories of entities inheriting previous circumstances, deciding to persevere in a new way of being.” Bruno Latour, “Do Objects Have History? A Meeting

[...] identity is only the minimal degree of difference and hence a kind of difference, and an infinitely rare kind, as rest is only a special case of movement, and the circle only a particular variety of ellipse.<sup>63</sup>

According to a common kind of intuition, deep in the world of life, things retain their identities despite their encounters with the world, what Aristotle called *ousia* (substance). As this great Greek philosopher would say, it doesn't matter whether Socrates is sad or happy, since in the end he remains what he is. In other words, "Aristotelian primary substance is always durable."<sup>64</sup> Following a similar path, it is common to think of the Coronavirus, for example, also as an identity wandering around, a kind of substance that is independent from the bonds it establishes around it, nothing more than a piece of matter waiting to be discovered by some scientist. Despite Harman's attempts to convert Whitehead into an Aristotelian disciple,

The simple notion of an enduring substance that holds persistent qualities, whether essentially or accidentally, expresses a useful summary for many purposes in life. But whenever we try to use it as a fundamental statement of the nature of things, it turns out to be wrong. It arose from a mistake and has never been successful in any of its applications.<sup>65</sup>

f. *Aesthetics*: Before diving headlong into this sixth characteristic, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of the term. *Aesthetics* here can be thought of not only as a synonym for art, but also as equivalent to *Body*, sensibility and affections, an approach that can be found in Nietzsche and in all the authors of O.O.S.T. especially in Brian Massumi and his reformulation of the Spinoza's project. This means that *Aesthetics* is also synonymous with a *Theory of Affect*. According to this feature, everything is governed by the same vital principle, a single movement, which results in a curious detail: *everything has*

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between Pasteur and Whitehead in a Lactic-Acid Bath," *História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos* 2, no. 1 (1995): 83.

<sup>63</sup> Gabriel Tarde, *Monodology and Sociology*, trans Theo Lorenc (Melbourne: Re.Press, 2012), 40.

<sup>64</sup> Harman, "Whitehead and Schools X, Y and Z," 237.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.



*agency*, no matter what. Every inch of reality carries an impulse, an energy, whether human or not. We are talking about everything that “disposes its body to be able to be affected in many ways, or that makes it capable of affecting external bodies in many ways.”<sup>66</sup> Everything overflows with meaning, involving a rich, though dispersed, field of relations and exchanges. In other words, everything has “the capacity to affect and be affected.”<sup>67</sup> Of course, different authors name this vital and aesthetic flow in different ways (*Act Potency*, *Conatus*, *Becoming*, *Elan*, *Imitation*, *Individuation*, *Thing-Power*, etc.), although they all share this same vitalist detail.

In more methodological terms, involving here the very internal process of any given research, Aesthetics in a sense replaces an exaggerated epistemic commitment (true or false) by placing emphasis on the way things are experienced, woven, and affected, what Latour called *relevance*<sup>68</sup> and Whitehead called *importance*.<sup>69</sup> This means that a scientific statement is not only true or false as an element describing a certain state of affairs, but also, and primarily, relevant or irrelevant. Besides the “matters of fact,” and its exaggerated *epistemologism*, we have the Latourian “matters of concern,”<sup>70</sup> which does not exclude epistemic commitment, but only expands it. The aesthetic dimension in the methodological field rescues at the same time a resumption of the sphere of meaning, and its importance in a research, although without falling into the social constructivism of the post-structuralists, since they always reproduce a hileomorphic model.

No matter whether using methodological or ontological terms, aesthetics is one of the fundamental cores of an Object-Oriented Social Theory. “Everywhere there is unity of circumstance there is, therefore, an aesthetic relation established [...]”<sup>71</sup> The world, in this approach, is a decentered field of forces, in which various elements, living or not, collaborate and compete with each other. As a consequence, the concept of *life* is no longer a simple property of

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<sup>66</sup> Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, ed. James Guttman (New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1954), 184.

<sup>67</sup> Massumi, 198.

<sup>68</sup> Bruno Latour, “Do Objects Have History?” 7-26.

<sup>69</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (New York: Free Press, 1968).

<sup>70</sup> Bruno Latour, “How to Talk About the Body? The Normative Dimension of Science Studies,” *Body and Society* 10, nos. 2-3 (2004): 205-229.

<sup>71</sup> Alfred North Whitehead. *Science and Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929), 34.

an entity, an organism, but a movement of reality as a whole. In this sense, even a stone could be alive, since it participates in the same flow of affections, as anthropologist Tim Ingold would say.<sup>72</sup>

#### IV. Conclusion

If it were possible to put together all six elements that define vitalism, and consequently O.O.S.T., it would certainly be the idea of an alternative (or decentered) language. Object-Oriented Social Theory (O.O.S.T.) has produced not only this differentiated epistemological field, but has also opened a gap to a new universe of possibilities, involving new approaches, from more modest ones like the Ontological Turn within anthropology, or even more radical versions like the *new materialism*. In any case, we are here facing a creative space of questionings, criteria and approaches, a new universe just waiting to be explored by the hands of some curious person. Following this reasoning, we can raise a final question: “What paths can O.O.S.T. open, what are its implications?” This article was just an introduction, nothing more than a sample of a tradition of thought that not only grows every day, but also invades several disciplinary and professional fields.

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<sup>72</sup> Timothy Ingold, “Materials against Materiality,” *Archaeological Dialogues* 14, no. 1 (2007): 1-16.

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# Contemporary Epistemology of Nationalism: Faltering Foundationalism Contrasted with Holistic Coherentism

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## Abstract

*This inquiry examines the structure of knowledge of nationalism. While numerous studies on nationalism focus on the nature and defining elements of nations, this research explores nationalism discourse from a purely epistemological viewpoint and asks two overarching questions: what are the constitutive beliefs in these various theories and how are they structured? The first section outlines a contemporary foundationalist argument and analyzes two widely accepted theories of nationalism from this theory of knowledge. The study finds that the linear constraints of a foundationalist approach, resting on the existence of non-inferentially justified beliefs, provide a weak framework for understanding the knowledge structures of nationalism. No single element alone can be deemed to be a sufficient basic belief of nationalism that is self-justified. The second part of this research utilizes contemporary coherence theory to assess the interconnected beliefs embedded in nationalism. Examining several theories of nationalism which arguably adopt coherentism, this particular theory of knowledge is shown to provide a more holistic approach. The study concludes that the very definition of nationalism incorporates interconnected beliefs and ideas about ideology, ethnic basis, shared culture and history, as well as unity and autonomy which imply a befitting epistemological refocus away from foundationalism and towards coherentism.*

**Keywords:** nationalism; foundationalism; coherentism; coherentist theory of justification

## I. Framing the structure of knowledge concerning nationalism

The structure of knowledge as it relates to the topic of nationalism is ambiguous at best. While the subject of nationalism has long been debated, the epistemology of nationalism has received minor attention.<sup>1</sup> My purpose in this study is to attempt to uncover the structure of knowledge of nationalism, moving away from foundationalism and refocusing on coherentism. I first outline a contemporary foundationalist argument for the study of nationalism. From there, I present an approach to nationalism based on a four-part system of coherentism as outlined by Laurence Bonjour. The argument shows how coherentism, as presented by Bonjour, provides a sufficient basis for nationalism discourse. This comes in stark contrast to foundationalism, which is, arguably, an inadequate approach but somehow the default perspective on this phenomenon.

Conceptually, nationalism has several features, including the “process of formation of nations, the consciousness of belonging to a nation, the language and symbolism of the nation, and the sociopolitical movement on behalf of the nation.”<sup>2</sup> Nationalism is understood in terms of the nation, where themes of language and symbolism, sociopolitical movement, and ideology intersect. Hence, nationalism is commonly defined as “an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population which some of its members deem to constitute an actual or potential nation.”<sup>3</sup> From this broad definition, issues of ideology, ethnic basis, and the inner world of *ethnies* (reconstructed ethnic cores that include collective myths, values, and traditions) lie at the heart of any discussion concerning nationalism. In contrast to the ever-increasing process of globalization, nationalism recalls various ethno-histories, an ‘authentic’ form and recollection of culture that is extremely politicized, to increase solidarity of a community which claims a homeland and believes in a shared destiny in order to preserve its identity for the future.

Understanding the basic structure of knowledge of nationalism that combines the multitude of intersecting features, as outlined above, is imperative. I contend that the very definition of nationalism,

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<sup>1</sup> A limited number of authors have sought to address the subject of epistemology in nationalism such as Eugene O’Brien’s article “The Epistemology of Nationalism” and, to a certain extent, Nenad Miscevic’s comprehensive text *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict: Philosophical Perspectives*.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2010), 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.



which incorporates ideology, an ethnic basis, a shared culture and history, as well as unity and autonomy, requires an epistemological shift away from foundationalism and towards coherentism. I argue that foundationalism provides a weak and limited framework through which to understand nationalism discourse. In other words, the constraints that a foundationalist perspective places on the structure of knowledge concerning nationalism will be critically assessed and found lacking. In its place, an epistemological refocus on coherentism will be presented as the more appropriate approach to analyzing nationalism discourse. Ultimately, an emphasis on coherentism will not only prove its utility in revealing the structure of knowledge concerning nationalism, but it will also imply the necessity for the further epistemological study of such a controversial topic.

## II. Foundationalism and nationalism

According to Robert Audi, foundationalism assumes the possibility and existence of non-inferentially justified beliefs. In this case all other knowledge is dependent upon, and justified on, the basis of non-inferential knowledge. Audi claims that,

Foundationalism considers knowledge – and indeed justified belief, which is commonly regarded as a major part of knowledge – to be possible only through *foundational beliefs*. These beliefs are construed as non-inferential in the way perceptual beliefs are: based on experience rather than inference. The underlying idea is in part this: If knowledge or justified belief arises through inference, it requires belief of at least one premise, and that belief can produce knowledge, or justified belief of a proposition inferred from the premise only if the premise belief is itself an instance of knowledge or at least justified.<sup>4</sup>

Audi presupposes an axiomatic starting point for belief and, ultimately, knowledge. While classical foundationalism would presuppose an infallible starting point, moderate and weak foundationalism does not require non-inferential beliefs to be infallible to the point of embracing beliefs that have relative epistemic value. Moreover, such a

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Audi, “Contemporary Foundationalism,” in *The Theory of Knowledge: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Louis P. Pojman, 206-213 (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1999), 207.

weak foundationalism even takes into account inferences that are not strictly deductive. This is the fallibilistic foundationalism at the heart of Audi's approach. This fallibilistic foundationalism presupposes,

Conceptual requirements for the possession of knowledge, epistemic dependence on some appropriate inferential connection, via some epistemic chain, to some non-inferential knowledge, and the traceability of inferential knowledge to some non-inferential knowledge through the interaction of epistemic chains.<sup>5</sup>

Fundamentally, Audi seeks to resolve the epistemic regress argument that plagues knowledge. For Audi and other foundationalists, this epistemic regress is problematic for ever arriving at any solid basis of knowledge since everything is contingent on some other belief. Audi's contemporary view of foundationalism seeks to skip regress for justification for some sort of beliefs – those that are deemed foundational beliefs. In this regard, Audi argues in support of an epistemic chain “terminating with a belief constituting direct knowledge” rather than infinite regress.<sup>6</sup> An epistemic chain is simply a chain of beliefs, with at least the first constituting knowledge, and each successive belief being based on the previous. Moreover, in line with his empirical foundationalism, Audi presents what he considers the four basic sources of knowledge: perception, consciousness, reflection and memory. All four sources of knowledge constitute elements of human experience but are also fallible according to Audi. Therefore, combining the two elements – sources of knowledge and epistemic chains – Audi contends that justified knowledge can only come from epistemic chains that are based on common sense and causally, empirically-evidenced, direct perceptual beliefs. To this effect, he argues that “epistemic chains that originate with knowledge end in non-inferential knowledge: knowledge not inferentially based on further knowledge (or further justified belief). That knowledge, in turn, is apparently grounded in experience.”<sup>7</sup> Adopting such a position, Audi concludes that the infinite regress problem can only be resolved if one adopts the position that regression to inferentially justified beliefs is finite, terminating in non-inferentially justified beliefs. Yet, as per his fallibilistic foundationalism, Audi does allow for the possibility that basic

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

beliefs are revisable. As such, the possibility that justification of beliefs can be defeated is omnipresent as per Audi's fallibilistic foundationalism.

Audi's defense of foundationalism, specifically fallibilistic foundationalism, is arguably at the core of much of the literature on nationalism. Seeking to discover the most basic non-inferential belief that may be defeated lies at the core of nationalism discourse. All other inferential beliefs and knowledge are surely derived from one such non-inferential belief that would render the regress of justification of nationalism finite, with the epistemic chain eventually ending somewhere, preferably in a direct perceptual belief that connects common sense 'realities' in the right way.

With this in mind, Benedict Anderson is among the most prominent scholars to embark on a project of discerning the most basic non-inferential belief/knowledge upon which all discourse of nationalism lies. As outlined in his highly influential work, *Imagined Communities*, Anderson presents a foundationalist argument for the definition of nationalism. By defining the concept, Anderson inadvertently discerns the basic non-inferential belief upon which the entirety of nationalism hinges upon – that of the nation. Adopting a historical reductionist approach to nationalism discourse, Anderson comes to define the most basic belief encapsulated in the phenomenon of nationalism. Anderson considers three complex paradoxes:

- (1) The objective modernity of nations to the historian's eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists.
- (2) The formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept – in the modern world everyone can, should, will 'have' a nationality, as he or she 'has' a gender – vs. the irremediable particularity of its concrete manifestations, such that, by definition, 'Greek' nationality *is sui generis*.
- (3) The 'political' power of nationalisms vs. their philosophical poverty and even incoherence.<sup>8</sup>

In light of these recurring contradictions, Anderson believes that nationalism cannot be understood separately from the nation, which he understands to be a social construction – a figment of collective imagination of vernacular print communities that historically develop a national consciousness.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

Fundamentally, Anderson asserts that a nation is an imagined community. An imagined community, unlike an actual community, is void of actual face-to-face interactions between members of a community. A nation, according to Anderson, is the most basic unit of analysis for understanding nationalism. This belief in community which is wholly based on collectively shared 'imagination' is the basic non-inferential belief upon which Anderson's foundationalist argument for nationalism rests upon. Such emphasis upon imagination as basic knowledge defines Anderson's fallibilistic foundationalism as it is susceptible to perpetual defeat, since people may continually reimagine and modulate their perceptions of what group they belong to. In this sense, Anderson claims that "communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined."<sup>10</sup> Hence, he comes to the conclusion that the only basic belief that is non-inferential is belief in an imagined community.

Holding a basic belief in a nation, the defining characteristic of his modernist (constructivist) perspective on nationalism, Anderson comes to define the features of the imagined community. Firstly, Anderson argues that a nation is imagined as limited since "even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind."<sup>11</sup> Here Anderson contends that an exclusionary principle is encapsulated in the basic knowledge of the imagined community. There must exist the 'other' in order to differentiate the self. For a nation to exist it must be exclusionary – at least somebody must not be part of it. Furthermore, Anderson envisions the concept of sovereignty to lie within the imagined community. The nation is:

Imagined as sovereign because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm [...] nations dream of being free.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, Anderson contends that another major component of the nation is the imagined bonds holding the community together. To this effect, Anderson states that,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 6

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 7.

It [nation] is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.<sup>13</sup>

In this way, Anderson emphasizes the prerequisite necessity of human imagination in order for people to perceive their association with a constructed (print-language) group. Imagined affinity to, and identification with, a social construct forms the foundation for nationalism discourse. All other concepts, theories, and dilemmas build upon this basic belief of imagination of political community according to Anderson.

It may be argued that an imagined political community is a more complex inferential belief, but the fact that its focus is on a social construction rather than the material attributes of an actual community still relegates it to the level of basic knowledge because it is pure non-inferential imagination, rather than pragmatic realization. After all, imagining is so basic, so fundamental to conscious being, that it can be nothing other than a fundamental belief upon which discourse concerning nationalism can rest. However, this begs the question whether an imagined basic belief in the nation and nationalism is not prone to further regress – even to the point of making it impossible to justifiably defeat. Is there something more basic than imagination of community as a social construct? If so, what would be more basic than collectively shared imagination? Does Anderson’s foundationalist project resolve the infinite regression of the structure of knowledge regarding nationalism? The answer is a resounding no. Even when adopting Audi’s empirical foundationalism, the question remains: what is Anderson’s source of knowledge concerning the belief in a so-called imagined community? It would seem to rest only on consciousness rather than incorporating the other three elements of experience (perception, reflection, and memory) that Audi refers to. However, the issue then becomes how one is to make a logically sound jump from a foundationalist conscious imagining of a community as the basis of a nation, which also serves as the starting point for nationalism discourse, to the more pragmatic expression of nationalism’s empirical features.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>14</sup> Please refer to the section entitled “Coherentism and Nationalism” for a detailed discussion

Finally, even if Anderson's foundationalist argument for an imagined community is adopted, the question remains whether it is transferable to fallibilist foundationalism that would allow us to address issues of truth claims. Simply put, can imagining ever be 'justifiably' defended or defeated? Anderson's basic belief of imagined political community based on mental affinity is extremely abstract, if not relativistic, and as such it is difficult to find cause for reversal. Political communities of all sorts can be imagined, but which one is correct and true?

To highlight the problem of any foundationalist approach to discourse concerning nationalism, one must look no further than to an equally persuasive basic belief presented by Ernest Renan in his famous essay aptly entitled *What is a Nation?* In his work, Renan asserts that the basic belief defining the nation (and nationalism) is the idea of solidarity. Renan claims that,

A nation is therefore a vast solidarity, constituted by the sentiment of the sacrifices one has made and of those one is yet prepared to make in the future. It presupposes a past; it is, however, summarized in the present by a tangible fact: consent, the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life. A nation's existence is an everyday plebiscite, just as an individual's existence is a perpetual affirmation of life.<sup>15</sup>

Once again, Renan rests his foundationalism on consciousness as the source of knowledge. However, where Anderson's basic belief is imagining a (national) community, Renan's is solidarity. Renan understands solidarity to be the most basic non-inferential belief in the epistemic chain of nationalism as the impetus for commonality between people sharing the same consciousness. But there is the remaining issue of what type of solidarity. Can solidarity of any kind be justified, or is it a particular solidarity that is shared by a specific group? Moreover, the issue arises as to who is to determine whether the imagining of the abstract political community is the basic non-inferential belief, or whether solidarity is the most basic non-inferential belief upon which nationhood and nationalism rest? If both are based on human consciousness, are we to suppose that one supersedes the other?

This broad analysis of Anderson and Renan's works on nations highlights the numerous issues and problems that arise when applying

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of the features that are encapsulated in nationalism discourse.

<sup>15</sup> Ernest Renan, *What is a Nation? And other Political Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 261.

foundationalism to the discourse on nationalism. Clearly, a structure of knowledge concerning nationalism based on foundationalist premises is insufficient. Hence the need to adopt a coherence theory of knowledge concerning nationalism discourse, which provides a more all-encompassing approach to the subject.

### III. Coherentism and nationalism

Coherence theory has been developed as a counterpoint to foundationalism and focuses on the “totality of our so-called knowledge or beliefs.”<sup>16</sup> Coherentism seeks to resolve some of the weaknesses that plague foundational knowledge claims in foundationalism. Coherentism rejects the foundationalist premise that empirical knowledge must have a foundation. According to its major proponent, Laurence Bonjour, foundationalism actually fails to resolve the epistemic regress problem. While foundationalists such as Audi acknowledge the epistemic regress argument and attempt to solve it by terminating it in experience, contemporary coherentists such as Bonjour claim that the regress problem survives. Essentially, Bonjour finds fault with foundationalism’s linear path of dependence of justification. Instead, coherence as presented by Bonjour understands justification to be circular. To this effect, Bonjour asserts that “coherence theories attempt to evade the regress problem by abandoning the view of justification as essentially involving a linear order of dependence.”<sup>17</sup> Coherentists, like Bonjour, reject the notion of basic beliefs attributed to knowledge at any time. All these basic beliefs necessarily require reference to further empirical beliefs which themselves require further justification, hence the infinite regress problem continues due to the impossibility of determining the ultimate non-inferential belief based on experience. Coherence theory of knowledge then becomes the only alternative solution to the regress argument emphasizing a “non-linear conception of justification.”<sup>18</sup>

As presented in his work entitled *The Coherence Theory of Empirical Knowledge*, Bonjour outlines the basic tenets of contemporary coherentism as an alternative to foundationalism. Fundamentally, coherentism replaces linear justification with a nonlinear view. Basic

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<sup>16</sup> Louis P. Pojman, *What Can We Know?: An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2000), 115.

<sup>17</sup> Laurence Bonjour, “Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (1978): 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

beliefs are rejected, and instead coherentism presents the view that beliefs are justified by being inferentially related to other beliefs that are simultaneously held. According to Bonjour, coherentism presents a “holistic or systematic conception of inferential justification: beliefs are justified by being inferentially related to other beliefs in the overall context of the coherent system.”<sup>19</sup> A belief is analyzed in terms of two levels of justification: local and global justification. Any singular belief depends on local justification to adjacent beliefs, and the overall global system of beliefs. To this effect,

Justification of a particular belief would involve four distinct steps of argument, as follows: 1. The inferability of that particular belief from other particular beliefs, and further inference relations among particular beliefs. 2. The coherence of the overall system of beliefs. 3. The justification of the overall system of beliefs. 4. The justification of the particular belief in question, by virtue of its membership in the system.<sup>20</sup>

These four steps for the justification of an empirical belief are based on what Bonjour defines as the coherence criteria. According to Bonjour, this four-step argument represents the culmination of a holistic process that is circular in nature, and that stresses the importance of beliefs being inferentially related to other beliefs in an overall coherent system. What this four-part coherentism implies, therefore, is that a system of beliefs is coherent only if it is logically consistent. The level of coherentism of a particular set of beliefs depends on the level of probabilistic consistency, which is, in turn, dependent on the number and strength of inferential connections both on the local and global level of justification.

Ultimately, Bonjour’s four-part account of the fully explicit justification of a particular empirical belief highlights the importance and interconnectedness of both coherency and justification. The starting point is justification in a subset of beliefs. From there, global justification and global coherence are introduced in order for the complete justification of the particular belief. This shift from local to global levels allows for the truth of beliefs to be judged in accordance with how they fit into other beliefs that are held. Bonjour claims that

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<sup>19</sup> Laurence Bonjour, “The Coherence Theory of Empirical Knowledge,” *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 30, no. 5 (1976): 286.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.



a belief compatible with coherency must be reliable since it coheres with the overall system.<sup>21</sup> As far as the connection between truth and justification in coherence theory of empirical knowledge is concerned, however, Bonjour claims that coherentism can only point to the likelihood of correspondence in the long-run.<sup>22</sup> It is this link between coherence, correspondence to the real-world, and ultimate truth that is evasive for coherentism, but might prove to be sufficient to point towards the likelihood of truth to be attained. Adhering to the view that if a belief coheres with other theories of truth it can therefore be deemed as true, might be problematic for Bonjour, but it does move one step forward in linking coherentism with judgment of truth claims.

Coherentism provides a more complete basis for discourse concerning nationalism since it dispels basic beliefs regarding the nation that are usually relative and highly contentious. Instead, a focus on how a single belief regarding nations and nationalism coheres with the entirety of the global system of beliefs encompassing this discourse is more appropriate. In this regard, Bonjour's four-part holistic coherentism is well suited to provide the epistemological lens through which to investigate discourse regarding nationalism. Understanding the structure of knowledge regarding nationalism through Bonjour's coherence criteria refocuses attention on how the multiple beliefs and features embedded in nationalism discourse are inferentially related in the wider scope of a coherent system.

The widely adopted definition of nationalism as "an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population which some of its members deem to constitute an actual or potential nation" warrants examination using Bonjour's four-step holistic coherentism.<sup>23</sup> An epistemological focus on coherentism when analyzing Smith's definition of nationalism highlights the multitude of inferential connections between different beliefs of unity, identity and autonomy. Moreover, Bonjour's four-step holistic coherentism emphasizes the varying degrees of logical consistency between different beliefs that are equally valuable in this defined structure of knowledge of nationalism. The argument follows that Bonjour's four stages stress the importance that specific beliefs concerning nationalism are inferentially related to other nationalism beliefs in an overall coherent system. Only by acknowledging the manner in which these different beliefs are inferentially connected in

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 285-286.

<sup>23</sup> Smith, 9.

a coherent system will an epistemological account of nationalism be satisfied. Hence the relevance of Bonjour's holistic coherentism to the epistemological analysis of nationalism discourse.

In his all-encompassing text, *Nationalism*, Anthony D. Smith hints at the need for coherentism when addressing the subject of nationalism. Smith understands nationalism in terms of the nation, where themes of language and symbolism, sociopolitical movement, and ideology all intersect. Smith bases his discussion of nationalism on the notion of nation as a group of people with a common political striving. Conceiving of nations exclusively in terms of people is in direct contrast to the institution-centric idea of the state. According to Smith, the nation is characterized by two interconnected concepts: autonomy and unity. All other concepts, ideas, and beliefs concerning nationalism must cohere with these two elements. For example, ideas of language, symbolism, homeland, ethnicity all have to cohere with the overarching idea of a nation as a group of people united and striving for autonomy.

Bonjour's four-step coherentism applies well to assessing the coherence of interconnected beliefs about language, symbolism, shared history, manifest destiny, and even religion which intersect and constitute the body of knowledge on nationalism. All of these elements first have to be locally justified, however. For example, the idea of shared history and language, attributed to a nation, has to be locally justified as important for the subset of the nation. Shared history and language bring people together through information communication, but all set them apart from other groups. From there, ideas of shared history and language globally cohere with the tenants of unity and autonomy. Unity and autonomy cohere with a subcategory of unity that shared history and language incite. From there, shared history and language are globally justified by facilitating further cohesion-building (as well as exclusivity) among members of the nation. In this way, ideas of shared history and language become completely justified as beliefs of nationalism discourse.

Smith's continual emphasis on the intertwining of *ethnie* and homeland as major components of nationalism can only be analyzed from the perspective of epistemological coherentism. Concepts of *ethnie* and homeland have to cohere internally and externally in order for them to be justified beliefs in the holistic scheme of nationalism discourse. As Smith notes, an *ethnie* is a "named human community connected to a homeland, possessing common myths of ancestry, shared memories, one or more elements of shared culture,

and a measure of solidarity, at least among the elites.”<sup>24</sup> Ethnicity is not synonymous with nationhood since it alone is far too culturally restrictive and politically passive. Yet, both ethnicity and homeland in Smith’s definition, cohere with the broader definition of nationalism as an ideology of a united group of people striving for self-determination.

Both ethnicity and homeland globally cohere with nationalism discourse whose definition is intertwined with beliefs concerning a united community who share an autonomous territory. Part three of BonJour’s system is satisfied as both ethnicity and homeland can be globally justified within the concept of nationalism. In this regard, the complete justification of ethnicity and homeland as components of nationalism is satisfied. Nationalism, therefore, has no basic self-justified beliefs. Instead, the intersection of interconnected and coherent concepts of ethnicity, homeland, language, shared history and religious background, and symbolism all have to cohere in order to define the overarching justified belief of what nationalism is. No single trait alone can be deemed to be a basic belief of nationalism that is self-justified.

A coherentist perspective on nationalism is also shared by Ernest Gellner. As a modernist it would be easy to misinterpret Gellner’s reductionism to also imply foundationalism. On the contrary, Gellner’s sociocultural theory employs coherentism to unveil the interlinking truths embedded in nationalism. In his text *Nations and Nationalism*, Gellner defines nationalism as a product of modernization that expresses itself as a sociological condition and serves the purpose of creating cultural homogeneity. Rather than grounding his theory of nationalism in a single foundational belief, Gellner’s approach to nationhood rests on interlinking components of will and culture under the notion of polity. Gellner explains that,

Nations can indeed be defined only in terms both of will and of culture, and indeed in terms of the convergence of them both with political units. In these conditions, men will to be politically united with all those, and only those, who share their culture. Polities then will to extend their boundaries to the limits of their cultures, and to protect and impose their culture with the boundaries of their power. The fusion of will, culture, and polity becomes the norm, and one not easily or frequently defied.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>25</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 55.

Such a perspective on nationalism clearly ascribes to coherentism because Gellner's theory is not grounded on any single, self-evident, basic belief. Instead, it is the intersecting beliefs concerning will and culture, fused under the umbrella of polity, that cohere and constitute what is understood as the phenomenon of nationalism.

Possibly the clearest example of epistemological coherentism of nationalism discourse comes to fruition through the work of Michel Seymour in his piece entitled *On Defining the Nation*. Seymour inadvertently shows that no basic beliefs are inherent in the concept of nationalism. Instead, a variety of coherent concepts come to confluence in a more robust epistemic understanding of nationalism. Seymour argues that nationalism, first and foremost, involves considering the nation as a "political community composed of a national majority, and very often of national minorities and ethnic communities. All share a certain national consciousness on the same territory."<sup>26</sup> Contrary to Anderson, Seymour shows that a foundationalist premise of consciousness, specifically that of the imagined community, is insufficient as a basic belief. Instead, Seymour understands nationalism to focus on a type of epistemic coherentism in which four key notions of political community, national majority, national consciousness, and territory must interact and unequivocally cohere. By political community, Seymour conceives of a "sociopolitical group" that differentiates itself from another political community by both subjective and objective factors.<sup>27</sup> For Seymour, the political community arises out of a pluralist process pitting the ethnic versus the civil. This, then, ushers in the idea of national majorities. The national majority is defined as a "group of people with a specific language, culture, and history."<sup>28</sup> Of course, Seymour contends, this national majority must occupy a territory with which it associates – a homeland per se. Seymour argues that the fourth feature of nationalism in regard to national consciousness naturally arises out of the other three and is based on a subjective sense of belonging. When people show a "will to live together and belong together" they voluntarily choose to be a part of the nation.<sup>29</sup> Ultimately, Seymour's argument highlights the need for coherence between the four elements of the nation when addressing the epistemology of nationalism discourse.

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<sup>26</sup> Michel Seymour, "On Redefining the Nation," in *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict*, ed. Nenad Miscevic, 25-56 (Chicago: Open Court, 2000), 39.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

I argue that Seymour's four factors both singularly and mutually cohere to the discourse of nationalism. More specifically, the elements of political community, national majority, national consciousness, and territory have to singularly comply with Bonjour's four-part coherentism in order to be justified as part of the definition of nationalism. At the same time, these elements can together be understood to fulfill Bonjour's four-part holistic coherentism. Territory can be understood as part of local justification, national consciousness as a part of global coherence, national majority as part of global justification, and political community as complete justification of nationalism.

#### IV. Coherentism and moral considerations of nationalism

Holistic coherentism can also be particularly useful when investigating the structure of knowledge as regards to moral arguments for and against nationalism. More specifically, holistic coherentism addresses the issue of special obligations when discussing national partiality. In his enlightening chapter, *National Partiality: Confronting the Intuitions*, Daniel Weinstock attempts to untangle the complexities involved with defenses of nationalism based on "special obligations towards their compatriots."<sup>30</sup> Acknowledging the powerful appeals to emotion and intuition, Weinstock finds offense with the paradox of 'choosing' one's obligations. Special obligations to compatriots, as a subset of moral obligations, do not necessarily hold if we are free to choose to uphold them according to Weinstock. Instead, Weinstock understands special obligations towards compatriots as limited to "imperfect obligations" that can be chosen to be discharged at the discretion of whoever embraces them.<sup>31</sup> Virtually all arguments put forth by special-obligations theorists (including kinship arguments, gratitude arguments, shared history arguments, proximity arguments, and even mutual advantage arguments) are grounded in some type of foundationalism that considers special obligations to be derived from a (controversial) basic belief concerning the meaning of "obligation" and "compatriot."<sup>32</sup>

Highlighting the weakness of these foundationalist arguments, Weinstock seems to suggest that any and all obligations should be assessed in terms of holistic coherentism, in which grounds for special obligations would be reconsidered in terms of 'may' rather than 'must.' Special obligations, therefore, would not constitute sufficient grounds

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<sup>30</sup> Daniel Weinstock, "National Partiality: Confronting the Institutions," in *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict*, ed. Nenad Miscevic, 133-156 (Chicago: Open Court, 2000), 133.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

for national partiality since they do not cohere with the overall view of what is meant by compatriot and obligation in the wider scope of nationalism.<sup>33</sup> One may have a special obligation to his/her compatriot in the wider scope of unity and solidarity that nationalism purports. However, the premise that one must have special obligations to his/her compatriot simply does not epistemically cohere either in terms of global coherence or global justification as part of a holistic coherence structure of knowledge concerning nationalism. Hence, national partiality simply does not hold in terms of necessary special obligations, since it does not necessarily epistemically cohere.

#### V. The value of coherentism for nationalism discourse

A foundationalist approach to nationalism discourse is insufficient. Trying to strip down nationalism to a specific basic belief seems to misread the discursive objective and layered complexity of the phenomenon of nationalism. Assertions that have been laid out by Anderson and Renan concerning basic beliefs of imagined community and solidarity seem rather vague, if not controversial. Limiting the scope of nationalism to such basic beliefs fails to take into account a multitude of interconnected beliefs, concepts, and ideas associated with the subject of nationalism.

An epistemological refocus away from foundationalism and towards coherentism bodes well for comprehending nationalism. More specifically, BonJour's four-part holistic coherentism provides a more complete epistemological grounding for nationalism discourse. The structure of knowledge concerning nationalism would greatly benefit from adopting epistemological coherentism as a basic guideline by which to categorize and organize beliefs, theories, concepts, and even dilemmas when addressing this complex subject. This is clearly evident from a critical assessment of the more balanced and holistic approaches to nationalism put forward by Smith, Gellner, Seymour, and Weinstock.

Finally, it must be accepted that there are possible weaknesses to a coherentist epistemological approach to nationalism. As Richard Fumerton duly notes in his text, *A Critique of Coherentism*, the problem arises when one has to judge and choose between equally coherent systems of belief. According to Fumerton, the problem of choosing the "true belief" is extremely difficult to solve and overcome

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 133-156.

with coherentism.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, a coherence theory of truth faces multiple problems with the implicit acceptance of internalism.<sup>35</sup> Despite Fumerton's invaluable critique, however, it must be noted that these criticisms seem to be leveled at individual belief systems, of which nationalism discourse is not necessarily a part. The nature of the structure of knowledge concerning nationalism is more holistic and therefore it is not so constrained by independent individual belief systems. Therefore, these criticisms do not necessarily hold for nationalism discourse, at least.

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<sup>34</sup> Richard Fumerton, "A Critique of Coherentism," in *The Theory of Knowledge: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Louis P. Pojman, 241-245 (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1999), 245.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

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# Confucius' Ontological Ethics

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## **Abstract**

*Confucius associates the good and the beautiful. Li (translated variously as “ritual propriety,” “ritual,” “etiquette,” or “propriety”) embodies the entire spectrum of interaction with humans, nature, and even material objects. I argue that Confucius attempts to introduce an ethical ontology, not of “what,” but of “the way.” The “way” of reality becomes known with the deliberate participation to the Dao. In other words, through interaction. The way people co-exist demonstrates the rationality of the associations of living and functioning together. Li, as an aesthetic-moral principle, embodies the entire spectrum of one’s interaction with humans, nature, and even material objects. Li is a constitutive element of Confucian ethics and politics, highlighting the importance of beauty, and not only goodness, in human action. The worthiness of human action is judged both aesthetically and morally. Moreover, I hold that Confucius’ ethical ontology is not an ontology of “whatness” but of “howness,” according to the Dao, since Confucius primary concern was not to define the Dao, but to restore the Dao of the ancient sage-kings. The morality of the action is dependent on the way it is performed, according to the mandates of the Dao.*

**Keywords:** *Confucius; Li; Dao; ethics; ritual propriety; virtue; aesthetics*

The connection between aesthetics and ethics is a close one, since they are both forms of value, as Wittgenstein has pointed out.<sup>1</sup> The ancient Greeks had a term to describe this connection: *kalokagathia*, from the expression *καλὸς κἀγαθός* (the beautiful and the good). Aristotle equates perfect virtue to *kalokagathia*.<sup>2</sup> This concept makes sense in the context of ancient Greek thought, which stresses the importance of harmony and balance in every human expression. Confucius also associates the good and the beautiful in the concept of *li*. *Li* (translated variously as “ritual propriety,” “ritual,” “etiquette,” or “propriety”) has a central role in Confucianism, but its conceptual complexity, meaning, and use are frequently misunderstood in scholarship. Chenyang Li understands *li* as a cultural grammar and misses its aesthetic and moral overtones.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, Kwong-loi Shun focuses on *li*'s political and ceremonial dimensions, disregarding its significance for ethics and aesthetics.<sup>4</sup> Karyn Lai, while acknowledges the centrality of *li* in Confucian ethics, underestimates its interplay with aesthetics.<sup>5</sup> Tu Wei-Ming considers *li* not so important for the establishment of Confucian ethics.<sup>6</sup> Some other scholars interpret ritual behaviors as attempts to defend conservative practices stemming from the idealized Chinese past.<sup>7</sup> Recently, Ming Dong Gu attempted to discuss the dialectic of the good and the beautiful in the concept of *li*, but he focuses on music and the arts and not on ethics.<sup>8</sup> Xiaowei Fu and Yi Wang argue against the unity of the beautiful and the good in Confucian ethics. Anywise, their argument refers predominantly to the significance for goodness to aesthetics and not vice versa. Furthermore, they establish their

<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922), 6.41-6.42.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, 1249a 18-21.

<sup>3</sup> Chenyang Li, “Li as Cultural Grammar: On the Relation between Li and Ren in Confucius’ ‘Analects,’” *Philosophy East and West* 57, no. 3 (2007): 311-329.

<sup>4</sup> Kwong-loi Shun, “Jen and Li in the ‘Analects,’” *Philosophy East and West* 43, no. 3 (1993): 457-479.

<sup>5</sup> Karyn Lai, “Li in the *Analects*: Training in Moral Competence and the Question of Flexibility,” *Philosophy East and West* 56, no. 1 (2006): 69-83.

<sup>6</sup> Tu Wei-Ming, “The Creative Tension between Jên and Li,” *Philosophy East and West* 18, nos. 1-2 (1968): 29-39.

<sup>7</sup> Kwong-Loi Shun, “Ren and Li in the *Analects*,” in the *Confucius and the Analects: New Essays*, ed. Bryan W. Van Norden, 53-72 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 67.

<sup>8</sup> Ming Dong Gu, “The Ethical Turn in Aesthetic Education: Early Chinese Thinkers on Music and Arts,” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 50, no. 1 (2016): 95-111.

view on texts from “early” Confucianism and, as a result, they do not cover the broad spectrum of Confucian thought.<sup>9</sup>

However, by a closer examination of the nature and function of ritual propriety as described in the *Analects*, it becomes apparent that it is a much broader concept than those scholars make it out to be. The rites of *li* are not rites in accordance with the Western conception of religious customs. Rather, *li* embodies the entire spectrum of one’s interaction with humans, nature, and even material objects. Confucius includes in his discussions of ritual propriety such diverse topics as learning, mourning, and governance. I will argue that ritual propriety has a key role within Confucian ethics and politics and adds aesthetic overtones to these fields, stressing the interest in the way (*Dao*) of the individual’s action; not to consequences, motives or deontological principles. Moreover, I will attempt to define the kind of ethics Confucius proposes, since *li* provides us a key to re-evaluate Confucius’ ethical thought, which, by most contemporary scholars is categorized as virtue ethics,<sup>10</sup> or as a non-Kantian type of deontological ethics.<sup>11</sup> Confucius, to my understanding, attempts to introduce a peculiar kind of ontological ethics – an ethical ontology, not of “whatness” but of “howness,” meaning that the ethical demand arises out of the structures given with existence, not out of a relation to transcendence, since *Dao* (*Way*), as a cosmic principle, is immanent. Confucius’ moral ontology of “howness” relies on facts that exist objectively. According to Confucius, *li* encompasses a broad range of public or shared experience, existing independently. *Li* is valid and binding because the “how” becomes known with the deliberate participation to the *Dao*, as the archetypal *Way*.

Predominantly, the third and tenth books of the *Analects* are focused on ritual propriety. The ritual network includes religious and political ceremonies and norms of political and social etiquette. These were overlapping aspects of rituals and social etiquettes, and it is not always easy to distinguish between “rites,” “ceremonies,” and “manners.” All these are called *li*. *Li* is a dominant concept in Confucian thought. It is the path through which *ren* (perfect humaneness)

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<sup>9</sup> Xiaowei Fu, and Yi Wang, “Confucius on the Relationship of Beauty and Goodness,” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 49, no. 1 (2015): 68-81.

<sup>10</sup> Bryan van Norden, *Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 65-138; Jiyuan Yu, *The Ethics of Confucius and Aristotle, Mirrors of Virtue* (London: Routledge, 2007), 10-19.

<sup>11</sup> Ming-Huei Lee, *Confucianism: Its Roots and Global Significance* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2017), 92-101.

can be attained in individuals, and order restored to society. The ideogram for ren is “human” on left and “two” on right. According to Confucius, human beings are always defined through others. One cannot exist without the other. Therefore, human interaction and its terms are crucial for Confucius. Perfect humaneness, the highest virtue in Confucian ethics, is not some abstract concept of good, but practical benevolence expressed in human interaction.<sup>12</sup>

Confucius holds that ritual propriety is valuable because it is rewarding aesthetically and generates a kind of wisdom. According to Confucius, the acquisition of ritual skills transforms one’s perspective and confirms the absolute value of those skills. Confucius supports that in using *li*, harmony should be valued. Ritual propriety is the oil that keeps the wheels of our social life turning and leads to greater social harmony. Confucius holds that a large part of wise living involves making use of this ritual propriety to bring a greater degree of elegance and harmony to our personal life and to the lives of others.<sup>13</sup>

Ritual propriety forms a set of codes that regulate in detail every sphere of human conduct. Therefore, it is a formalized set of rules for communities, aimed to improve their cohesion and ensure their orderly function. It designates each person’s exact place within a smaller or larger community. Confucius is adamant that the laws of the state alone will not bring social order.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, controlling the citizens’ behaviors through ritual propriety is much more effective, because, through shame, voluntary conformity is achieved:

The Master said, Guide them with government orders, regulate them with penalties, and the people will seek to evade the law and be without shame. Guide them with virtue, regulate them with ritual, and they will have a sense of shame and become upright.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ranjoo Seodu Herr, “Is Confucianism Compatible with Care Ethics? A Critique,” *Philosophy East and West* 53, no. 4 (2003): 471-489; Fu, and Wang, 68-81.

<sup>13</sup> Yong Huang, and Robert A. Carleo III, “Introduction: Contemporary Confucian Political Philosophy,” in *Confucian Political Philosophy: Dialogues on the State of the Field*, eds. Robert A. Carleo III, and Yong Huang, 1-27 (Cham: Springer, 2021), 18.

<sup>14</sup> Randall Peerenboom, “Law and Religion in Early China,” in *Religion, Law and Tradition: Comparative Studies in Religious Law*, ed. Andrew Huxley, 84-107 (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), 85.

<sup>15</sup> Confucius, “Analects,” in *The Analects of Confucius*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 2.3.

Confucius aims to a total and voluntary participation of the people in ritual propriety. For this reason, he supports that adhering to the ritualistic order must be combined with perfect humaneness:

The Master said, A human being who lacks humaneness – what is ritual to someone like that? A human being who lacks humaneness – what is music to someone like that?<sup>16</sup>

According to Confucius, the person who embodies perfect humaneness and conforms to ritual propriety is a noble human (*junzi*). Confucius reclaims the term, removes any aristocratic connotation, and focuses on meritocracy. A noble human adheres to ritual propriety and seeks to actualize the *Dao* with perfect humaneness. His actions are aligned with beauty and grace. The noble human not only serves as a moral exemplar, but also demonstrates a level of ritual mastery in which rituals are no longer cumbersome and restrictive. Those who become noble humans not only follow ritual propriety, but also can express themselves in creative and novel ways.<sup>17</sup>

A special place in Confucian ethics is held by the concept of *shu* (being accommodative). It is taking oneself as the measure of one's behavior towards others.<sup>18</sup> However, Confucian thought does not limit itself in the negative version of the Golden Rule, that is to avoid treating others as we would not like to be treated.<sup>19</sup> It certainly encompasses the notion that through our actions we offer ourselves as models to others and we become moral legislators for our entire community:

Zigong said, If someone could spread bounty abroad among the people and rescue the populace, how would that be? Could that be called humaneness?

The Master said, Why bring humaneness into the discussion? If you must have a label, call the man a sage. Even Yao and Shun had trouble doing that much.

The humane person wants standing, and so he helps others to gain standing. He wants achievement, and so he helps

<sup>16</sup> Confucius, 3.3.

<sup>17</sup> Hagop Sarkissian, "Ritual and Rightness in the *Analects*," in *Dao Companion to the Analects*, ed. Amy Olberding, 95-116 (Dordrecht: Springer, 2018), 111.

<sup>18</sup> David L. Hall, and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius* (New York: SUNY Press, 1987), 283-295.

<sup>19</sup> Qingjie James Wang, "The Golden Rule and Interpersonal Care: From a Confucian Perspective," *Philosophy East and West* 49 no. 4 (1999): 415-438.

others to achieve. To know how to proceed on the analogy of what is close at hand – this can be called the humane approach.<sup>20</sup>

It is important to clarify that we should not see Confucius' thought through the lenses of modern individualism. According to Confucius, human behavior is dictated by ritual commands. This should not be conceived as submission to the will of others, but that even discord is expressed in the appropriate way.<sup>21</sup>

Along the same lines, Confucius introduces the concept of *yi* (righteousness),<sup>22</sup> through which Confucius aims to demonstrate that everyone appreciates appropriate behavior, though always within the context of ritual propriety. Social etiquette is an endless primer of methods, which we can draw upon appropriate action on every occasion. Moreover, the concept of *de* (virtue)<sup>23</sup> applies to how noble humans govern through the moral shining virtue of their deeds:

The Master said, Conduct government in accordance with virtue, and it will be like the North Star standing in its place, with all the other stars paying court to it.<sup>24</sup>

Through the ritual propriety, everything in the world returns to perfect humaneness:

Yan Yuan asked about humaneness. The Master said, To master the self and return to ritual is to be humane. For one day master the self and return to ritual, and the whole world will become humane. Being humane proceeds from you yourself. How could it proceed from others?

Yan Yuan said, May I ask how to go about this?

The Master said, If it is contrary to ritual, don't look at it. If it is contrary to ritual, don't listen to it. If it is contrary to ritual, don't utter it. If it is contrary to ritual, don't do it.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Confucius, 6.30.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.1.

<sup>22</sup> Hall, and Ames, 89-109.

<sup>23</sup> Jiyuan Yu, "Virtue: Confucius and Aristotle," *Philosophy East and West* 48, no. 2 (1998): 323-347.

<sup>24</sup> Confucius, 2.1.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.1.

Of course, the internalization of ritual propriety is achieved through intense study and effort. A ritual is valued not only for its practical dimension or for the benefit it brings, but also because it goes along with a certain beauty.<sup>26</sup> The link between ritual propriety and beauty is evident:

Master You said, What ritual values most is harmony. The Way of the former kings was truly admirable in this respect. But if in matters great and small one proceeds in this manner, the results may not always be satisfactory. You may understand the ideal of harmony and work for it, but if you do not employ ritual to regulate the proceedings, things will not go well.<sup>27</sup>

Confucius stresses that ritual propriety requires harmony,<sup>28</sup> which is the beauty of the *Dao* of the Former Kings and a source of great deeds. Great deeds are beautiful as much as they are elegant and harmonious. Particularly, Master You states that when ritual propriety guides respect, we will be far from shame and disgrace:

Master You said, Trustworthiness is close to rightness – it ensures that people will live up to their word. Courtesy is close to ritual decorum – it ensures that people will give wide berth to shame and disgrace. When one makes no mistakes in what he favors, he can serve as a leader.<sup>29</sup>

It becomes clear that any behavior that diverts from the context of ritual propriety is disregarded, because is not harmonized with the *Dao*. Even respect can lead to deviation or failure if it is not shown in the appropriate way. A show of respect punctuated with theatrics and verbalism can cancel out its purpose, regardless of the honest intentions of the person who pays respect. Again, ritual propriety dictates the appropriate way. Furthermore, Confucius revisits the link between ritual propriety and respect, providing a notable example:

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<sup>26</sup> Fu, and Wang, 68-81.

<sup>27</sup> Confucius, 1.12.

<sup>28</sup> Jim Behuniak, *John Dewey and Confucian Thought: Experiments in Intra-cultural Philosophy, Volume Two* (New York: SUNY Press 2019), 184-187; Sean McAleer, *Confucian and Stoic Perspectives on Forgiveness* (Lanham: Lexington Books 2022), 30-31.

<sup>29</sup> Confucius, 1.13.

Meng Yi Zi asked about filial devotion. The Master replied, Never break the rules.

When Fan Chi was driving the carriage, the Master reported this to him, saying, Meng Sun (Meng Yi Zi) asked me about filial devotion. I told him, Never break the rules.

Fan Chi said, What did you mean by that?

The Master said, While they are alive, serve them according to ritual. When they die, bury them according to ritual, and sacrifice to them in accord with ritual.<sup>30</sup>

*Xiao* (filial devotion), the noblest manifestation of virtue, serves as a model for all social and political interactions, and is consistently tied in with ritual propriety.<sup>31</sup> A son's duty is to bury his parents and pay them tribute with the appropriate sacrifices, according to etiquette. As pedantic as this might seem, Confucius had realized the deep practical wisdom of ritual propriety. Especially regarding funerals, on which he insists, the main goal of the etiquette is primarily not to let people on their own in mourning. The gathering of family and friends aims to provide the support needed in these hard times. In addition, the strict funeral rites, with the numerous obligations during the first days, keep mourners occupied to avoid losing themselves in lamentations and self-absorption. The social visits after the funeral and the sacrificial offerings at the ancestral altar serve the same purpose. If the mourner decides to deviate from the proper ways, there is the risk of exaggerated mourning and its rather unpleasant personal and social consequences.<sup>32</sup>

However, Confucius remarks that, in funerals, the expression of personal pain comes before adhering to the ritual's protocol without substance. Namely, he is fierce against those who subdue sentiments to rituals. The protocol should not get in the way of the expression of pain:

Lin Fang asked what is basic in ritual. The Master said, A big question indeed! In rites in general, rather than extravagance, better frugality. In funeral rites, rather than thoroughness, better real grief.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Confucius, 2.5.

<sup>31</sup> Donald Holzman, "The Place of Filial Piety in Ancient China," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118, no. 2 (1998): 186-190.

<sup>32</sup> Xiaoqun Wu, *Mourning Rituals in Archaic & Classical Greece and Pre-Qin China* (Singapore: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 75-83.

<sup>33</sup> Confucius, 3.4.



The following passages are even more illuminating:

Meng Wu Bo asked about filial devotion. The Master said, Your father and mother should have to worry only about your falling ill.

Ziyou asked about filial devotion. The Master said, Nowadays it's taken to mean just seeing that one's parents get enough to eat. But we do that much for dogs or horses as well. If there is no reverence, how is it any different?<sup>34</sup>

Confucius questions the common idea of his time that filial devotion primarily means covering the basic survival and nutritional needs of the parents. He then wonders what a human's difference from animals is since we provide food for them too. The answer he gives is respect. In other words, without the appropriate sentiment of respect when food is offered, the act loses its meaning. For instance, a wealthy person might offer to his parents the most expensive and refined meals, but in a demeaning and offensive way. On the other hand, you may have someone who covers their parents' basic survival needs and offers them a humble meal, but in the proper manner. Evidently, Confucius would consider the latter approach as the appropriate one, as in that behavior, beauty and respect go hand in hand. The action is defined not only by its goal or motive, but also by the mode of execution, the way.<sup>35</sup> In fact, the ethics of ritual propriety that Confucius introduces can also be applied in politics:

Ji Kangzi asked, How can I make the common people respectful, loyal, and diligent in their work?

The Master said, If you are strict in overseeing them, they will be respectful. If you are filial and compassionate, they will be loyal. If you promote persons of goodness and teach those who are incompetent, then the people will be diligent.<sup>36</sup>

Ji Kangzi asks Confucius how he can win over the people. Confucius responds that people's veneration will be won with the appropriate

<sup>34</sup> Confucius, 2.6-2.7.

<sup>35</sup> Lee Dian Rainey, *Confucius and Confucianism: The Essentials* (Malden, and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 23-28.

<sup>36</sup> Confucius, 2.20.

approach, not so much with results. People seek from politicians to be treated with dignity, to pay respect to parents, and to be compassionate to the rest. Therefore, not everything is judged according to what is offered and what is achieved, as advocates of utilitarian politics claim. Confucius neither ignores nor does he dismiss the importance of securing adequate standards of living for the people. Nevertheless, he highlights the importance of providing for the people in a nice manner, to achieve the appropriate political result and ensure the excellent function of the state.<sup>37</sup>

The emphasis on the way of the action, the link between ethics and aesthetics, is also evident in another passage, where Confucius vividly associates ritual propriety with perfect humaneness: “The Master said, A human being who lacks humaneness – what is ritual to someone like that? A human being who lacks humaneness – what is music to someone like that?”<sup>38</sup> Specifically, he remarks that ritual propriety without perfect humaneness is useless. It is clear that he is not interested in blind obedience, but in adherence to ritual propriety with substance. The manner is important, but the substance of the act is equally important: motive and objective. In fact, he mentions that in offering sacrifices, which of course falls under the protocols of rituals, if people do not participate in them with their soul, it is no better than not offering them at all.<sup>39</sup>

It should be noted that virtue could be attained only through voluntary conformity with ritual propriety. Following rituals without deep inwardness is mere formalism,<sup>40</sup> and Confucius expresses his discontent for the fact that in his era they are usually considered as merely conventions: “The Master said, Ritual! ritual! they say. But is it just a matter of jades and silks? Music! music! they say. But is it just a matter of bells and drums?”<sup>41</sup>

However, simply following ritual propriety behaviors does not constitute perfect humanness. As much as Confucius praises the ancient

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<sup>37</sup> Leong Chan, “Virtue-Based Politics: A Dialogue with Loubna El Amine’s New Interpretation of Classical Confucian Political Thought,” *Confucian Political Philosophy: Dialogues on the State of the Field*, eds. Robert A. Carleo III, and Yong Huang, 175-200 (Cham: Springer, 2021), 196-198.

<sup>38</sup> Confucius, 3.3.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.12.

<sup>40</sup> Archie J. Bahm, *The Heart of Confucius: Interpretations of Genuine Living and Great Wisdom* (Fremont: Jain Publishing Company, 1992), 43; K. K. Yeo, *Musing with Confucius and Paul: Toward a Chinese Christian Theology* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008), 290.

<sup>41</sup> Confucius, 17.11.

ways, he does note at times that it might be appropriate to alter rituals to suit contemporary circumstances:

The Master said, Ritual calls for caps of hemp, though nowadays silk is used, because it is more economical. I go along with others in this.  
Ritual calls for one to bow at the foot of the stairs. Nowadays people bow at the top of the stairs, but this is presumptuous. Although it means differing from others, I perform the bow at the foot of the stairs.<sup>42</sup>

Ritual propriety helps to shape perfect humanness, but perfect humanness is not totally defined through ritual propriety, because there is also some flexibility to depart from existing ritual propriety. However, this flexibility must be understood within a general acceptance of existing ritual propriety behavior. Meanwhile, Confucius insistently rejects any unjustified change to the rituals, as it undermines sociopolitical stability:

The Master said, You (Zilu), have you heard of the six terms and the six flaws attending them?  
Zilu replied, No, not yet.  
Sit down, said the Master, and I will tell you. Love of humaneness without love of study invites the flaw of foolishness. Love of understanding without love of study invites the flaw of recklessness. Love of trustworthiness without love of study invites the flaw of injurious behavior. Love of uprightness without love of study invites the flaw of bluntness. Love of bravery without love of study invites the flaw of riotousness. Love of firmness without love of study invites the flaw of irrational action.<sup>43</sup>

Confucius considered ritual propriety to be of the utmost importance, as he insists<sup>44</sup> that despite his contemporaries' objections, his duty is to ensure that ritual propriety is observed. Ritual propriety mostly binds the elite, so they do not mistreat the people. The ethical and aesthetical ideal turns social aristocracy into moral aristocracy:

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<sup>42</sup> Confucius, 9.3.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.8.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.17.

Duke Ding asked how the ruler should treat his ministers and how the ministers should serve the ruler. Confucius replied, The ruler should treat his ministers in accordance with ritual. The ministers should serve the ruler with loyalty.<sup>45</sup>

Even the riches are not acceptable if they are not attained in accordance with the Way:

The Master said, Wealth and eminence are what people desire, but if one can't get them by means that accord with the Way, one will not accept them. Poverty and low position are what people hate, but if one can't avoid them by means that accord with the Way, one will not reject them. If the gentleman rejects humaneness, how can he be worthy of the name of gentleman? The gentleman never departs from humaneness even for the space of a meal – in confusion and distress he holds fast to it; stumbling, faltering, he holds fast to it.<sup>46</sup>

Once more, the end does not justify the means. What matters most is the manner, the way, although it might bring no result or even lead to poverty. Disregarding an end due to the use of ill means is also evident in 4.14, where Confucius explicitly states that authority positions or fame should not be pursued in the wrong way:

The Master said, Don't worry that you have no position – worry about how you can qualify for one. Don't worry that people don't know you – look for some reason to become known.<sup>47</sup>

People must follow the *Dao*, regardless of whether it may lead them to positions of power. The rule of the noble human is what is just, whereas the rule of the small-minded is what is beneficial.<sup>48</sup>

In this same perspective, it is interesting to examine Confucius' opinion on wealth. Confucius does not reject it, although he admits

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<sup>45</sup> Confucius, 3.19.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.5.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.14.

<sup>48</sup> Ming-Huei Lee, "Confucianism, Kant, and Virtue Ethics," in *Virtue Ethics and Confucianism*, eds. Stephen Angle, and Michael Slote, 47-55 (New York: Routledge, 2013), 49-50.

to its corrupting role. Instead, he states that what is important is the way it is used. His advice is not to reject riches but to use them to the benefit of society.<sup>49</sup> Emphasis on manners is also evident in 14.1, where Confucius remarks that it is shameful for someone to earn their salary from a situation where the Way is absent:

Xian (Yuan Si) asked what is shameful. The Master said, When a state follows the Way, one receives an official stipend. But when a state is without the Way, to receive an official stipend is shameful.<sup>50</sup>

That is, if nothing around a person happens the proper way, he should not accept the salary for his work. A person can enlarge the Way (Dao), but the Way cannot enlarge a person.<sup>51</sup> It is obvious that ritual propriety is not static. Humans could become ethical and aesthetical legislators enlarging the *Dao*. Mere conformity to the *Dao* does not add to someone's value.

Confucius touches again the issue of ritual propriety, by encouraging his speaker to be a scholar with manners of a noble human.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, education on its own is not enough. Its value relies on being acquired in the appropriate way.<sup>53</sup> We could refer to this as an ontology of ritual propriety that permeates Confucian thought. Beings are independent of the way they are realized but their substance does not remain unchanged: they are determined and valued by the way they have been realized. Later the role of ritual propriety reemerges. Knowledge is not enough to prevent humans from digression. Ritual propriety takes up this role, complementing knowledge, and it is the one that keeps the noble human in line.<sup>54</sup> The ultimate ideal, the point of self-actualization of a perfect human, is to offer himself as an exemplar.<sup>55</sup> In other words, to become an ethical-aesthetical legislator for his community. Such a level of virtue cannot be attained only with knowledge.

On the other hand, the lack of ritual propriety leads to some sort of degradation. Confucius explicitly states that respectfulness without ritual

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<sup>49</sup> Xiaoxi Wang, *On Moral Capital* (Cham: Springer, 2015), 140-144.

<sup>50</sup> Confucius, 14.1.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.29.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.13.

<sup>53</sup> Geir Sigurðsson, *Confucian Propriety and Ritual Learning: A Philosophical Interpretation* (New York: SUNY Press, 2015), 26-30.

<sup>54</sup> Confucius, 6.27.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.30.

propriety becomes laborious bustle; boldness becomes insubordination; and straightforwardness becomes rudeness. It is evident that virtue alone is not enough but requires ritual propriety to acquire its full meaning and reach its point of actualization. A virtue is actualized in accordance with its nature only when it is pursued in the proper way:

The Master said, Courtesy without ritual becomes labored; caution without ritual becomes timidity; daring without ritual becomes riotousness; directness without ritual becomes obtrusiveness.

If the gentleman treats those close to him with generosity, the common people will be moved to humaneness. If he does not forget his old associates, the common people will shun cold-heartedness.<sup>56</sup>

Confucius goes into detail as to what proper conduct consists of and how it is achieved: movements, expression, words, and intonation. Competence and aspiration to virtue foster beauty, the aesthetics of action:

When Master Zeng was ill, Meng Jing Zi asked how he was. Master Zeng spoke these words: When a bird is about to die, its cries are sad. When a man is about to die, his words are good. With regard to the Way, there are three things the gentleman prizes: in his actions and manner, that he be far from harshness or arrogance; in ordering his appearance, that he stick close to trustworthiness; in his utterances, that they be far from crude or unseemly. As for the sacrificial baskets and stands, there are experts to tend to such matters.<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, he clarifies his point by explaining that a human without flaws may look poor in his ordinary garments, but his robes are elegant in sacrifice rituals. Every occasion requires different aesthetics, according to the substance of each ritual. After all, cultivation in social etiquette and music is necessary for a person to reach a position of power:

The Master said, I can find no fault with Yu. Sparing in his food and drink, he yet served the spirits and gods with utmost filial devotion. His ordinary robes were shabby, but

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<sup>56</sup> Confucius, 8.2.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.4.

his sacrificial aprons and caps were of the utmost beauty. He lived in lowly rooms and halls, devoting his entire energy to the opening of irrigation ditches and channels. I can find no fault with Yu.<sup>58</sup>

In addition, Confucius insists on the importance of correct pronunciation.<sup>59</sup> Specifically, when someone read official texts and participated in rituals, he sought to use the proper pronunciation because texts acquired a higher value in it.<sup>60</sup> In an attempt to focus on ritual propriety, Confucius articulates the Golden Rule of ethics: never impose on others what you would not choose for yourself.<sup>61</sup>

Confucius insists that ritual propriety is an essential element in moral self-cultivation, which is one of his main contributions to ethics. At the same time the social and performative aspects of etiquette provide an aesthetic dimension to the political function of moral self-cultivation. Etiquette is part of a complex web that connects morality, religion, and politics. The mastery of etiquette may allow for some flexibility within appropriate situations, but these divergences from the norm must always be recognizable and acceptable to others in order for them to be effective as transformational actions. In this vein, the successful practice of etiquette depends on the development of an aesthetic “style,” which expresses to others one’s personal dispositions, and by extension, one’s perfect humanness. Thus, reverence for past tradition is supported by creative innovations.

Therefore, *li*, as an aesthetic-moral principle, embodies the entire spectrum of one’s interaction with humans, nature, and even material objects. *Li* is a constitutive element of Confucian ethics and politics, highlighting the importance of beauty, and not only goodness, in human action. The worthiness of human action is judged both aesthetically and morally. Moreover, Confucius’ peculiar ethical ontology is not an ontology of “whatness” but of “howness,” according to the *Dao*, since Confucius primary concern was not to define the *Dao*, but to restore the *Dao* of the ancient sage-kings. The morality of the action is dependent

<sup>58</sup> Confucius, 8.21.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.17.

<sup>60</sup> Ann-Ping Chin, *Confucius: A Life of Thought and Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 12-13; Xing Lu, *Rhetoric in Ancient China, Fifth to Third Century B.C.E.: A Comparison with Classical Greek Rhetoric* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2022), 163.

<sup>61</sup> Bo Mou, “A Reexamination of the Structure and Content of Confucius’ Version of the Golden Rule,” *Philosophy East and West* 54 no. 2 (2004): 218-248; Wang, “The Golden Rule and Interpersonal Care: From a Confucian Perspective,” 415-438.

on the way it is performed, according to the mandates of the *Dao*. Humans' way of acting flourishes when their individual way (*rendao*) attunes to the *Dao*. *Rendao* is a way of becoming consummately and authoritatively human. This explains Confucius' formalism, his descriptiveness, but also his poetic tone. As long as we attempt to discover "what is virtue" in Confucius' texts, they will respond with misleading and contradictory answers. Answers to the question "how is virtue obtained" will bring us closer to what Confucius meant to say with his *Analects*. An ontology of the way, of "howness," may have the downside that it focuses on the description of the real world rather on the question of whether the world is real – which is a common characteristic for grounded, practical philosophies such as the Chinese – but it has the upside that it strives to offer practical guidance to humans. The "how" of reality becomes known with the deliberate participation to the *Dao* that constitutes the archetypal "how." The way people co-exist demonstrates the rationality of the associations of living and functioning together. We can know the substance of something *that is* from the way it *participates to being*. Reality *per se* is unimportant; what is important is how people get to know and participate in reality, because each person forms several connections throughout its life. Every person actualizes substance, the nature of being, in their unique way; but their unique way should accord with the *Dao*, because humans have their own manner of development, according to the *Dao's* way of emerging and acting. The *Dao* of each being (the individual or shared substance) amounts to the totality of interactions among beings. Everyone interacts with everything, but every human interaction with other beings is unique. The uniqueness of individual agency reflects each individual connection formed. Freedom is a synonym for actualization and discovery of the personal way of being. All that determines being (nature, freedom, belonging to a species, otherness) indicates a way: not a "what," but a "how."

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**book reviews**



Cornelius Castoriadis. *The Greek Imaginary: From Homer to Heraclitus*. Edited by E. Escobar, M. Gondicas, and P. Vernay. Translated by J. V. Garner, and M.-C. Garrido Sierralta. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023.

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**Abstract**

*This essay will discuss the combined seminars presented in the book “The Greek Imaginary: from Homer to Heraclitus” by Cornelius Castoriadis. In these seminars he dissects Ancient Greek culture, politics, and religion in an investigative and analytic way. Through ancient Greek mythology and the Homeric texts a lot of information can be derived regarding the everyday lives, ideology, and philosophy of the time; all of the aforementioned will be explicated as well as the way Castoriadis specifically interprets certain aspects of ancient Greek life in his own unique way. Additionally, we will look into the language of the texts, the meaning of the French vocabulary that was used at the seminars and the ways in which it can be accurately translated in English.*

**Keywords:** *Castoriadis; Homer; imaginary; Anaximander; apeiron*

## I. On the translation of the title: French, English, and Greek

On the translation of the title, the title in question being “The Greek Imaginary” the following is to be said; John V. Garner, explains that the title was created partly after Castoriadis’ ideas that the Greeks have their own “imaginary grasp” on the world, and partly after actual expressions Castoriadis used during the seminars. Furthermore, Castoriadis uses the equivalent of the expression “The Greek Imaginary” in French in his seminars.

The original title given in French for the majority of the seminars was *Ce Qui Fait la Grèce* which as the foreword of this book makes clear, roughly translates to “What Makes Greece.” The Greek version of the title, *Η Ελληνική Ιδιαιτερότητα*, roughly translates in English as “The Greek Particularity,” but as this title is less relevant with the contents of the seminars, the title chosen for the English version seems “fresh” and “renewed.” Additionally, a title such as “The Greek Particularity” could confuse readers into believing that Castoriadis, when appointing something as Greek, he characterizes it in a positive way, but that is not always the case, which is another point that John V. Garner does not fail to mention.

## II. On the English translation of the corpus

As with any philosophical piece, the translation of philosophical thought is a difficult endeavor. This translation seems to be complete; nothing having been omitted from the content of the original book. The terms used are accurate, and depict the true meaning of the original work, meaning there is consistency in the terminology, while the readability of the chapters remains intact, and the reader’s experience in reading the piece can be considered to have a natural flow, similar to the experience of a reader of the original piece.

Several expressions Castoriadis first used in French might not correlate in meaning with any English counterpart; this translation, however, provides readers with useful notes on every single term that either has no corresponding term or is difficult to translate.

The editor’s notes guide the reader and steer them in the direction Castoriadis initiated, while the translator’s notes explicate whatever cannot be translated in a sufficient manner, providing either periphrastic translation of a concept or bibliography explaining a subject or term. Whatever the case may be, a reader of this particular translation is aided throughout every chapter.



### III. The birth of Democracy and Philosophy

Castoriadis, in these seminars, sets the groundwork for the discussion of how ancient Greek democracy came to be, and how philosophical thought was inexplicably tied to that establishment. He begins by examining our relationship with the past and how we view it. This is important because, as he explains, we view history through a specific lens, one that is shaped by our world-view and ideals.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is impossible to have the ability to possess only one definitive recount of ancient Greek democracy and its creation, since there will not only be many different sentiments examining it, but it is also such a complex institution, that there cannot be one singular explanation that does it justice.

The birth of politics, as presented in this seminar, is when the citizens collectively decide that all common affairs should be managed and guided by their own persons.<sup>2</sup> Essentially, it is the settlement where everyone gets a say on matters that regard them as individuals, and the society of which they are a part of. Following that, everyone is put in a position where they have the power to influence the laws that will be emplaced. This coincides with the birth of philosophical thought, as some would say that philosophy is a direct consequence of that political condition.<sup>3</sup> Since everyone is in a position where they can affect the political landscape, they need to be able to support that position, in order to allow ideas and public speech to flourish. It is because of this that philosophy is what we know it to be today.

### IV. Homer

Moving on to the discussion surrounding Homer and the Homeric *epos*, he begins by shortly examining the concept of “social-historical creation.” He explains that the political and social state of Ancient Greece determined the subject of arts and sciences that developed at the time, which is why we have this kind of authenticity when we study ancient Greek literature, and why these texts cannot be replicated, since, in order for them to be reproduced by a different society, that

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<sup>1</sup> Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Greek Imaginary: From Homer to Heraclitus*, eds. Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas, and Pascal Vernay, trans. John V. Garner, and María-Costanza Garrido Sierralta (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), 15; For the importance of the social-historic element in the history of philosophy as a whole, see Cornelius Castoriadis, *Le Monde Morcelé* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990), 311-313.

<sup>2</sup> Castoriadis, *The Greek Imaginary*, 26.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

society would have to also copy everything about the living conditions of ancient Greece during that time.<sup>4</sup>

That being said, he begins by discussing the difficulty of dating and identifying the author of the Homeric poems, the discourse regarding whether Homer was a real person that solely created *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, or whether it could have been a collective effort, which is a crucial element of ancient Greek literature analysis. There are two main schools of thought surrounding the subject; the Analytic view, that supports that multiple people have contributed to the body of these poems equally and no one can be credited as the “main” poet, and the Unitarian view, that supports that it is a work of one or two people, one of them being who we consider to be Homer. The poems are mainly his, but it is speculated that someone else completed his work with the *Odyssey*.<sup>5</sup>

Despite some of the uncertainty surrounding the poems, one thing we can be certain about is their influence on the ancient Greek society. They were often taught to students, and recited at festivals and important celebrations by rhapsodes. What is interesting about this specific function is that almost everyone knew big portions of these poems by heart, even children, women, and slaves who were not excluded from these kinds of celebrations.<sup>6</sup> The Homeric texts were extremely significant, contained valuable life lessons and role models, and created the standard that the average ancient Greek citizen had to attempt to maintain.

This text, although not in a religious sense, was considered sacred.<sup>7</sup> There was no doubt that by many people the events that were narrated were thought to be true. The heroes of these stories were believed to be real people and were honored as such.<sup>8</sup> In the Homeric texts there was also a big emphasis placed on ancestors and their impact. It is not hard to imagine that the Homeric heroes were loved not unlike the ancestors that were praised in the text. Another important aspect of the poems is the historic aspect, since they are considered to have mirrored the real world of that period. Despite their lyric ambiance and supernatural elements, they provide valuable insight about the ideologies and living conditions of their time.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 44-46.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 59.

Castoriadis labels the poems as “meta-tragedies.” What differentiates them from regular tragedies is that the hero is largely aware of his fate, and the characters are usually, for the most part, autonomous.<sup>9</sup> Already we can see why the Homeric poems are thematically separated from tragedies such as the Oedipus anthology, where the characters are usually, not only unaware of their fate, but also oblivious of their past and origins. Furthermore, their fate is predetermined; therefore, we cannot consider them autonomous beings, even if at times it feels like they are.

The other aspect about the Homeric poems that places them in a different category than other tragedies is the fact that they do not include *catharsis* in the Aristotelian sense, but *catharsis* in the form of reconciliation.<sup>10</sup> In most ancient Greek tragedies, *catharsis* is the part of the story where the hero gets vindicated even if they are not alive to see it (e.g. Creon losing his mind after Antigone has passed away) and the audience gets some kind of closure, the story wraps up by giving the viewer the sense that everything happened for a reason.<sup>11</sup> In the Homeric poems, there is usually no reason or divine plan behind the misfortunes that the characters endure, and they experience *catharsis* by getting what they want in the end while they are still alive.

A simple explanation for that crucial difference would have to be the Homeric view of death. In contrast to many pieces of ancient Greek literature, the Homeric texts do not romanticize death, nor do they give it any kind of extra significance. You could even say that death is only significant in the way that it cannot have significance; it is considered the ultimate end and the dark fate of all humans, a fate the heroes often cry about. In these poems, nothing is worth more than a life, being alive is celebrated and dead people are often pitied more than they are admired.<sup>12</sup> It is not coincidental that the *Odyssey* is the ultimate ode to survival by any means possible. There would be no way in the Homeric universe for Odysseus to achieve *catharsis* post-mortem. The only way for that story to have a satisfying ending would be for him to finally return home and reconcile with his family.

## V. Ancient Greek religion as presented in the Homeric texts

In order to move on to ancient Greek religion, the place it had in society, and the philosophical ideology it represented, we need to talk about the

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 68-70.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1449b 24.

<sup>12</sup> Castoriadis, *The Greek Imaginary*, 73-76.

concept of fate. As we discussed earlier, death is the only inescapable thing, and the most tragic thing about human existence. Fate is every event that is going to take place in one's life, but everyone's ultimate fate is death. Here is where we will find what Castoriadis has labeled as a paradox: death is worse than nothing, but immortality is worse than death.<sup>13</sup>

A human choosing immortality would not only be considered hubris but would also render all human experiences meaningless.<sup>14</sup> A life is valuable because it ends, death is a tragedy, but it is a necessary one; nowhere in the Homeric texts is immortality considered a gift. It can even be observed that even though humans have sometimes been granted immortality by the Gods, it has never been due to their own asking and it is often presented as a burden or a punishment.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, fate has predetermined every action that one will take in his life, it is out of the question for ancient Greek theology to talk about free will, humans make mistakes but they were never their own, they were simply things that needed to happen.

This fact is one of the many things that hugely separate the ancient Greek religion from Christianity. In the latter, God has provided human beings with free will, with which they can either make correct or incorrect choices, the incorrect choices will be labeled as sins. In the ancient Greek religion sins do not exist in that way, people can "sin" accidentally or are put in situations where they have no choice but to "sin," in neither of these cases does their action describe their character or their morality.<sup>16</sup> Another major difference with Christianity is the fact that the concept of humans loving and being loved by their gods is non-existent.<sup>17</sup> The ancient Greek gods aren't loving parental figures, they are flawed and can often be considered villainous and cruel.

They are not presented as beings people are thankful for, but as beings that people have to learn to accept and make peace with. This, we could say, is a more grounded take on religion than the Christian one. Here we can say that religion in a sense parallels life, things do not always work out in people's favor, sometimes we wish we were luckier, or we feel like everything is against us. It is only when we accept that we cannot control some things and deal with everything that is coming

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 86-87.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 104-105.

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

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 98.

our way that we can live a happy and healthy life. Ancient Greek religion is very similar to this, humans must accept the Gods' will, not because they are always right or because there is a larger universal plan that is in place, but because they have no other choice.<sup>18</sup>

Lastly it is important to note, on the subject of what sets ancient Greek religion apart from other religions, that there is no "hope" or promise of a happier and better afterlife.<sup>19</sup> As we already mentioned, death is not a positive thing in the sense that nothing positive comes after it, it may be positive if it is considered the right thing for someone to die for whatever reason, but even if someone loses their life as a noble sacrifice for their people, nothing positive is waiting for them on the other side, the only contentment one can have is while they are alive on earth.

It is also crucial at this point, to mention the social nature of the gods. A lot of religions have a social aspect, but rarely is it as prevalent as it was in ancient Greece.<sup>20</sup> Not only do the gods constantly interact with humans and are actual characters in myths, poems, and ancient tragedies or comedies, but they themselves represent social elements. It is common for ancient religions that gods represent natural elements, which is something that we see a lot in the Dodecatheon (e.g. Zeus representing thunder, Poseidon representing sea) but what is not seen as often is gods representing social elements, like family with Ira or festivity with Dionysus.

As we will have noticed by now, gods and humans aren't all that separate; a human can become a god if the gods desire it, and a god can be as flawed and tormented as a human, just with immortality and more abilities. Once we realize how similar gods and humans are in ancient Greek religion, it will become clear that the only creatures that are presented as completely "other" than humans are the ones that aren't social.<sup>21</sup> This once again proves how important socialization and being part of a community was for ancient Greek ideology, it touches on the fact that the worst fear of the average person at the time was exile, not being remembered and not being welcome, and it was a fear that not even gods could escape.

Additionally, Castoriadis comments on the fluidity of the ancient Greek religion, since it was a religion that had no dogma, allowed

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 170-171.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 115-116.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 127.

multiple traditions, interpretations, and practices.<sup>22</sup> It basically gave everyone the creative space to express anything they wanted through the gods and their symbolisms, especially writers and poets who constantly influenced the public's belief system by using the gods to their liking in their work. This aspect of the ancient Greek religion closely resembles the way their democratic system worked, the inclusivity and plurality that was endorsed as well as the ideological relativity that characterized the ancient Greek landscape at the time.

## VI. "Apeiron" and "Chaos"

In his final seminars, from February 16 to March 9, 1983, Cornelius Castoriadis shifts his focus from the mythical figurations that Hesiod presents in *Theogony* (more specifically the idea of "chaos" as a primordial matrix, a substratum) to Anaximander's conception of *apeiron*, and its relation to *chaos* and *cosmos*, that pair of significations that was so important to *The Greek Imaginary* grasp of the world. What is important to note is the double meaning of the word *apeiron*.<sup>23</sup> It signifies infinite, but also indefinite. This second meaning is of paramount importance for what Castoriadis believed that constituted *The Greek Imaginary*, followed by – not merely – cosmological but also ontological implications that are present in the philosophy of even Plato and Aristotle.<sup>24</sup>

As far as Plato is concerned, Castoriadis finds evidence to support his claims in *Timaeus*.<sup>25</sup> In Castoriadis' own words:

There exists a "demiurge," an artisan who fabricates the world [...] by imposing order on a preexisting substratum. He contemplates the model of this order in [...] the eternal living being,<sup>26</sup> an idea or a system, an "organism" of ideas. The demiurge tries to make of the world something that comes nearer, as much as possible, to this eternal living being. [...] Yet this *kosmos* depends on the imposition of an order on a substratum that, as such, is a rebel against order.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>26</sup> "Le vivant éternel" in the original text; see Cornelius Castoriadis, *Ce Qui Fait la Grèce: D'Homère à Héraclite*, eds. Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas, and Pascal Vernay (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004), 177.

<sup>27</sup> Castoriadis, *The Greek Imaginary*, 152.

The key here is this phrase: as much as possible, *kata to dynaton*. The suspected reader already understands the vast onto-theological difference that is implied, comparing this demiurge to a biblical conception of God as creator:<sup>28</sup>

There is something that is superior to the power of the demiurge, which is the resistance of the substratum to letting itself be defined by an order through and through. The limit of this divinity is precisely the being-thus of a substratum that manifestly is not the pure creation of a personal God.<sup>29</sup> A similar idea is to be found in Aristotle's *Physics*, *apeiron* as a property of matter, the lack of form of the latter ascribing it its inconceivability.<sup>30</sup>

To summarize Castoriadis' idea, *chaos* as inconceivability is a property of the world and at the same time a constitutional condition of philosophy: "The historical possibility of philosophy depends on the fact that the world both is and is not thinkable at once."<sup>31</sup>

Castoriadis goes on to further explicate his idea by analyzing a fragment by Anaximander,<sup>32</sup> referring to *apeiron* but also to the emergence (*γένεσις*) and decay (*τὴν φθορὰν*) of beings (*τοῖς οὐσι*), according to necessity (*κατὰ τὸ χρεῶν*).<sup>33</sup> His analysis begins by focusing

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>30</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, 207a.

<sup>31</sup> Castoriadis, *The Greek Imaginary*, 144.

<sup>32</sup> "Ἀναξίμανδρος [...] ἀρχὴν [...] εἶρηκε τῶν ὄντων τὸ ἄπειρον [...], ἐξ ὧν δὲ ἡ γένεσις ἐστὶ τοῖς οὐσι καὶ τὴν φθορὰν εἰς ταῦτα γίνεσθαι κατὰ τὸ χρεῶν διδόναι γὰρ αὐτὰ δίκην καὶ τίσις ἀλλήλοις τῆς ἀδικίας κατὰ τὴν τοῦ χρόνου τάξιν, ποιητικώτεροις οὕτως ὂν μασιν αὐτὰ λέγων." DK 12A9/B1.

<sup>33</sup> The editors quote the translation by Geoffrey S. Kirk in Geoffrey S. Kirk, John E. Raven, and Malcolm Schofield, in *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 107, and 118: "Anaximander [...] said that the principle and element of existing things was the *apeiron* (indefinite, or infinite), [...] from which come into being all the heavens and the worlds in them. And the source of coming-to-be for existing things is that into which destruction, too, happens 'according to necessity; for they pay penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice according to the assessment of Time,' as he describes it in these rather poetical terms." I use the verb "emerge" as a synonym of "come into being," although *γένεσις* means also "birth." But to be born, implies the existence of a mother and a father – emergence from the matrix of *chaos* is thus more in line with the philosophy of Anaximander (judging by its remaining fragments). Castoriadis also uses the same verb in the original text when referring to *chaos* and existence: "Nous avons donc un monde qui emerge du *chaos* [...]." See Castoriadis, *Ce Qui Fait la Grèce*, 170.

on the term “beings” (τοῖς οὖσι), which in turn brings us to the classical ontological question: *ti to on*, what is a being. For Castoriadis, our tendency to focus on the verb or the substantive is mistaken, the key to understanding the ontological question is the pronoun *ti*: “The *ti* is in a sense undefinable; to make it precise or elucidate it, one can only return to the ontological question itself.”<sup>34</sup>

Anaximander, as read by Castoriadis so far, states that the beings (onta) give themselves *diken kai tisin*, justice and punishment. But for what? “[...] [T]here’s a reciprocal reference between *adikia* and hubris.”<sup>35</sup> For Castoriadis, this hubris is “natural and common to all beings;” and it is existence itself (genesis) that is a hubris that must be paid with death (phtora).<sup>36</sup> Here, we take a step further from the Homeric conception of hubris as *hyper moiran*, namely to transgress one’s limits, to go beyond one’s lot. It is existence itself that is *adikia*, and so:

[...] this existing must be destroyed according to the same principle that produced it. There prevails in the end a kind of ontological justice [...]. Since every particular existence implies a delimitation, *peiras* [...] it must each time return to the indeterminate.<sup>37</sup>

The possible arbitrariness of Castoriadis’ interpretation is not lost on him,<sup>38</sup> although he does believe that if we follow his interpretative thread, the fragment makes sense through and through. We have to note that Castoriadis’ interpretation presents a certain kinship with the Judaic conception of sin. The editors of the original edition have added a footnote that perfectly exposes this objection and a possible counterargument.<sup>39</sup>

Anaximander’s importance, however, is not limited to the ramifications of the fragment at hand. For, according to Castoriadis, his search for a principle that is in its own nature unrepresentable and indeterminate, signifies a rapture with mythical and religious thought.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Castoriadis, *The Greek Imaginary*, 170.

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

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

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

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, see footnote 268 for Jaeger’s and Gigon’s difference of opinion on the matter of the intertwining of existence and guilt in *The Greek Imaginary*.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 184-187. Of course, Castoriadis is not the first to notice this, see Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*.



What is fundamental, at any case, in Anaximander's fragment, is this inescapable duality between being and the law of being.<sup>41</sup> Castoriadis further elaborates on this duality, by referencing three "polarities:"<sup>42</sup> being/appearance, truth/opinion, *physis/nomos*. These polarities are the basic building blocks upon which *The Greek Imaginary* is founded. Thus, the passage from Anaximander to Heraclitus. Heraclitus' principle is not *apeiron*, but *pyr*, fire;<sup>43</sup> a metaphor – without a shred of doubt for Castoriadis – that combines both the generative and destructive powers of this principle, reigned by a form of justice and law as well.<sup>44</sup> Castoriadis goes on to mention a number of fragments by Heraclitus, not with an intent to over-analyze, but to provide proof for the fact that Heraclitus was extremely critical of his own political and social environment. That very ability to criticize traditional modes of thought is important at any age and should not be taken for granted.<sup>45</sup> Of equal importance are two fragments that underline the relativity of certain religious and social practices of antiquity:

But this relativity [...] results from or rather is founded in something that surpasses it [...]. It was starting from these considerations by Heraclitus, and Parmenides as well, that the whole of the fifth century became fascinated by the question of knowing under what conditions we can state something true, or even under what conditions statement is possible.<sup>46</sup>

Castoriadis continues by quoting some of the most well-known fragments by Heraclitus referring to the relative nature of the world<sup>47</sup> (and its epistemological implications):

Of course, they contradict all that men habitually think. They in effect establish, between what appears and what

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<sup>41</sup> "Une dualité inévitable, une dualité ultime," as characterized by Castoriadis; see Castoriadis, *Ce Qui Fait la Grèce*, 204.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> For the different interpretations of *pyr*, see the editor's footnote 297, Castoriadis, *The Greek Imaginary*, 196.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 209-210.

<sup>47</sup> "The sun is new every day," DK 22B6; "We go and don't go into the same river; we are and are not," DK 22B49a.

truly is, a divorce that Heraclitus characterizes as the violation of nature by itself: *physis kryptesthai philei*,<sup>48</sup> “nature loves to hide.”<sup>49</sup>

To return to the aforementioned distinctive polarities, Castoriadis makes the following remark:

In the Greek cities, doubtless in the seventh century [...], there emerged a philosophy *ergō* (in act), and not simply *logō* (in speech), as a political struggle in the interior of the community [...] to call into question the instituted order. [...] In any case, it's starting from the question of the *nomos*, posited in act by political activity, that the oppositions being/appearing, and truth/belief will adopt in Greece their acuity and their specific profundity.

What leads to this profundity is the special signification of the term *nomos*, conceived by *The Greek Imaginary* as a constituted and at the same time constituting force;<sup>50</sup> a conception implicitly apparent – for Castoriadis – even before the emergence of Presocratic philosophy.<sup>51</sup>

There are different facets to the term *nomos*: for one, language is a law.<sup>52</sup> The designation of the conventionality of language culminates, according to Castoriadis, with Democritus' fourfold argumentation.<sup>53</sup> But most importantly, Castoriadis notes:

What's at the core of the Greek conception is the understanding, quite early on, that there's a separation between humans and nature [...], which is not a natural given but the product or the result of human acts, acts which posit this separation, which constitute it, and which are of the order of the *nomos*.<sup>54</sup>

Proof of this conception is to be found in the works of the three tragic poets. Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* easily comes to mind: the titan's gifts

<sup>48</sup> Castoriadis, *The Greek Imaginary*, 212.

<sup>49</sup> DK 22B123.

<sup>50</sup> Castoriadis, *The Greek Imaginary*, 232.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

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

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 235-236.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

to humanity signaling a rupture between what society was (lawless, and without arts and institutions) and what it became after Prometheus', albeit divine, intervention.<sup>55</sup> This allusion to the poets (in comparison to limiting oneself strictly to philosophy) is perfectly justified considering their ability to “[express] with a fantastic acuity what one could call the *topoi* of the era, the ideas, the problematics, [...] which are discussed, which are in the air at the time.”<sup>56</sup> For Castoriadis, it is exactly in this way of envisioning man as a self-constituting entity that the philosophical and political aspects of the Greek imaginary coincide.

Needless to say, this intersection does not take place in the open space of a *Lichtung*,<sup>57</sup> or at the exit of a cave under “the light of the true Sun,”<sup>58</sup> but inside the crossroads of a labyrinth, possessing qualities that remind us of *apeiron*:<sup>59</sup> indeterminate, not infinite;<sup>60</sup> for it is after all a human creation. Perhaps, in this image, the universal and timeless importance of *The Greek Imaginary* can be elucidated.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>57</sup> As Castoriadis so eagerly repeats, *ibid.*, 69; also 179, and 240; For the notion of *Lichtung*, see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie, and Edward Robinson (Oxford, and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1962), 171, and 214-217.

<sup>58</sup> “La lumière du vrai Soleil.” My translation from the original, Cornelius Castoriadis, *Les Carrefours du Labyrinthe 1* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1978), 6.

<sup>59</sup> On the importance of the notion of *apeiron* in Castoriadis’ thought in general, see Cornelius Castoriadis, *Domaines de l’ Homme* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1986), 272.

<sup>60</sup> *Unbestimmte*, not *unendliche*. See the editor’s footnote 240, Castoriadis, *The Greek Imaginary*, 150.

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# Anthony A. Long. *Selfhood and Rationality in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Heraclitus to Plotinus*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022.

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### Abstract

Anthony A. Long's recent book, *Selfhood and Rationality in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Heraclitus to Plotinus* (2022), is a collection of fourteen essays that explore the themes of selfhood and rationality in ancient Greek philosophy. Long's book provides an illuminating account of the vast ancient Greek tradition and an engaging tour that begins with pre-Socratic thought and ends with Stoicism and Neoplatonism seeking answers to the multifaceted question of the rational self, its emergence and evolution within Greek antiquity.

**Keywords:** A. A. Long; selfhood; rationality; identity; eudaimonia; soul; divinity; antiquity

Anthony A. Long's aim in this book, which is mainly a collection of previously published essays, is extremely complex: to explore the multi-layered and multi-dimensional concepts of *selfhood* and *rationality* (explicitly defined and discussed in modern philosophy) as they are presented in Greek antiquity, or as they originally arose. Concepts such as these can only lead one into an intellectual maze and reveal the meaning of many other concepts and terms that permeate ancient Greek thought and require thorough revisiting, such as *soul*, *eudaimonia*, and *divinity*. Finally, Long's book provides a concise account of the extensive ancient Greek tradition and a masterful tour that begins with pre-

Socratic thought and ends with Stoicism and Neoplatonism. However, this book cannot be considered a mere introduction to Greek thought, as it contains critical essays as well as essays that discuss technical issues, alongside original interpretative pieces that require adequate familiarity with Greek literature and a sufficient background knowledge of the concepts with which these essays deal, although Long always strives to present his material in a way that might appeal to a general audience. In any case, this book's insight and clarity make it accessible to all readers.

This book is a collection of thirteen essays written between 1992 and 2021, as well as one previously unpublished essay. It is not only a testament to the author's profound knowledge of the Greek antiquity, but also reveals something about the author himself: Long's devotion to the concept of *the self*, which is central to multi-conceptual ancient Greek literature. Long has already explicitly shared this devotion with his readership in his previous book, *Greek Models of Mind and Self* (2015), where he confesses:

I drafted my lectures specifically for these occasions, but their topic, ancient Greek models of mind and self, has engaged me closely throughout my life as a teacher and scholar. Decades ago I undertook to write a book with this title for Harvard University Press. Over the years I published a large number of articles on the subject in specialist journals, but the book itself eluded me. More than once I started to fulfill my old contract, but the complexity and scope of the subject were too daunting for me to complete the project.<sup>1</sup>

The book is divided into fourteen chapters. The reader should keep in mind that while each chapter is a self-contained experience, it is also part of a larger project, namely, the search for an answer to the multifaceted question of the rational self. The first three chapters are a general exploration of this problem in Greek literature. Beginning in Chapter 4, Long focuses on particular historical moments of Greek antiquity or on particular thinkers, considering their place and contribution to the seven centuries of the history of Greek ideas and relating ancient Greek philosophy to modern discussions of the self and identity. In this book, Long demonstrates in a highly characteristic way that ancient Greek philosophy should always be treated as *terra incognita*, while it remains always relevant because of its inexhaustible intellectual and conceptual fertility. This book review

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony A. Long, *Greek Models of Mind and Self* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2015), ix-x.

focuses on the three introductory chapters of the book, while it offers an overview of the rest eleven chapters that constitute an enlightening journey through the history of Greek thought seeking the emergence and the evolution of the concept of the rational self.

## I. The Self: Between Rationality and Divinity

### Chapter 1: Finding Oneself in Greek Philosophy

Chapter 1 is an introduction to Long's project: he goes back to antiquity to redefine the concept of self. The ancient Greeks were the first to formulate a concept of the self, or, as the author himself says, they "activated an entire aspect of the self that had been mainly latent before."<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter, Long discusses *inter alia* several methodological issues, to illustrate how he navigates the history of philosophy and why he seeks a connection between our contemporary concerns and ancient teachings that are so distant from us in time, space, and culture. He argues that interpretation is a dynamic and interrogative process<sup>3</sup> and accepts the fact that the historian of ideas, like any historian, inevitably changes his focus according to his contemporary interests and framework. This belief is also confirmed in Chapter 2, where Long moves from the metaphor of Greek philosophy as the cultural root of Western civilization to the metaphor that portrays Greek philosophy as an inherited house full of rooms, levels, and passages that we visit from time to time, choosing different pieces to look at, use, or incorporate into our historical contexts.<sup>4</sup> On this point, Long remains in the constellation of what Max Weber called "Wertbezüge." In his effort not to be anachronistic, he does not fall into the historicist fallacy, i.e., a) he does not believe that ancient thought should be read exclusively in terms of the *Weltanschauung* of its particular time and culture – he looks for superhistorical or intertemporal ideas in ancient Greek literature, b) he does not believe that we can understand the authors better than they understood themselves if we start from our historical consciousness.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the methodological aspects offered by this chapter, Long's primary concern in this chapter is to argue that we can discern in ancient Greek thought an objective conception of the self, or a rational

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<sup>2</sup> Antony A. Long, *Selfhood and Rationality in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Heraclitus to Plotinus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 9

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

agent, who distances himself from his personal perspectives and who interacts with the world in ways that we now call *scientific*. Long argues that Thomas Nagel's notion of an *objective self*<sup>6</sup> that coexists with our ordinary human individuality is not a post-Cartesian notion, but actually arose in pre-Socratic thought through doubt of religious authority or the so-called *discovery of nature*, a moment identified with the birth of philosophy. Long surveys the emergence of natural philosophy and asserts that this new understanding of the world "brought with it a new dimension of the self."<sup>7</sup> He focuses primarily on Heraclitus and his attempt to arrive at an objective view of the world by distinguishing between the surface and deep structure of the world,<sup>8</sup> while striving for self-transcendence: *ἐδιζήσάμην ἐμεωυτόν*.<sup>9</sup> Heraclitus, despite the historical gulf that separates him from Nagel, fulfills the conditions of the objective self, as a pure scientific self, through his definition of *σωφροσύνη*: "σωφρονεῖν ἀρετὴ μέγιστη, καὶ σοφίη ἀληθὴ λέγειν καὶ ποιεῖν κατὰ φύσιν ἐπαίοντας."<sup>10</sup> In Heraclitus, Long points out, *σωφροσύνη* goes in part beyond its traditional meaning, that is, beyond human limitations or modesty, for "Heraclitus has a concept of the self that breaches the traditional distinction between human and divine."<sup>11</sup> After a brief, though profound, account of Plato's and Aristotle's misinterpretation of Heraclitus,<sup>12</sup> Long turns to Marcus Aurelius' conception of the self as an application of Heraclitus' concept: Marcus understands himself as part of the world, which he defines both as community and nature. By placing himself in a cosmic perspective and locating himself in a combination of opposites, Marcus objectivity "presents him with a sense of his responsibility, his autonomy, his being a contributor to a social system."<sup>13</sup> Long concludes that we can learn from the ancients regarding our twofold self that "we have an objective self, but we are highly [...] subjective in how we exercise it."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), mainly 54-67.

<sup>7</sup> Long, *Selfhood and Rationality*, 14.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17. See his Heraclitus' references, especially DK B123.

<sup>9</sup> DK B101. Quoted in Long, *Selfhood and Rationality*, 18.

<sup>10</sup> DK B112. Quoted in Long, *Selfhood and Rationality*, 19.

<sup>11</sup> Long, *Selfhood and Rationality*, 20.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.



## Chapter 2: Ancient Philosophy's Hardest Question: What to Make of Oneself?

In Chapter 2, Long focuses on the rule of reason as a prerequisite for happiness in ancient Greek philosophy. The entire chapter focuses on the juxtaposition of the tragic view of man and morality with the philosophical concepts of reason and autonomy.

The question "What to Make of Oneself" is called by Long the "self-model question,"<sup>15</sup> and he treats it as a supra-historical, eternal question relevant to all kinds of human activity. Long emphasizes that the question of human identity in the ancient Greek worldview is very complex. It encompasses both what one is and what one might be, and refers simultaneously to one's cognitive and practical status.<sup>16</sup> It is therefore inseparable from the question of the good life, because *is* and *ought* were not yet separate at the time. The question of *ought*, the ethical question, is closely related to the search for happiness, *εὐδαιμονία*. The same question has both psychological and theological significance, as man seeks to approach the divine through *ἀρετή*. Long traces the complexity and multi-dimensionality of this question in the first part of this chapter in a very clear and simple way, since this chapter is addressed to a general audience. However, by framing it as comprehensibly as possible, he underscores its central and crucial character.

In this chapter, Long emphasizes the distance that separates our worldview – and thus our conceptual understanding – from the ancient worldview. He insists that we must make a decisive break with the conceptual framework of our modern tradition (e.g., monotheism, human rights theory, etc.) in order to understand the *self-model question* as it was approached by the ancients. In this chapter, Long attempts to explain the concept of divinity in the ancient Greek worldview in the context of the pursuit of happiness or eudaimonia. Eudaimonia, however, was not viewed in theological terms in ancient Greek philosophy: Eudaimonia is a goal that lies within our individual, rational, and intellectual powers. In this sense, the ancients considered reason as our "internal divinity."<sup>17</sup> Against this background, philosophy stands on the opposite side of tragedy, or, as Long emphatically asserts, "the ancient philosophical tradition, with the exception of Aristotle, had the audacity, or insensitivity, to occlude tragedy,"<sup>18</sup> because in tragedy "we get the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 31.

impression that human happiness, and autonomy, and the rewards for justice are a snare and delusion.”<sup>19</sup>

### Chapter 3: Eudaimonism, Divinity and Rationality in Greek Ethics

In Chapter 3, Long develops and expands the ideas presented in the previous chapters. This chapter begins with a dialogue between Long and Julia Annas (any dialogue between these two thinkers would be extremely beneficial for the reader) about her well-known work *The Morality of Happiness*.<sup>20</sup> Although Long praises Annas’ work as a study “that keeps our subject vibrant and stimulating,”<sup>21</sup> he disagrees with her views. The content of this chapter is presented by Long as “directly questioning of the affinity Annas finds between ancient ethics and modern morality.”<sup>22</sup> His main disagreement with Annas relates to the concept of eudaimonia: Long maintains, contrary to Annas’ view, that eudaimonia is neither a weak nor a non-specific concept.

To support his claim, Long turns to the history of the concept of divinity in archaic Greek culture, in Socrates-Plato, Aristotle, and Epicurus,<sup>23</sup> and to the etymology of the word *daimon*.<sup>24</sup> He argues that Greek philosophers were attracted to the multiple connotations of the term *daimon*: divinity, fate and monitoring spirit.<sup>25</sup> Long then focuses on the use of the term *daimon* in Hesiod, Heraclitus, Pindar, Empedocles, and Democritus.<sup>26</sup> The diverse Presocratic concepts of divinity are briefly examined in the third part of this chapter, in contrast to part 4, which is devoted entirely to the Platonic concept of daimon, which, according to Long, is “far too rich and complex to be discussed completely.”<sup>27</sup>

Daimon in platonic texts, as Long observes, is strongly connected with rationality, knowledge, self’s identity, and autonomous happiness (eudaimonia). Daimon takes the form of the rational self, while in the same time Plato preserves its theological connotations, since the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>20</sup> See Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (New York, and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>21</sup> Long, *Selfhood and Rationality*, 41.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 43-46.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 47.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 48-50.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 50.

rational subject of Plato is still considered as “the voice of god.”<sup>28</sup> Long chooses cautiously the platonic passages of the *Symposium*, *Timaeus* and *Republic*, giving a comprehensive and clear overview of one of the most complex platonic concepts.

At the end of this chapter, Long explores the affinities between Platonic and Stoic concepts of eudaimonism, noting the similarities between Plato and (both early and Roman) Stoicism in their focus on “pursuing eudaimonia by identifying oneself entirely with the rationality that we potentially share with divinity.”<sup>29</sup> To fully understand these concepts, Long reemphasizes the methodological premise for a valid interpretation of antiquity: Our greatest challenge is to capture a conceptual framework that is alien to our modern worldview.<sup>30</sup>

## II. From Heraclitus to Plotinus

In Chapter 4, Long introduces Heraclitus as the father of the concept of rationality, focusing on his analysis of pre-existing concepts, especially the concept of measure, and he explores the multiple applications of the concept of measure in Heraclitus’ thought by making the connection between Heraclitus’ cosmological and psychological theories. Heraclitus’ discovery, Long argues, was “how to articulate rationality in terms of measured or proportional processes both in non-animate nature, and in mental disposition and conduct.”<sup>31</sup> Long examines the idea of rationality in Heraclitus’ thought through the influence of later philosophy and Plato in particular. Thus, much of this chapter is devoted to Platonic concepts of cosmic order, measure, and sophrosyne, tracing echoes of Heraclitus in Plato, as opposed to the conventional interpretation that associates Plato primarily with Pythagoreanism, Empedocles, and Parmenides. Long discusses Heraclitus’ contribution to rational inquiry and its indirect relevance to Platonic and Stoic notions of rationality, while also commenting on the aphoristic and cryptic nature of Heraclitus’ fragments. Significantly, Long asserts that

When [Heraclitus] is quite mysterious – as for instance in B62, “immortal mortals, mortal immortals [...]” the riddle is philosophically motivated. He takes on the role of the Delphic oracle in order to challenge his audience to come up

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 60.

with their own interpretation of his remarks, so as to rethink the traditional disjunction between mortal and immortal beings.<sup>32</sup>

In Chapter 5, Long deals with Parmenides in a manner similar to Heidegger: he tries to avoid anachronism and to internalize the direction of his thought.<sup>33</sup> Long argues that Parmenides was not a metaphysician, at least not primarily, and his central question was not on the Being, but on the *thinking* being, i.e., mind. This chapter is quite technical and detailed. It focuses on the much discussed DK28 B3: “τό γάρ αὐτό νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καί εἶναι,” and the two prevailing translations and interpretations of its meaning. The first “posits a tie of sameness between cognition – actively thinking/knowing – and being/reality,”<sup>34</sup> while the second postulates “identity between what is thinkable and what is capable of being.”<sup>35</sup> Long examines the arguments (mainly those of Francis M. Cornford)<sup>36</sup> against the identity of mind and being and the perception of being as mindless, as well as some other fragments of Parmenides that defend the position that the source and object of thought are identical. His conclusion is similar to the one of Gregory Vlastos. However, he points out the weaknesses of Vlastos’ view, arguing that “if we detach the activity of thinking from belonging to Being as its own property, Parmenides’ entire methodology becomes incoherent.”<sup>37</sup> After his brief outline of Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Empedocles, and Anaxagoras, Long asserts that most early Greek philosophers regarded thought, cognition, and mind as fundamental properties of reality. Long is not content with this statement, however, and turns again to Parmenides’ text to prove that “thinking is internal to and bounded by Being.”<sup>38</sup>

Chapter 6 is a genuine contribution to the Socratic problem. The question that guides Long’s reflections is whether “Socrates set out to stage himself,”<sup>39</sup> or the possibility of a self-fashioning on behalf of Socrates. In other words, was Plato trying to present a particularly dramatic figure as a new anthropotype and a new way of life? Plato, as Long puts it,

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-75.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-77.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>36</sup> See Francis MacDonald Cornford, *Plato and Parmenides* (London: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>37</sup> Long, *Selfhood and Rationality*, 86.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

was not only responsible for publicizing Socrates as the earliest so-called philosopher, he also transmitted our most memorable images of Socrates as gad-fly, obsessive pederast, Silenus faced, poorly clad, bare footed, and so forth.<sup>46</sup>

Or, more precisely, did Socrates,

deliberately cultivated a quite new personal style, perhaps exploiting, as Plato does on his behalf, the contrast between inner beauty of soul and unattractive face and body?<sup>47</sup>

Long focuses on the literary persona and dramatic character of Platonic Socrates as he appeared within the dramatic framework of the Platonic dialogues, far from being sanctified, and compares the notable features of this Socrates image with those of the fifth-century Sophists and the unconventional, hence instrumental, exhibitionism of Diogenes of Sinope. Using this illustration, Long attempts to illuminate the possibility of autonomous (i.e., rational) and intentional self-fashioning in ancient Greek thought and literature.

Chapter 7 focuses on the Socratic *daimonion* question, a distinctive feature of Socrates that cannot be ignored in Socratic scholarship. Long examines this remarkable and controversial experience of Socrates and his commitment to the exhortations of the divine sign. He seeks to detect whether the divine sign lies outside or within the sphere of rationality. By co-examining Plutarch's *De genio Socratis*, Long contends that the Socratic daimonion is the coinage of the indissoluble connection between divinity and reason. According to Long, there are many perspectives from which the divine sign can be examined. However, he chooses three of them for his investigation. First, he attempts to determine the connection between Socrates' descriptions of the experience of the divine sign and his philosophical and theological doctrines and methods.<sup>40</sup> Long considers both Gregory Vlastos<sup>41</sup> and Mark McPherran's<sup>42</sup> views on the rationality or extra-rationality of the divine sign. Long briefly but thoroughly examines whether the divine sign is more than a hunch

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 111-113.

<sup>41</sup> See Gregory Vlastos, *Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

<sup>42</sup> See Mark McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

and whether Socrates' rationality and religiosity are compatible with this experience.<sup>51</sup> He then turns to Plutarch and *De genio Socratis* to sketch the second perspective of the Socratic daimonion, the way it actually appears in the Socratic mind or the psychological nature of this experience, as well as the third perspective, the historical and cultural context of its appearance. Taking all these aspects into account, Long understands the daimonion as the essential Socratic link between divinity and rationality, or the representation of Socrates' self-knowledge and magnanimity (in Aristotle's sense): "Socrates was remarkable and knew himself to be so,"<sup>43</sup> and "what is remarkable in Greek culture typically fell into divine domain."<sup>44</sup> According to Long, Socrates sought to fulfill his destiny of becoming as godlike as possible via the *daimonion* (ὁμοίωσιν θεῶν κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν).<sup>45</sup>

In Chapter 8, Long examines Socrates' rationality and the formation of the self in the context of Plato's *Republic*. In this context, Long examines the role of divinity in the Platonic corpus and concludes to identify the Platonic notion of divinity with the Form of the Good. This is a radical and provocative interpretation that contradicts the traditional Anglo-American reading, which understands the Platonic god as the highest kind of soul (*ψυχή*). For Plato, souls, though eternal, are in constant self-motion, and in this respect differ from static, unchanging Forms. This notion results primarily from a selective focus on *Timaeus* and the *Laws*, as well as from the "comfortable [...] notion of a divine and beneficial creator."<sup>46</sup> Another reason why Long's view might be viewed with suspicion is the tendency to associate divinity with an intellect or *νοῦς*.<sup>47</sup> After all, Long himself notes that Plato's later focus was on the divine intellect, not the obscure concept of the Form of the Good. But as Long concludes:

Goodness, beauty and stability are the essential attributes of divinity in [Plato's] understanding of the *theion* throughout. They are paradigmatically instantiated in the Form of Good: that is to say, harmony, proportion, teleology, and mathematical structure actually are Plato's divinity in its highest manifestation.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Long, *Selfhood and Rationality*, 119.

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

<sup>45</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*, 176b 5-6.

<sup>46</sup> Long, *Selfhood and Rationality*, 142.

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

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

Although Long did not explore the Platonic soul ( $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ ) in his previous chapter on divinity, he devotes Chapter 9 to this particular concept. He argues that conventional translations of  $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$  are largely misleading because they fail to reveal the breadth and depth of this Platonic concept. According to Long, the Platonic  $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$  is semantically more closely related to (but by no means identical with) the modern concept of *person* than with the modern concepts of soul or mind. His main contention is that  $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$  enables the human being to act like a person, i.e., to act intentionally, rationally, morally, and autonomously, and to have desires and feelings of joy and sorrow, since “rationality and desire for objective goodness are properties of psyche at its best.”<sup>49</sup> On this basis, he argues that Plato’s psychology “was strongly motivated by a wish to establish the credentials of a concept that we can liken to the concept of person.”<sup>50</sup> Taking into account the approaches of John Locke, Daniel Dennett, and Harry Frankfurt to the concept of personhood, Long contends that the Platonic soul seems to confer on humans the ability to live as persons in a sense similar to how personhood is understood by modern thinkers.<sup>51</sup> As a historian of ideas, Long could not help but mention the origins of the concept of  $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$  and the dualistic treatment of body and soul, by returning to Homer and Isocrates, respectively, before delving into his interpretive analysis of the Platonic soul as an agent of personhood. Despite the important insights we can find in the Platonic corpus regarding personhood, however, Long stresses that we should keep in mind the teleological worldview of the Platonic universe that prevents us from identifying with a Platonic soul: Plato’s soul is a strictly normative concept, existing for the sake of love of truth and beauty, and striving for its perfection or likeness to the divine.<sup>52</sup> However, if divinity is identical with the Form of the Good, as argued in the previous chapter, Long’s analysis could lead to the conclusion that the ultimate goal of the Platonic soul is to cease to exist as a moving soul and to transform itself into a completely static and objective Form. In this sense, the body and the properties that Plato attributes to it are the reason that Platonic souls did not disappear from the Platonic universe.

The concept of divinity becomes even more complicated when one considers the next chapter, which outlines the idea of the *divine*

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 147-149.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 155-160.

*craftsman*. Long argues that Plato, followed by the Stoics, transforms the impersonal rationality of Heraclitus, as presented in Chapter 4, into a providential creator. In this chapter, Long explains the differences between the Platonic and Stoic conceptions of cosmic craftsmanship, particularly in terms of their practical and emotional efficacy: Unlike Platonism, Stoicism succeeds in reconciling human beings with this world by offering a more political and anthropocentric conception of divine craftsmanship. As Long puts it, “Plato politicized the human mind with his injunctions to put reason rather than passion in charge of our lives; but he did not conceptualize the created world as a polity.”<sup>53</sup>

In Chapter 11, Long examines the divine qualities of Aristotle’s νοῦς and argues that although contemplative life (βίος θεωρητικός) is the highest form of life for Aristotle, the divine character of the νοῦς also manifests itself in practical or political life (βίος πολιτικός). He examines whether this second level of human activity is connected to the divine excellence of Aristotle’s teleology and thus to eudaimonia, the highest human goal, while also examining the presence of the νοῦς as an Aristotelian analogue of the self and as an expression of divinity in human affairs and in practical life. This chapter highlights the indissoluble relationship between the concept of selfhood and the concept of eudaimonia in Aristotelian thought, or as Long puts it, “Aristotle’s appraisal of nous is the most promising approach to crediting him with a more or less unitary and consistent conception of happiness.”<sup>54</sup> The thinking element in both contemplative and political life, as revealed in φρόνησις, practical wisdom, is to be regarded as the human self *par excellence*. By revisiting the last book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Long succeeds in raising anew the questions of the interrelation between contemplation, divinity, and happiness, and of the nature of the two types of Aristotelian life.

In Chapter 12, Long examines in a lucid way the essence of friendship in Stoicism and the character of perfect Stoic friends understood as second selves, *alter egos*, and compares the Stoic conception of friendship with the Aristotelian one, taking into account also the Platonic and Epicurean conceptions. Stoic friendship by excluding utility and by presupposing excellence,

was designed to characterize the features of an ideal partnership between persons, nor as a description of actual

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 191-192.



experience, but to serve as a model for what friendships would be like if friends truly possessed wisdom.<sup>55</sup>

Long argues that the major difference between Aristotle and the Stoics, which leads the Stoics to limit true friendship to relationships between morally excellent individuals, is based on their different conception of goodness and thus of virtue: The Stoics, unlike Aristotle, have a “monolithic”<sup>56</sup> theory of goodness that compels them to apply friendship, like happiness, only to virtuous persons, since “you must be completely knowledgeable about authentic values in order to love truly.”<sup>57</sup> However, if Stoic wisdom in its strict sense is absolutely essential to friendship, then Stoic friendship seems much more impersonal than Aristotelian friendship. This makes Stoic friendship “disturbingly remote from our experience in the little interest that it explicitly takes in a friend’s personality and uniqueness.”<sup>58</sup>

Chapter 13 focuses on Marcus Aurelius, already discussed in Chapter 1, and his theory of selfhood as expressed in his reflections on human identity. Marcus’ main concern is the *ἡγεμονικόν*, the ruling faculty of the Stoic soul, which is identified with the self as such. This self, which is actually man’s capacity for rational reflection, is understood by Marcus as an inner divinity. Long once again examines both selfhood and divinity in parallel, and in this case outlines the core of Stoic pantheism. In considering the question of autonomy in Marcus’ work, Long also emphasizes that Marcus’ distinction between embodied mentality and inner divinity anticipates Kant’s *noumenal* and *phenomenal* selves, demonstrating the timeless value of Marcus’ *Meditations* and their importance in the history of ideas.

In the final chapter, Long discusses Plotinus’ main argument regarding eudaimonia, namely that true happiness is only possible under the condition of a dualism in the self: an embodied soul, and an eternal, incorporeal intellect. Long argues that Plotinus “has synthesized Aristotle’s intellectual excellence, Stoic indifference concerning body and externals, and his own concept of the higher self’s purely noetic activity,”<sup>59</sup> to redefine both selfhood and eudaimonia. This chapter examines in depth a number of carefully selected arguments by Plotinus

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 200-201.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 233.

that get to the heart of the relationship between rationality and selfhood. Given the synthesis Plotinus draws from his entire earlier tradition, this final chapter is illuminating and recapitulatory of the entire book.

### III. Postscript

A few years ago, I had the invaluable opportunity to meet Anthony A. Long and discuss with him on Greek antiquity.<sup>60</sup> Rereading this interview today, after the enlightening journey of *Selfhood and Rationality*, I feel I know the author much better: I better understand his scholarly concerns and motives, or the direction of his thought. In *Selfhood and Rationality in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, a sequel to *Greek Models of Mind and Self*, the reader is given the privilege to peer into the laboratory of A. A. Long's scholarly life, in which he spent many years traveling the highways and byways of ancient Greek thought. This book gives the reader the opportunity to become acquainted with the author's hitherto unfinished project, the fruit of his personal, extended, and productive scholarly adventure in the vast Greek world.

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<sup>60</sup> See Anthony A. Long, and Despina Vertzagia, "Antiquity Revisited: A Discussion with Anthony Arthur Long," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2020): 111-122.

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