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WHY POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY MATTERS?

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY RESEARCH LABORATORY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS

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Preface

Vu le lien inextricable de la philosophie politique avec la sphère publique et la vie en commun, les questions qu'elle se pose ne sont jamais obsolètes. Reformulées, suivant les changements inéluctables de la condition humaine, elles gardent au noyau de leur nouveauté inévitable le même souci pour les affaires communes et le même caractère aporétique qui fait le propre de vraies questions philosophiques. De ce constat font aussi preuve les événements qui actuellement tourmentent la planète.

Il en devient explicite que cette actualité oblige à repenser la façon dont on entend la notion du citoyen à l'ère de la mondialisation ; à s'interroger sur la responsabilité qui incombe à ce dernier vis-à-vis des agissements de son gouvernement tant à l'intérieur qu' au niveau international ; à refaire le bilan de la notion de la souveraineté et à réfléchir sur le concept de la nation ; à porter son attention sur la résurrection du théologico-politique, l'aspect totalitariste des fondamentalismes et les nouvelles formes de la tyrannie ; à entamer, à nouveau, la discussion sur la liberté politique et les politiques discriminatoires ; à explorer, une fois encore, le sens de la dignité humaine, dans son rapport avec l'afflux des immigrants et par rapport au polythéisme des valeurs ; à mobiliser la méditation philosophique contre la réapparition du racisme, souvent déguisé en son contraire ; à remettre en question la question de la guerre. Par-dessus tout, la philosophie politique doit faire face au retour de la barbarie que rend possible le déni des principes qui fondent la culture politique occidentale.

Dans le but de tenter sa chance dans ce vaste domaine à explorer, on admet préalablement que l'examen de ces questions doit prendre la forme d'un dialogue avec le passé, à savoir avec notre tradition philosophique. Pour cette raison, on considère que les questions philosophico-politiques qui nous intéressent aujourd'hui n'excluent point des études sur les philosophies politiques qui se sont formulées depuis l'antiquité. Cela veut dire qu'on considère les penseurs du passé comme les compagnons précieux de cet effort de comprendre et expliciter le sens, ainsi que d'évaluer l'importance des événements qui déterminent notre réalité socio-politique.

Cette sorte de dialogue on a voulu que se réalise par des nouveaux chercheurs, prêts à affronter les questions qu'adresse l'esprit du temps, et libres à explorer et à mettre à leur service l'héritage que l'histoire de la philosophie politique leur a légué.

De cette exploration on attend des réinterprétations fructueuses, capables de détecter l'originalité qui se cache sous les similitudes avec le passé, souvent trompeuses, que présentent les phénomènes politiques contemporains. Autrement dit, notre revue aspire à devenir un lieu de rencontre de nouveaux penseurs aussi accueillant que le nécessitent les commencements de leur aventure intellectuelle. On leur donne la parole afin que la philosophie politique demeure épanouie et dans ce cas *rajeunie*.

Vana Nicolaidou-Kyrianidou

ARTICLES

Politics without politics: Technical Politics and Subactivism as New Forms of Political Action today

Giannis Perperidis

University of Ioannina

Abstract

This paper explores two forms of political agency that differentiate from traditional political activities, like politicking and conventional, political representation. The first form is based upon Andrew Feenberg's critical theory of technology and focuses on the dialectical, constitutive relation between technological design and the formation of modern subjectivity. The second form, which draws on Jürgen Habermas's work, consists in the organization of a public sphere according to the normative principles of deliberative democracy. Our aim is to highlight the ways in which modern political subjects can practice political agency in contemporary societies.

Keywords

Politics, Andrew Feenberg, Jürgen Habermas, Critical theory of Technology, Public Sphere, Deliberative Democracy, Internet, Subactivism

In contemporary technological societies, one of the most intriguing notions for political theory is that of "agency". Political agency within the socio-historical boundaries of modernity was never an unambiguous conception. Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in 1835, in his book *Democracy in America,* about a new kind of despotism, a very modern one, which follows democratic procedures. The democratic façade of this despotism refers to the seemingly overwhelming political power that voting entails for citizenry, but, in reality, political subjects find themselves heteronomously governed by rulers with different interests than their own. Possession of political power remains an impractical declaration within the horizon of deliberative that is voting, democracy. Such lack of political agency was assessed as one of the "malaises of modernity" by the Canadian political philosopher Charles Taylor.[1] Another important philosopher who highlighted the transformations within the modern era, that relegated the possibility to act in the public sphere, is Michel Foucault. He essentially explicated the ways in which repressive institutions, extrinsic to our control, come to organize the multiplicity of our social existence. Modern institutions entrap individuals into an uncharted web of unconditional individualism, overwhelmed with feelings of alienation and existential isolation. The feeling of an absolute incapability towards gigantic institutions, like bureaucracy or autonomous techno-structures, resembles the image of Joseph K. in Franz Kafka's *The Trial*. Modern subjectivity could be compared to a helpless person, incapable of acting socially and individually. Gradually, voting came to be conceived as the sole, feasible way out of this bleak arrangement.

However, political agency within the confinements of the act of voting created dystopic scenarios. Literally, the essence of dystopia is the complete lack of agency, an irreversible impotence. Technological development will inevitably subjugate the essence of human beings. Since modern individuals have no power to affect the trajectory of technological dynamics or the inner workings of bureaucracy, those completely autonomous institutions will take over humans' lives. This pessimistic notion culminated in two distinct approaches to technology: the first one conceived technology as a mere tool, lacking moral or political laden. This particular approach is called "instrumentalism". The second approach to technology was the so-called "substantive theory".

To be concise, after the 1980s' and 1990s', when dystopias started to emanate in popular culture, the unprecedented rise of the Internet in 1990s' and 2000s' emphasized the enormous changes that occurred in social organization. Considering the ongoing insufficiency of voting and political representation with regard to the satisfaction of peoples' interests, philosophers began to explore new ways of political action.

[1] Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, (Toronto: House of Anansi Press 1998).

On the one hand, there emerged the provocative idea that the ubiquitous presence of technological artifacts in contemporary societies has a constitutive dynamic in relation to the totality of social organization. Langdon Winner famously claimed that "artifacts have politics"[2] hence highlighting the political embeddedness of modern technics. A few years later, Andrew Feenberg would develop what he called a "critical theory of technology". According to his insights, technological design and societal transformation are mutually entangled, in the sense that changes in technical design may entail transformations in society in general. It is Feenberg's contention that the democratization of technological design is the hidden political wager of our time.

On the other hand, some scholars, following Habermas's theory on the public sphere, claimed that there are ways to ponder political agency today through the ideas of deliberative democracy. To act politically today means to create public spheres in which people can assemble and find solutions for social problems deliberatively, without representatives. This process distances itself from what is called "politics" and turns toward the "political". The "political" is the status of society where each citizen can be heard and participate autonomously in social processes. Nowadays, such public spheres are constructed in digital milieus as well.

Despite Feenberg's criticism of Habermas's theory, we believe that the two theories can be reconciled concerning the need for a democratic public sphere. An innovative approach to today's political action can derive from this reconciliation. Maria Bakardjieva's notion of subactivism, for instance, emerges out of Feenberg's analysis of technology, whereas Habermas's analysis of the public sphere has been elaborated by scholars, like Nancy Fraser, Noëlle McAfee and Iris Marion Young. The primary aim, that lies beyond the proclaimed reconciliation, consists, on the one hand, in opposing the pessimistic image offered by essentialist notions about technological development, and, on the other hand, in inquiring the possibility for alternative political praxis in contemporary technological societies.

The politics of technology

In which way modern technology is supposed to be political? Why, consequentially, would the political aspect of technology be important for a democratic re-organization of contemporary societies? Such questions emanate within the corpus of philosopher Andrew Feenberg. To be precise, Feenberg articulated a sophisticated theoretical schema, "critical theory of technology", which draws upon philosophy (modernity theory in particular) and the so-called "Science and Technology Studies" (STS), in order to explore

[2] Langdon Winner, *The Whale and the Reactor. A Search for Limits in an Age of High Technology*, (London: The University of Chicago Press 2020), ch.2.

in a critical fashion such enduring questions. Feenberg's contribution to Frankfurt School critical theory avoids falling into the trap of valorizing an absolute pessimism. Critical theory of technology and its democratic ramifications will be explored in this part of the paper.

Feenberg's critical theory of technology can be seen as a critical elaboration of insights made by thinkers, like Herbert Marcuse, Bruno Latour and Norbert Wiener, among others. He conceives technology, not as mere instrumentation, but, more accurately, as a determining social power that produces distinct forms of life. In this sense, Feenberg suggests that deliberate intervention in technological processes and structure-formation is able to reinvigorate a renewed political power of modern citizenry. Precisely, he calls this process "democratization of technology", a straightforward political thesis that draws on a large number of features presented in the history of philosophy of technology. In Feenberg's account, political action today takes the form of technological action, which, in turn, presupposes a concrete conceptualization of the "Political". This entangled relationship is the subject of the current chapter's inquiry.

Feenberg's democratization of technology thesis derives from a variety of approaches within the spectrum of philosophy of technology. On the one hand, Marcuse's marxian and heideggerian insights on the technical condition of modern social life,[3] and, on the other hand, the constructivism of Science and Technology studies, are the primary influences of Feenberg's philosophy.[4] One is tempted to suggest that this duality can be seen as a theoretical, dynamic coalescence of modernity theory and "Science and Technology Studies". Amalgamating these two theories entails accepting a general conception of our times, that is modernity, but, simultaneously, not ignoring the micro-scale, case studies of certain artifacts, as well as the transformations of the larger context in which these artifacts are embedded.

In order to argue about the redesigning of technology as an act of regaining political agency, Feenberg needs to explicate the way in which agency is connected to technology. In this manner, agency is correlated to technological design, due to the "bias of technology" aspect, that he conceptualizes.[5] For Feenberg, every technical design is biased toward the distinct interests of the social groups that affect the technological processes.

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[3] See Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man. Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, (Boston: Beacon 1964).

[4] The theory articulated by scholars like Sheila Jasanoff or Wiebe Bijker, Thomas Hughes and Trevor Pinch. See Sheila Jasanoff, *Designs on Nature: Science and Democracy in Europe and the United States*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 2005; Wiebe E. Bijker, Thomas P. Hughes and Trevor Pinch (eds.), *The Social Construction of Technological Systems. New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology*, (Cambridge/London: The MIT Press 2012).

[5] Andrew Feenberg, *Transforming Technology. A Critical Theory Revisited*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002), p. 80-82.

To put it in simple terms, formal bias concerns the values that are incorporated, via technology, and translated into rational facts. This kind of translation of values into rational facts is why formal bias is so difficult to detect. It seems overwhelmingly rational that evades the critique against subjective prejudices. Another important notion in Feenberg's theory is that of the "technical code". This notion allows Feenberg to combine facts and values, two features that were always distinct in 20th century epistemology. In his latest book, he argues that "in sum, values are the facts of the future"[6] , by which he means that through the technical codes, the contemporary values, namely, the socially produced ideas, personal insights or *τόποι*, will be translated into the facts of tomorrow's technical design. Admittedly, this bears a significant resemblance to Kuhn's idea of "the paradigm" regarding scientific experimentation. In particular, just as scientific advances are not simply and solely determined by rational arguments (facts), but also by the very idea regarding what is a right and rational argument (value),[7] so technology is not, merely, influenced by materials or by physical laws (facts), but also, by what is thought to be the right material or what needs to be achieved (values). The technical code is the totality of values that have been rendered facts within a specific social context, and Feenberg believes that this state of truth, or paradigm, can be transformed in accordance with the social changes that occur within a specific social arrangement. We believe that it is exactly this point where Feenberg's thought can be related to Cornelius Castoriadis's concept of the social imaginary.[8] In this sense, "formal bias" along with the notion of "technical code" allows Feenberg to unearth the hidden, essential element of modern technology.

It must be clear by now that technology incorporates the values of the existing social imaginary and translates them into technical specifications and designs. Technology is not completely determined by rational facts but is "underdetermined" by them. The most important question that arises from this point is: whose values? This is the point where Feenberg develops his "hermeneutics of technology".[9] Since formal bias is the incorporation of specific values into technological design, while this incorporation constructs the technical code of society, it follows that what is being translated is the totality of values that the social imaginary consists of. In regard to this condition, Feenberg introduces some insights from Gramsci, Mouffe and

[6] Andrew Feenberg, *Technosystem. The Social Life of Reason*, (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press 2017), p. 8.

[7] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1962).

[8] Andrew Feenberg expressed to me personally in an e-mail conversation that what he conceptualizes is indeed a kind of change within the social imaginary and his thought can be truly related to that of Castoriadis.

[9] Golfo Maggini, *For a Hermeneutics of Technical World. From Heidegger to Contemporary Technoscience*, (Athens: Patakis 2010), p. 140. (in Greek. Footnote translated by the author)

Laclau, concerning the hegemony of meanings in societies.[10] Indeed, it is exactly the socially dominant meanings that penetrate the social imaginary and, hence, the technical codes. This is the reason why technology is intrinsically political. For Feenberg, however, the primary locus of investigation lies on another aspect of this state of affairs.

Drawing upon the sociological and epistemological field of "Science and Technology Studies", Feenberg develops the idea of "participant interests",[11] that is, the interests of groups that are able to influence the technological design process. These interests shape the dominant meaning of the society in question, the hegemony that rules societal meanings, and hence, the dominant values that are translated into facts. In addition, this line of argument draws on more aspects of "Science and Technology Studies", like the "interpretative flexibility" of technological artifacts. Concisely, since technical artifacts are not determined completely by rational facts, there is a process of interpretation that takes place in order for an artifact to be established within the total meanings of a social setting. Different participant interests culminate in different interpretations of the meaning of technology. Thus, the idea of "democratizing technology" that Feenberg seeks to concretize is the proliferation of the groups that can affect the design of technical artifacts. In this sense, technical artifacts will be biased toward a multiplicity of interests and values. This can lead to today's marginalized groups to become equal bearers of an inclusive and just society.

Discussing current technological designs, Feenberg encounters a feature of today's technical codes that is extremely problematic. By posing the question, "who bears the greatest impact on technological design today?" he finds out that current design processes are mainly influenced by the administrations and managers of private companies. This one-dimensional impact on technology is what he calls the "operational autonomy"[12] of modern technology. Today, technology is produced not only according to managers' aims, but, moreover, it is constructed in such a way as to reproduce managerial dominance over the productive process and society in general. The operational autonomy also posits managers "in a technical relation to the world, safe from the consequences of their own actions".[13] Concerning the fact that capitalist values appropriate technological design from the beginning (and these values are translated into the technical specifications of artifacts) then what was thought of as the fate of technology as such reveals itself as a feature of a specific kind of technology; the capitalist technology. It is the values that have been translated into the

[10] Graeme Kirkpatrick, *Technology and social Power*, (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2008), p. 9, 81-86.

[11] Feenberg, *Transforming* Technology, ibid., p. 20.

[12] Feenberg, *Between Reason and Experience*, ibid., p. 70-72.

[13] Ibid.

capitalist technology that posit humans in a technical relation to the world, revealing everything as raw materials.

In accordance with the hermeneutics of technology and the fact that today's technology takes the form of a straightforward capitalist technology, Feenberg attempts to develop ideas about resisting this particular technological production and the forms of life that it entails. The proliferation of participant interests, meaning the widening of the interests toward which the technical design will be biased, derives out of resistance against the current shaping of subjectivity from designs which are biased toward operational autonomy. In order to elaborate his theory about technological resistance, Feenberg turns to Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau.

Foucault is a significant thinker and a very important one for modernity. In his works,[14] Feenberg finds a very different critique of modernity than in other theorists like Marx. As Feenberg argues, "the point […] is not that Foucault is a Marxist or replaces Marx as a theorist of resistance to capitalism but rather that his work suggests a reinterpretation of Marx's theory that shifts the overall emphasis and supplements certain deficiencies".[15] The most important aspect of Foucault's approach is that modernity relies on forms of knowledge that are simultaneously forms of power. The French philosopher explores how modern subjectivity is being shaped by the repressive mechanisms of prison and clinical asylums, rather than by state violence. The everyday processes that categorize, organize or differentiate humans within these mechanisms Foucault called "microtechniques". Such mechanisms are technical artifacts that incorporate the ideas and values of their designers. In this context, human subjectivity is being shaped by the values of the mechanisms' designers. It becomes clear, then, that for Feenberg, such techno-systems, like bureaucracy or detention centers, consist in mechanisms the technological design of which becomes value laden. This is the point in which technology is political and posits the need for political resistance.

Such resistance orientation is to be found not only in Foucault's work, but in Michel de Certeau's as well. Since, as Feenberg puts it "technology is just one among many similar mechanisms of social control, all based on pretensions to neutral knowledge, all having asymmetrical effects on social power",[16] then a new kind of political action is needed today, a kind of technical politics, which Feenberg calls "interactive politics of technology".[17]

[14] See Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard 1975) ; Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité* (Paris: Gallimard 1975).

[15] Feenberg, *Technosystem,* ibid., p. 18.

[16] Feenberg, *Transforming Technology*, ibid., p. 68.

[17] Andrew Feenberg, *Alternative Modernity. The Technical Turn in Philosophy and Social Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1995) p. 39-40. For a recent and fruitful

This kind of political action, which is based on the previous assumptions regarding everyday subjectivity shaping through practices carried out by mechanisms that embody social control disciplines, is a kind of "micropolitics" that re-appropriate technology, and hence, re-appropriates the formation of subjectivity. Every "regime of truth" that is established and embedded in technology creates a "margin of maneuver"[18] in which counter-hegemonic practices arise, resisting the certain subjectivity formation that is carried out through the microtechniques of the established mechanisms. Drawing upon some of the ideas that Michel de Certeau developed, Feenberg refers to the tactics that people need to practice in order to resist, as opposed to the strategies that the system undertakes in order to impose its power. Thus, tactics need to be everyday actions that transform the very items or systems people use by investing them with different collective meanings.[19] Michel de Certeau's ideas about everyday resistance and the reshape of items and systems is being translated for Feenberg into the project of democratizing technology by collective interventions that alter the very meaning of the artifacts. Since technology is one of the factors that carry out social control, then shaping its design based on more social demands may reduce the social power of the few and widen the practice of political agency for the people. This is an argument that can be correlated to political autonomy today: Feenberg's theory aims at providing people the ways they can shape their own subjectivity, through the influence of the produced technology (since technological designs and mechanisms impact on peoples' lives and subjectivity). Some of the democratic interventions that Feenberg conceptualizes are "hearings, citizen juries, technical controversies, protests, boycotts and legal challenges, hacking and other creative appropriations of technologies".[20]

Acting politically today must incorporate democratic interventions to technology since technology not only is far from being just a neutral tool but it shapes subjectivity and directs humans' lives.[21] Intervening to technology's

critique on Feenberg's politics of technology see Graeme Kirkpatrick, "Transforming Dystopia with Democracy: The Technical Code and the Critical Theory of Technology", in *Critical Theory and the Thought of Andrew Feenberg*, ed. by Darrell P. Arnold, Andreas Michel (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2017).

[18] Feenberg, *Transforming Technology*, ibid., p. 84-88.

[19] Michel de Certeau, *L' invention du quotidian. Arts de faire* (Paris: Gallimard 1990).

[20] Feenberg, *Between Reason and Experience*, ibid., p.81.

[21] An important scholar who engages with the problematic of how technology directs peoples' lives is Mark Coeckelbergh. See. Mark Coeckelbergh, *Moved by Machines. Performance Metaphors and Philosophy of Technology*, (New York and London: Routledge 2019); Mark Coeckelbergh, «Technology, narrative and performance in the social theatre: how digital technologies write, direct and organize the narrative and temporal structure of our social existence» in *Understanding Digital Events. Bergson, Whitehead and the Experience of the Digital*, ed. by David Kreps (London and New York: Routledge 2019), p. 13-26.

design means intervening to what shapes and directs peoples' lives and by this kind of interventions political autonomy surfaces. Moreover, widening the horizon of participant interests leads to changing the technical code by altering the values that are translated into technological facts. This process may culminate in the agency strengthening of the marginalized social groups, which until now were exposed to the subjectivity shaping by the dominant actor of the society through technology. Transforming the technical code is a political struggle. It is the same process as decolonizing the social imaginary. This is a very important dimension of contemporary political action.

Concerning Feenberg's argument, an example of intervention to technology may be useful. In November 2020, people in Paris and other French cities revolted against a certain law that was about to be voted in the parliament, which would forbid capturing policemen on camera. This law was promoted by some politicians after the online publication of a number of videos that showed policemen acting violently on citizens. According to the proposed law, citizens would not have the right to capture police on duty by camera even if they were acting with unparalleled violence. After the suggestion of this law in the parliament and for a couple of weeks people revolted on the streets (an action that faced violent police opposition) and eventually the law was dismissed. Had this law passed, it would have changed the whole technical code of smartphones, tablets or cameras, because many years later it would seem rational not being able to capture policemen on camera. Since it would be illegal to film police actions and people would be led to the jury for such matters, the technical specifications of the artifact would prohibit this kind of filming. The values that a few people represented - the values of a specific group of participant interests - would have affected technology's design in such a way as for the technical artifacts to be biased towards its interests. Thus, cameras and smartphones would be designed not to allow such actions. It would have led companies to create software that automatically forbids one from taking photos of policemen (through recognition techniques of certain elements like a uniform or a helmet). Other technologies would follow that would render people increasingly powerless regarding state violence.

Since today the Internet is the technology that allows for international publicity of an event or publicly communicating incidents worldwide, prohibiting the filming of some events would automatically reduce the publicity and the communication of such incidents to the whole world. If people hadn't revolted, the politicians who suggested the law along with companies who would have taken over the responsibility of creating smartphones with such software would have been the agents whose participant interests would have been satisfied with such technologies. However, revolting on the streets rendered people the dominant actors with technological participant interests. As such, dominant actors publicly

affected the dominant notions of society. The notion of publicity and of being able to act digitally against police violence (this is a kind of agency against police brutality) prevailed over the notion of digital suppression. It seemed like people would not tolerate their agency (even in its digital form) to be reduced. Streets were rendered as the margin of maneuver for people to practice their agency and designate their opinion regarding future designs. In addition, people's resistance against the creation of a technology that would have placed a strict boundary to human expression and freedom was a revolt against new social meanings that would have been actualized in certain future technologies. And since the values of today are the facts of tomorrow, as Feenberg puts it, the dominance of the social meaning of freedom to film violence and the notion of an international public community against police brutality, will continue to be integrated into the design of digital artifacts of tomorrow as technical specifications.

The regulation of a law about forbidding the filming and public transmission of police actions would have led to a truly different technology, which would shape society based on other social meanings. Such technology may have led to a violent dystopia. But French people resisted it by dismissing a change in the technical code. Resistance against a technological change or a regulation about some technical specifications seems today to be a straightforward political act. The politics of technology indicates that it is citizens' duty to resist regulations and technical modifications that confine their political ability to act. If people in America hadn't filmed police brutality on George Floyd, probably the *Black Lives Matter* movement would have been rather feeble. Essentially, the fact that images from various American cities, in which revolts took place, could be transmitted worldwide, helped the movement acquire support from all around the globe.

Public space and deliberative democracy

Feenberg's theoretical and political position, as presented above, can be seen as a response to the significant transformations that postmodern societies have underwent the last decades. On the other hand, of course, there is another direction of political thought today that distances itself from conventional representative politics. This kind of political action derives from the work of German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, especially his conceptualization of the public sphere, combining it with the idea of deliberative democracy. This alternative direction in political tradition is related to the technical milieu, especially to the rise of the Internet, due to

the fact that many scholars today conceive the Internet as a whole new public space that can promote democratic deliberation.[22]

This form of political action is based on Habermas's notion of the public sphere, presented in his 1962 book *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*),[23] with some insights from scholars like Nancy Fraser;[24] along with another significant book of his, *Between Facts and Norms*, where he develops the idea of informal publics which can affect the formal political system.[25] His ideas remain interesting today because they can lead to different trajectories in terms of conventional political activity. They can lead to deliberative democracy that many thinkers claim to be the most important form of democracy for today's world. Habermas highlights the relation between media and democracy, specifically the use of media, like public journals, television, radio and even the Internet being able to affect public opinion and decision-making.[26]

The political import Habermas's theory entails is actually based on the well-known distinction between the "system" and the "lifeworld". It is within the lifeworld that the informal publics emerge. Formal political systems or administrations are what Habermas calls the "system". Informal publics have the power to affect the political system. But it is important to evaluate what a public consists of. A public is not just any crowd. Even more than that, a public is an occurrence when people turn to each other in order to find solution to a common problem. Even when such deliberation occurs online, creating, as a James Bohman argues, a distributive public sphere.[27] Noëlle McAfee, a scholar influenced by Habermas's writings, argues that people assemble together for finding such solutions about public affairs. Publics *constitute themselves* when ordinary people gather together to talk and

[22] Giannis Perperidis, "The Imaginary Constitution of Cyberspace" in E. Pandia & P. Kapos (eds.), *Media, Information & Communication in Digital Era. Psychological, Cultural and Philosophical Implementations* (Athens: Oasis Publications 2022), p. 225-246. (In Greek).

[23] Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1990).

[24] Nancy Fraser shows that Habermas's conceptualization of the public sphere leads to the idea of one and only public sphere which is described as with bourgeois characteristics from the German philosopher. Her interpretation leads to a multiplicity of publics, other weak and other strong and the relation in-between them which constitutes the network of publics needed for an actual democracy. Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy", in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. by Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: The MIT Press 1996), p. 109-142.

[25] Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms. Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, (Cambridge: MIT Press 1998).

[26] Julian Petley, "Jürgen Habermas: The Modern Media and the Public Sphere" in *Revisiting the Frankfurt School. Essays on Culture, Media and Theory*, ed. by David Berry (England & USA: Ashgate 2012), p. 139-159.

[27] James Bohman, "Expanding dialogue: the Internet, the public sphere and prospects for transnational democracy", in *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere*, ed. by Nick Crossley and John Michael Roberts (Oxford: Blackwell 2004), p. 13-55.

resolve ordinary and everyday problems; that is, when a subjective opinion becomes a public judgement.[28] Within this context, McAfee highlights the emergence of *public deliberation*: the fact that for any problem, there always must be a collective solution that ordinary people can actualize.

However, an important question arises: how do these informal publics affect the formal politics, that is, the governmental decision-making, private interests and international relations? It seems like the former is rather a flexible discussion on the neighborhood about placing benches on the sidewalk, an act that has little (or none) impact on international politics or the economic system of a country; while the latter is about the future of the country: economic, political, social, medical, urban among others. It is important to ponder on the fact that scholars connect this kind of public chat to find solutions to local problems with national politics and larger social problems that are currently being solely resolved through administrative, top-down decisions.

The decisive distinction that such scholars make in order to tackle this difficult issue is between "politics" and the "Political". As McAfee puts it, "politics is what governments do while the governed have the opportunity to protest, beseech or elect different representatives".[29] On the other hand, the political is the realm where there is no need for political expertise and where informal publics arise with its public will formation and public deliberation. In simple terms, the Political is when people are actually getting involved in decisions about their future; when people actually are autonomous within their society. It is only then that the concept of the Political becomes possible. This autonomy can only be attained through publics within the lifeworld because it is publics that constitute democracies.

For this kind of political action today citizenry must be part of deliberative publics. Representative forms of democracy focus on the actions of administration. All of citizens' actions are oriented toward representation: either voting a different politician because the previous did not satisfy the interests he should have in the first place; or protesting for some politicians to start satisfying peoples' interests. In both situations citizens' actions are oriented towards someone else; the one that exercises politics; because politics always seems to happen elsewhere, out of peoples' reach. Indeed, politics do need people, because voting representatives to speak for one is a main element of heteronomy; and politics is indeed a plain of heteronomy. While on the other side, politics occur far from the people; far from those

[28] Noëlle McAfee, "Three Models of Democratic Deliberation", *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy 18*, 2004, p. 44-59, 48.

[29] Noëlle McAfee, "Acting politically in a Digital Age", in *From Voice to Influence: Understanding Citizenship in a Digital Age*, ed. by Danielle S. Allen and Jennifer S. Light (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2015), p. 273-292, p. 276-277.

whose interests it ought to satisfy. To put in briefly, this is the core essence of heteronomy in contemporary political life.

To be specific, the Political is a new kind of political praxis. The idea that lies beyond this notion is that everyday discussions and acts can overwhelmingly affect politics through the transformation of societal meanings. Since societal meanings are constituted symbolically through communicative actions (Habermas's theory of communicative action in combination with G.H. Mead's theory of symbolic interaction), the modification and re-appropriation of such meanings consists in political praxis; and this modification can occur only through everyday actions and communicative actions. It is in this context, the context of communicative publics of deliberation that political transformation can take place. This is the reason why so many scholars focus on the organization of public will, or the informal publics that occur implicitly regarding the formal political arena. As McAfee highlights, "democracy is a project concerned with the political potentialities of ordinary citizens, that is, with their possibilities for becoming political beings through the self-discovery of common concerns and modes of action for realizing them".[30] People need to understand that they hold the power to transform society because they are the ones who constitute it symbolically in the first place. This is the ultimate political action, since representative democracy seems to be essentially thwarted.

To pause for a moment and ponder: what does it really mean to change the social meanings that penetrate every idea, action and relationship within the social order? The very essence of the social imaginary is that there are some dominant meanings that constitute society. These meanings can be altered when the ideas behind them and the action that they support them are dismissed. Every social actor contributes to establishing certain meanings within society. Some social actors may be contributing more than others due to their dominant position within the social imaginary. Informal publics are the publics that the marginalized actors can constitute in order for their interests to be actualized. This is how they contribute to a just and democratic society. The most important issue is that it is not a representative or a politician who argues or struggles for the interests of a social group. It is the very group that struggles for its interests and rights. Every person autonomously participates in social struggles for self-recognition. Hence, every person actively influences the social imaginary by altering the meanings that penetrate its structure. If a social group struggles for a specific meaning, then, sooner or later, that meaning will take its place within the social imaginary. This is what deliberative democracy is all about. It means that citizens assemble together constituting an active and autonomous body that is able to affect formal politics occurring somewhere far away from everyday

[30] Ibid. p. 285

people. As far as deliberative democracy is concerned, the centers of power making-decisions for the majority of people as representatives do not really practice the art of democratic deliberation. Autonomy and deliberation are the most important features for democracy to be concretized.

For McAfee, among others, such publics are gradually emerging, today, within the Internet milieu. She argues explicitly that what she elaborates is really "a concept of politics in the public sphere that occurs here and there, in stops and starts, and, we might add, online and offline".[31] By "online" she doesn't mean that the political must be taking place in certain websites approved by the policies of a country's administration; nor in websites set up by administrations in order, for example, for a referendum to take place. By "offline life", the Political can take place at parks, in homes, in a garage, in a public bus or on the queue in a cafe. Deliberative democracy is about constituting worlds of meaning, forming the substrata of the social order. This can be achieved through online or offline deliberation, since everyday informal deliberation transforms social meanings that organize a certain type of society.

Arguably, there are numerous difficulties that need to be overcome in order for informal publics to be able to influence the politics of a city or a whole country, in general. The establishment of the informal public is a difficult and complicated enterprise, given the fact that consumer capitalism and true democracy become gradually mutually exclusive. The Internet introduced an even more powerful and intense "society of the spectacle" (as Guy Debord named the society of the 20th century),[32] where every event, whether political or cultural, is conceived as pure "image". People tend to conceive political action as pressing mere buttons on the keyboard, liking or disliking simulacra. More importantly, however, late-capitalist scholars and economists have inquired the idea of a public will, culminating in theories about influencing peoples' psyche for marketing and consumption purposes.[33] Such strategies constitute a whole new anthropology, the neoliberal anthropology,[34] which alienates individuals, making it impossible for them to establish informal publics and articulate political proposals for the future. According to the abovementioned difficulties, the formulation of a differentiated approach to political action shall not to be conceived as a mere simplification of the complexity of modern issues, but rather, as an ongoing sociopolitical project with direct and explicit ramifications.

[31] Ibid. p. 284

[32] See Guy Debord, *La société du spectacle* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel 1967).

[33] A good example is the nudge theory about actuating consumers to buy certain goods than others. See Richard H. Thaler, Cass R Sunstein, *Nudge: The Final Edition*, (London: Penguin Books, 2021).

[34] Pierre Dardot, Christian Laval, *The new way of the world. On neo-liberal society*, trans. G. Elliot (London & New York: Verso 2013).

Political action and the internet

Unequivocally, the Internet is the single most prominent technology of the late 20th and 21st century. Its dynamics have concerned the majority of thinkers from many different traditions of philosophy and social theory. As far as the politics of technology is concerned, the Internet is an intrinsic component of our existence. For McAfee and others, the Internet is a new way to connect people and re-order civil society.

Despite the fact that both Feenberg and Habermas highlight the essential importance of the Internet, their theories are contradictory in many respects. Specifically, according to Feenberg,[35] for Habermas technology belongs to what the latter calls "the system", that is, all those aspects of today's society that human communication and meaning constitution cannot mediate. "The system", specifically, technology, bureaucracy and economy cannot be influenced by the activities within the "lifeworld". It is within the lifeworld that humans can create and organize meanings and bring changes through communication; that is the reason why Habermas puts so much effort in developing his famous "theory of communicative action" that takes place within the lifeworld.[36] For Habermas the system remains untouched by such processes that occur within the lifeworld and there is no way humans can alter the trajectory of the system's ever-expanding force. The sole political and moral vision that Habermas's theory entails is a vision of technological inhibition within the boundaries of the distinct system. Contrastingly, technological colonization of the lifeworld would mean the total annihilation of the human creativity and hence life per se. Habermas does not argue explicitly about this kind of dystopia, but at the same time he does not propose any practical solutions. According to Feenberg analysis, Habermas's theory has eminent affinities with essentialist dystopias, despite the latter's discontent with pessimistic accounts.

Regardless of the abovementioned antitheses, both traditions have something in common in terms of the ambiguous character of the Internet. To be precise, the public sphere after the emergence of the Internet is something unprecedented. For Feenberg, the Internet is the most prominent technology of the 21st century and the one which can actualize the democratization of technology. The Internet is thought to be a technology which is in a state of flux. Feenberg argues that the Internet consists of three distinct elements, three different models: the information model; the

[35] For Feenberg's critique of Habermas's theory see Feenberg, *Alternative Modernity*, ibid., ch. 4.

[36] Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des komminikativen Handels*, 2 Bände (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1984).

consumption model and the community model.[37] Each of these models resembles the Kuhnian paradigm. Each paradigm competes for the design of the Internet and for the features that it will contain. The information model consists of those elements that enable the information flow, the exchange of information and the access to information and data. This model was the original conception behind the invention of the Internet from the time it was called ARPANET.[38] The other two models are more interesting and important for contemporary society. The consumption model tends to render the Internet as a huge mall for buying and selling goods. If this model persists over the design of the Internet, then this technological invention will replace the physical market creating a digital space just for transactions. Features of this model are already too strong in the design of the Internet. The digital marketplace not only acquires more and more momentum within the Internet but as studies show it has already constituted a world of information about users and buying habits in order for it to thrive even more.[39] The third model is also intense and competes for the design of the Internet. By "community", Feenberg means all the elements of the Internet that are being created by human communication, namely, forums, communities, messaging, exchange of information or knowledge and many more. As he puts it: "Community is the primary scene of human communication and personal development. It is in this context that people judge the world around them and discuss their judgments with others. Any technology that offers new possibilities for the formation of community is thus democratically significant".[40]

A concretization of this antagonism between the consumption and community model, that Feenberg attempts to reveal, lies in online video games.[41] He and his colleague try to develop a critical theory of digital gaming by applying Feenberg's instrumentalization theory[42] on digital gaming. The most important issue is that online digital games can be transformed in the hands of individual gamers by simply hacking their code. By elevating his analysis on a communal level, Feenberg argues about the ways communities can transform technical artifacts (the Internet, digital games, and all other

[37] Andrew Feenberg, *Introduction. Toward a Critical Theory of the Internet*, in *(Re)Inventing the Internet*, ed. by Andrew Feenberg, Norm Friesen (Rotterdam/Boston/Taipei: Sense Publishers 2012), p. 3-17, p.11.

[38] For a history of the ARPANET see Janet Abbate, *Inventing the Internet* (Cambridge: The MIT Press 1999).

[39] Nikos Smyrnaios, *The oligopoly of the Internet. How Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft seized control of our digital life*, Athens: Metamesonykties Ekdoseis 2018. (In Greek. Footnote translated by the author). Smyrnaios's study is enlightening about the five stronger companies which thrive due to users' information.

[40] Feenberg, Introduction, ibid., p. 12.

[41] M. Grimes and Andrew Feenberg, "Rationalizing play: A critical theory of digital gaming", in *(Re)Inventing the Internet*, ed. by Feenberg and Friesen, ibid, p. 21-41.

[42] For more on his instrumentalization theory see. Andrew Feenberg, *Question technology* (London and New York: Routledge 1999).

technical artifacts like planes, automobiles, Computers etc.). In this sense, ordinary people and users are able to alter the seemingly unaltered trajectory of technology. To be sure, however, the emergence of a public space, and hence a digital public space, is a condition sine qua non for such an enterprise.

As far as the tradition following Habermas's thought in concerned, the Internet and the new media consist in two powerful, essentially political, tools. On the one hand, the fact that there are no boundaries and one can attend digitally at many places at the same time empowers communication and exchange of information. On the other hand, McAfee refers to the "networked public sphere". Particularly, she contends that digital media have overcome the one-to-many model of the media, like television, having created the many-to-many model, which "allows for robust and de-centered engagement in social and political life".[43] Through this kind of public sphere, people can be informed about a variety of issues, from events to movements taking place near them or even far away. Internet users can also communicate with each other in order to autonomously organize events or make informal referendums about everyday problems that need to be resolved.

Despite Feenberg's powerful critique for Habermas's thought, their two exemplary theories about technology and politics can actually be reconciled. Since technical politics needs a public space within which the meaning of technologies may be transformed, these two theories may be combined in a fruitful way. This is what Maria Bakardjieva attempts to investigate. By reconciling Feenberg's and Habermas's traditions, Bakardjieva introduces an innovative form of activism, which she calls "subactivism". Maria Bakardjieva studied the way people engage in an online civic participation.[44] She concluded that people think they are rather apolitical while expressing and practicing essentially political thoughts and issues. Her study ends with the phrase "the personal is political", meaning that what people think as their personal stance over an issue is not really personal, but consists of sociopolitical meanings. In other words, what she calls "personal" is a social construction with distinct meanings. Computers and the Internet have penetrated the personal space of every household making this phrase look even more intense. Subactivism involves the practices of everyday people, within the context of Habermas's "lifeworld" that tend to redesign the very basis of communicative action. At the same time, the Internet, having been the primary locus of communication in post-modernity, may carry out Feenberg's radical idea about redesigning, and thus, democratizing technology. By redesigning the medium, one can redesign society, a theoretical schema that corresponds to what Feenberg highlights, following

[43] McAfee, "Acting politically in a Digital Age", ibid., p. 288.

[44] Maria Bakardjieva, "Subactivism: Lifeworld and politics in the age of the Internet", in *(Re)Inventing the Internet*, ed. by Feenberg and Friesen, ibid, p. 85-108.

the Science and Technology Studies, as the "co-construction of technology and society". Bakardjieva argues that people engage with their world through talking or by interacting with each other, regardless of the specific matter they are chatting about, hence, creating a public sphere of freedom and responsibility. Citizenship involves participatory civil standing and this can be accomplished through and within the online milieu. Subactivism, briefly, is a critical element of a democratic society.[45]

Bakardjieva's approach on subactivism may seem oversimplified at first glance. To be precise, subactivism shall not be conceived as an absolute replacement of peoples' physical appearance on the public arena with the online political action. Subactivism always supplements the real, on-the-street resistance and supports its purposes for social change. It connects people from all around the world creating online groups. Surely, the face-to-face encounter with other activists cannot be replaced by virtual environments; it can however be supplemented and intensified. If followed by physical on-the-street revolt, subactivism may lead as well to a sociopolitical transformation. Nevertheless, the abovementioned difficulties regarding public spheres and the constitution of an informal public cannot be easily resolved.

A practical example of subactivism may highlight the totally pragmatic importance of Bakardjieva's line of thought. One could address the #metoo movement against sexual abuse as a form and instance of subactivism and the online public sphere more generally. The #metoo movement started as a hashtag on social media (in particular Myspace on 2006) in order for victims of sexual harassment to express their stories, experiences, feelings and thoughts. It soon became a symbol of resistance against sexual harassment, patriarchy and the enduring meanings of male chauvinism. #Metoo does not stand only for mere information sharing. It has changed (and is still changing) how people think; it has transformed the very categories of thinking about sexual abuse. Subactivism aims not only at bringing people together about issues about sexual assault, but more importantly, at substituting actions, habits and the sociocultural meanings of the world we live in.

To put it in simple terms, subactivism consists in a radical form of engaged activism made possible by digital platforms. Given the fact that today's world is getting constructed upon such platforms (from the images the politicians and companies create about themselves to what one is going to eat or drink) it follows that subactivism is as important as (analogue) activism. For this reason, examples of subactivism can involve even the boycott of the digital platforms of companies that aim at reducing their followers or getting a lower score on google grading system. Such was the case of boycotting the

[45] This is the reason studies explore the political dimensions of the Internet connecting it with current movements worldwide. See Alexandros Schismenos, *Introduction to the Critique of Digital Reason* (Athens: Athenschool 2021). (In Greek. Footnote translated by the author).

efood platform in 2022 in Greece, after the company announced less rights and wages for the deliverymen. Within a few days, its rating was reduced to an extraordinary degree, culminating in a revenue loss for the company.

The #metoo movement revealed ways of radically transforming the social meanings of talking, touching, flirting, reporting, abusing, harassing, among others. It has achieved this change by creating the necessary space for people (especially women and marginalized groups) to speak about events that were occurring for many years and no one was talking about. In this context, after thousands of reports about abuses, rapes, misbehaviors and many more acts against women, one observes, even a minute, change in the attitude and stance of many women: they talk about their abusers; they report the abuse immediately, they do not fall silent. This digital movement provided the conditions to speak and hence provided the basis for more reports, which led to the establishment of the term "femicide". It is a fact that *#metoo* did not confine within the boundaries of the digital world. Various strikes and revolts were organized. Subactivism and analogue activism can as easily coexist and reinforce each other's purposes. In this sense, we believe that Bakardjieva is right to express the new kind of activism with this new notion. On the other hand, however, we shall not forget that activism, both analogue and digital, has one innate purpose: to change the meanings that constitute social existence. The #metoo movement created the public space through which society experiences gradual and significant changes; and this is absolutely an authentic dimension of political praxis today.

Conclusion

The Internet and the new kind of social relations that it brings forth is one of the most significant issues that concern modern theorists. The Internet's political ramifications need to be emphasized, regarding its embeddedness in social existence of contemporary technological societies. The "window through which we see the world"[46] is digital. Thus, inquiring the political dimension of the Internet is not just a search for political uses of this specific digital media, but an evaluation of the structure of today's social world.

This essay attempted to present the approaches of two of the most important traditions that assess the digital world's potentialities. The

[46] I borrow this phrase to describe ontology from a book about the Commons that suggests first of all that every social and political world is based on certain ontological meanings. Thus, changing the society (towards commons and commoning) means altering the meanings that support its current form. This can be achieved through a long process of reevaluating everyday life, ideas, actions, conversations and generally everything in the social world. In order for different political action and ideas to emerge, there is the need for an "Ontoshift". David Bollier & Silke Helfrich, *Free fair and alive. The Insurgent Power of the Commons* (Canada: New Society Publishers 2019), ch. 2.

examples mentioned in this paper show that what "political" and "political action" means today has completely changed. People tend to move away from traditional representative forms of politics and search for alternative forms of affecting the social and political order. We should emphasize the essential entanglement of society and technology in the sociohistorical era that is modernity. One could argue that social and political meanings today are based on claims that are integrated into technology as facts. To change society today one needs technological means, and more importantly, any change requires a technological turn, in Feenberg terms, a change of the technical code. Contesting the ontological foundations of society –meaning redesigning its technical basis, through public spheres that connect people (online or offline)– is one of the most intriguing political projects. This is what the examples of France and #metoo reveal.

Technical politics and subactivism is not just another theoretical schema. They are rather founded on something totally pragmagic, the need for alternative technologies. The Internet and digital technologies today can be rendered as alternative technologies due to their interpretative flexibility. Digital technologies like the Blockchain have already been interpreted as economically revolutionary.[47] Furthermore, what is known as "digital commons" attempts to re-appropriate technologies at a communal level, changing their designs, aims, uses and communities around them.[48] Digital commons and new technologies as Blockchain or 3D printers should be conceived of as politics of technology, meaning that they are open to interpretation based on the social meanings of the participant interests that attempt to integrate their values to their design. A political action today should be able to address such affection and create subversive technologies. In the near future, more technological innovations will emerge depending upon the existing digital milieu and we should be aware that their creation and application on a daily basis is innately political.

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[48] For more on the Common initiatives see Vangelis Papadimitropoulos, *The Commons: Economic Alternatives in the Digital Age*, London: University of Westminster Press 2020; and for the commons regarding technological redesign see Chris Giotitsas, *Open Source Agriculture. Grassroots Technology in the Digital Era* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan 2019).

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The Noise of Facts. Putting Political Philosophy to the Ultimate Test

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Abstract

Political philosophy suffers the same challenges posed against the validity, plausibility and soundness of philosophical knowledge as such. If a problem is detected there it is a methodological one. Namely, the troubled relationship between reason and experience. We will argue that, applying the pragmatist method, political philosophy has to be put to the test of the imminent environmental collapse and the consequent actual potentiality of human extinction. We will further argue that political philosophy can survive that ultimate pragmatist test provided that it will bend an ear again to the noise of facts.

Keywords

Political philosophy; pragmatism; naturalism; environmental collapse; human exceptionalism; empirical; speculative reasoning

Though, is it still alive?

If the question is "Why Political Philosophy Matters", then in order to answer it a prior question should be stated: "Is Political Philosophy Still Alive"? For the reason that to decide if something is worth maintaining because it has been agreed upon that it matters, then a decision is required on whether or not it is still alive. It goes without saying that the one determinates the other: If something matters, then it will still be alive and if something is alive, then it has good chances to be considered as something worth maintaining –being or kept alive. In the case at hand, the current status or the fate of political philosophy may be considered from each one of its aspects: the political and the philosophical. This is for the reason that political philosophy has been challenged in both of its aspects: as the discrete brunch of philosophical inquiry, i.e. the political; as a philosophical inquiry as such, i.e. the philosophical. As for the latter, political philosophy, being an application in a specific research domain of philosophical inquiry in general, suffers the same challenges posed against the validity, plausibility and soundness of philosophical knowledge as such. The attack on philosophy was launched both from within and outside the field.

Logical positivism, linguistic analysis, analytical philosophy, neopragmatism, all questioned in part or in the whole the claim for valid and sound knowledge –or, the clarification of the foundation of knowledge– raised by traditional philosophy. Of course, traditional philosophy –or we'd better say philosophers that practiced it– accepted the challenge and fought back with rigor, using the, tested over the centuries, theoretical and methodological artillery and, most importantly, the exact line of argumentation that was disputed in the first place. As it was nicely put, "in the past two decades, or so, philosophers show little concern for metaphysical issues, and have blithely gone about the business of 'doing philosophy'. Metaphysics and normative ethics have flourished. We do not flinch at talk of 'possible worlds' or 'original positions'".[1] Traditional philosophy –though not the philosophers themselves– suffered some serious blows, but that was not something new or unexpected. Questioning and challenging the claims of philosophical inquiry or philosophy as such was a steady threat since still its classical era and one might say it was even a systematic component of its same formation. However, now, anti-

[1] Jaegwon Kim, "Rorty On The Possibility of Philosophy", *Journal of Philosophy* 77, no. 10 (October 1980), p. 588. Speaking of *traditional philosophy* in general is of course a rude, and aphilosophical in itself, simplification. However, we may attribute to it some main characteristics –notably, the claim for more or less accurate representation and the investigation for the universal standards of rationality and objectivity– common to all its traditions (as, at least, it is argued by its critics). Its idealist and materialist traditions, anyway, that concerns us the most for their direct political aftereffects. In respect to all that we would possibly be more accurate if we speak of speculative philosophy –of speculative political philosophy anyway, for that is the kind of philosophical investigation of politics that we challenge here.

philosophers' (so to say) stance was far more solid –one may say impossible to bypass. For it was language that is deficient and, even more, a troublemaker. And without language and its sophisticated use there is no philosophy of any kind. Linguistic deficiency threatened the very core of philosophy and, as excepted, the blow was powerful enough to cause harm even to the field of philosophical examination of politics. That is widely acknowledged: "Contemporary philosophy, and particularly what was called ordinary language philosophy, has developed powerful arguments to show that the theories of traditional speculative philosophy are all pseudo-theories". Some philosophical errors "are due to mistaken conceptions of language", nevertheless "if one works through the philosophical problems discussed and reasoned out in Rawl's *A Theory of Justice* one will find only few problems that will be resolved or even profitably treated by such an approach".[2] Rawls is mentioned here due to his specific methodological stance, but we may as well take him as an exemplar of political philosophy per se. After all, we may endlessly debate on the true nature of democracy, but we all have some at least basic –though quite real– idea of what we are talking about. Even philosophers can feel the difference between, for example, having the right to vote and to be denied or obstructed to. Regardless what Rousseau had to say, British citizens must have felt, must have known what democracy is –or, at least, have had a sense of it. Even if that was not so, those who had no right to vote, the poor and women, must have felt it for certain[3] (Though things are not so easy when we consider, for example, Rousseau's notion of the general will). At the very end, theoretical constructions in the philosophical inquiry of politics are not so much notions, as they are ideas, and ideas are judged not by their clarity or sophistication but by their ideological cogency and polemical usefulness.

[2] Kai Nielsen, "Some Remarks on Philosophical Method", *Metaphilosophy* 9, no. 1 (January 1978): p. 31, 30. See, indicatively: "Political philosophy is dead, I have heard men say, killed by the logical positivists and their successors who have shown that many of the problems which exercised the great political thinkers of the past were spurious, resting on confusion of thought and the misuse of language. Apply the solvent of linguistic analysis to these pretentious systems, they say, and when the dross has melted away. Little that is valuable remains. I think that is a mistake", John Plamenatz, "The Use of Political Theory", in *Political Philosophy,* ed. by Anthony Quinton (London: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 19. An often mentioned exemplifier of analytical dispute is T. D. Weldon, not without reason: "The purpose of philosophy is to expose and elucidate linguistic muddles. It has done its job when it has resolved the confusions which have occurred in inquiries into matters of fact because the structure and use of language are what they are", T. D. Weldon, "Political Principles", in *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, ed. by Peter Laslett (New York: Macmillan, 1956), p. 23.

[3] See, for example, the following rather peculiar, but deeply democratic, conception of the right to vote: "Universal suffrage is understood by many of [the pitmen of the north-east in 1819] to mean universal suffering, 'if one member suffers, all must suffer'", quoted in Edward P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 783.

The assault on philosophy from outside the field was launched by the till very recently brothers in arms –the scientists. The *cause célèbre* was not new nor undisputed in the past. It had to do with the endless debate on methodology, concerning the place and significance of reason and experience in philosophical practice. Scientists, the very practitioners of empirical reaffirmation in theoretical interpretation, arraigned philosophy for being too abstract, too speculative, and hardly, or barely, empirical. The debate on methodology has been lying in the very heart of philosophical practice for centuries, at least from the time that Antisthenis debated with Plato on the reality of the horse and of *horseness*. Since political philosophy constitutes a subfield of the general exercise of philosophy, it is only natural for the scientific dispute of philosophical abstractness to apply on it as well. On the other hand, one could think that given the specific subject of political philosophical inquiry, i.e., politics, political philosophers would be less abstract and more empirical. For example, it was something extremely real, the English Civil War, that made Hobbes so disquiet about the possibility of the social collapse into anarchy.[4] As already real was the remedy for that, i.e. the monarchical state, or any other kind of absolutist state whatsoever. On top of that, Hobbes's greatest philosophical and political opponent, Aristotle, had kept losing essential ground by the advance of modern scientific practice with its reliance on experiment and experience –"Our own navigations makes manifest, and all men learned in human sciences, now acknowledge that there are antipodes", Hobbes wrote with satisfaction.[5] That given, it is reasonable to argue that "in this respect Hobbes, like Bacon, was a pioneer of scientific revolution",[6] a convinced empiricist. And what more fruitful and appropriate field to apply these empirical methodological principles on than the field of politics? However, that was not the case, or, that was only part of it. For the reason that Hobbes did not proceed with that empirical orientation in his philosophical inquiries on the political. For example, it has long been debated whether his notion of the state of nature is historical, based on specific historical examples of natural societies, or normative and descriptive, functioning primary as a first axiom for his political theory to be derived from. Given his great admiration for the beauty of Geometry and his reliance on its rigorous credibility, it comes as no surprise that Hobbes applied the deductive method of reasoning on his political researches.[7]

Nonetheless, we may as well wonder, if one of the most realist political

[4] Or, anyway, the invasion of the Spanish Armada, or the awful massacre in Jamestown, or the, remoted in time but still quite real, sanguinary civil unrest in ancient Corfu.

[5] Thomas Hobbes, "Leviathan", in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, v. II., ed. by William Molesworth (London: Scientia Aalen, 1962), p. 688.

[6] Stephen Priest, *The British Empiricists* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 32.

[7] Although the exact nature of Hobbes's science of politics, if there is any, is still an open question. For a summary of the relevant debate, see Glen Newy, *The Routledge Guidebook to Hobbes' Leviathan*, (London & NY: Routledge, 2014), p. 80-82.

philosophers of all times, and, in addition to that, one of the heavy names of empiricist philosophical tradition is not so empiricist in his inquiries in politics, then what about empiricism in political philosophy? Leo Strauss recognizes the methodological problem, as well as the subsequent critique:

> Compared with classical political philosophy all later political thought has a derivative character […] This has given to political philosophy the character of 'abstractness', and has therefore engendered the view that the philosophic movement must be a movement not from opinion to knowledge but from the abstract towards the concrete […] This change in orientation perpetuated the original defect of modern philosophy because it accepted abstractions as its starting point.[8]

Strauss responded to that unpleased development by arguing for a "scientific political philosophy", or, in other words, for a scientific approach to politics. In order to do that, he needed a corresponding definition of what political philosophy is or ought to be, one that he already possessed. Political philosophy, for Strauss, is the "attempt to replace opinion about the nature of political things by knowledge of the nature of political things"[9]. We may rightly suppose that not everyone would agree with such a definition because that would require the acceptance of a historically, or some would say, empirically oriented political philosophy. Or, in any case, a less abstract one. Paul Kelly, for example, stands on the midway, which is rather the opposite side:

> A fully adequate political theory will require historical contextualisation and sociological nuance, but it will also require abstraction from pre-given social norms if it is to engage in normative social criticism.[10]

Kelly wants to defend Rawls and post-Rawls political philosophy and along

[8] As a consequence, "today, political philosophy is in a state of decay and perhaps of putrefaction, if it has not vanished altogether", Leo Strauss, "What is Political Philosophy", *The Journal of Politics* 19, no. 3 (August 1957): p. 357, 345. Distrust towards history and the empirical was a feature of prominent radical political philosophers as well. Most typical example of that is Althusser who formed his marxism on the rejection of the empirical elements on Marx's (early) theory and the overall impeachment of historical knowledge. Likewise, Agamben stated his indifference for the historical and factual status of a concept on account of its function as an ideational guide, see Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (USA: Stanford University Press, 1998). Anarchist anthropologist David Graeber criticized Agamben's way of conceptual philosophizing, juxtaposing instead the factual orientation of anthropology, see David Graeber, *Possibilities. Essays on Hierarchy, Rebelion, and Desire* (Oakland: AK Press, 2007), p. 71-73. The political philosophy of anarchism has been constantly methodologically oriented towards experience and the empirical.

[9] Strauss, "What is Political Philosophy", p. 344.

[10] Paul Kelly, "Rescuing Political Theory form the Tyranny of History", in *Political Philosophy Versus History? Contextualism and Real Politics in Contemporary Political Thought*, ed. by Jonathan Floyd and Marc Stears (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 37.

with it the normative character of political theory; a character that is served by "abstractive methods". In this regard, he claims that rather than a "false social ontology" liberal egalitarianism "is individualistic in an ethical and normative sense".[11] Surely one may notice that individualism, even if normative, requires a social ontology that has to be sound and precise –an ontology someone more daring would say more real. At least because amidst a normative anthropology and a metaphorical and hypothetical original state must be something that may be taken as real. For the notion of the state of nature is metaphorical and hypothetical, in other words normative as well. "The social contract is not a crude history of the origin of the states […] Instead is a metaphor to model what a legitimate political association should be".[12] This is the old enigma about the historical or hypothetical character of the notion of the state of nature and of the social contract resolved in favor of one of its two possible solutions. On the other hand, equally old is the rejection of that hypothetical character by virtue of wild speculation –a rather severe dispute that resulted in the quietening of the social contract discussion for at least half a century. But, as Kelly points out, all that changed through the "most powerful restatement of contemporary liberalism ": the contractual theory of Rawls.

Rawls's description of the contractual procedure entails two pressupossitions: the hypothesis of the *original position* and of the *veil of ignorance*. The latter is likely the old hypothetical demand implicit in most state of nature descriptions: the conception of the natural man naked of all his determinations. Rawls proposes something quite similar: "Among the essential features of this situation is that no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status, nor does any one know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence, strength and the like. The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance".[13] Under the *veil of ignorance* the equality of all –in the meaning that no one has a decisive advantage or disadvantage, that brings in mind the equality of all in the hobbesian natural state– is ensured. Concerning the first of the presumptions, the original position, that is the standard notion of the state of nature (the logical antecedent of the social contract scheme) in a higher level of abstraction.[14] Acting behind the veil of ignorance, people thus being

[11] Paul Kelly, *Liberalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), p. 9.

[12] Kelly, *Liberalism*, p. 38. He states here once more that a metaphor, such as the liberal contract, emphasizes "the limits of sociological and historical factors in determining the nature of justice and legitimacy", p. 40.

[13] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, revised edition, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1999), p. 12. The difference between the naked man of the state of nature and the man who chooses behind the veil of ignorance is that nudeness is necessary for us to judge natural man free from our civilization prejudices, while ignorance was necessary for the latter to choose without the biases of self-preference and partiality.

[14]"What I have attempted to do is to generalize and carry to a higher order of abstraction

in an "initial position of equality" (Rawls's highly abstracted state of nature), proceed in an "original agreement about the principles of justice for the basic structure of society" (Rawls's contract). Besides the fact that during that procedure people do not form a society and do not agree on the surrender of their power to the sovereign, but choose instead the content of their societal value structure, Rawls's contract is not so far from the standard contractual descriptions. He even cares to warn us that we do not have to think the original contract as "one to enter in a particular society or to set up a particular form of government", nor the original position as "an actual historical state of affairs, much less as a primitive condition of culture"[15]. Hence, in that way he simply follows his precedents who warned us for the same thing.[16] Therefore, if the original position is not an actual state, then what is it? It is actual, though by no means historical. We can enter the original position, "so to speak", at any time, simply by "following a certain procedure, namely, by arguing for principles of justice".[17] It is a "most philosophically favored interpretation", the result of a "hypothetical course of reflection", an "expository devise" and an "intuitive notion", i.e. a conception that "enables us to envision our objective from afar".[18] All these are in accordance with Rawls's definition of what political philosophy is. His

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the traditional theory of the social contract as represented by Locke, Rousseau and Kant", Rawls, *A Theory*, xviii.

[15] Rawls, *A Theory,* p. 10, 11.

[16] Locke, although later in the book [§ 100, 122] argues that natural state may have been a historical reality, as amongst the American Indians, at the opening [§ 4] he introduces the description of natural man as logically "derived from its original", John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. by C. B. Macpherson (Huckett: Indianapolis, 1980), p. 8. Rousseau says the same, in other words : "The articles of this contract […] they are as such, though perhaps never stated", Jean J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Maurice Cranston (London: Penguin, 2004), 15. In the *Second Discourse* he is much more explicit: "Let us begin by setting aside all the facts […] One must not take the research upon this subject as historical truth but solely as hypothetical and conditional reasonings", Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, (Gallimard: Paris, 1965), p. 45. Nevertheless, they both strove to provide actual examples of the state of nature, from historical and ethnological records alike. This puzzling ambivalence produce an ongoing debate regarding the character of the state of nature within a massive bibliography. In Kant things seems to be strictly clear. We "by no means" need to assume that the contract "actually exists as a *fact*. [On the contrary] it is an *idea* of reason, which none the less has undoubted practical reality", Immanuel Kant, "Theory and Practice", in *Political Writings,* transl. by H. B. Nisbet, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 37.

[17] Rawls, *A Theory,* p. 17.

[18] Rawls, *A Theory,* p. 16, 18, 19. Elsewhere he stresses that the original position is a "devise of representation", also mentioning that it is a widespread idea and not a "philosopher's fancy", naming Rousseau and Kant as two of those who foreshadowed it, John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007), p. 20. For what is worth, Rawls argues that regarding the distinction between actual and non-historical agreements the former is found in Locke and the latter in Kant.

definition is both strict and bold: philosophical inquiry on politics discloses nothing, no truths, no ideas, no notions. As a theoretical practice it has no special access to them; consequently, it conveys no claim to knowledge. If it has anything to offer, it is just the elaboration "by study and reflection, of deeper and more instructive conceptions of basic political ideas that help us to clarify our judgment".[19] Rawls is quite away from Strauss's definition of political philosophy and his emphasis on knowledge as its goal.[20] One could say that whereas Strauss seeks to qualitatively transform the opinions into knowledge, Rawls asks for the deeper or sounder founding of opinions. This entails a differentiation in methodology as well. However, that difference in methodology is not quite clear or sharp, for that is not so even within each philosopher's system –or, we'd better say, in any philosopher's system. The distinction between experience and reason, empirical and speculative, was never that absolute nor inviolable. Although it seems that the main –or prevailing– philosophical currents are those of wild or mild speculation, there are but a few (if any) philosophers that manage to keep their systems impermeable from empirical dirt. Whilst, on the other side, empiricism never managed to establish its intellectual dominion over philosophical inquiry. And what better example of that than the iconic ambivalence of natural law theorists on the methodological character of the state of nature and the social contract? At the time when early ethnological research provided philosophical practice with plenty of actual examples of natural societies, that could reaffirm some philosopher's hypothetical descriptions or, even better, challenge those of his rivals, that ambivalence remained intact. A debate along similar lines over Rawl's actual methodological premises has occurred as well. While some of his interpreters (such as the above mentioned Kelly) put the emphasis on normative abstractness and a-hirosticity, others detect a bias for empirical grounding.[21] Regardless of the soundness of each

[19] Rawls, *Lectures*, p. 1.

[20] Though, it seems like later on he changes his stance. Doubting the possibility for a "universal science of nature", that would provide the basis for a "unified science of man", he maintained that philosophy consists in a Socratic search for wisdom and not the possession of knowledge, see José A. Colen and Svetozar Minkov, "Leo Strauss on Social and Natural Science. Two Previously Unpublished Papers", *The Review of Politics* 76, no. 4 (Fall 2014): p. 622.

[21] See, for example, Nielsen who argues that Rawls "builds his accounts on contingent matters of fact and appeals to scientific theories", while contenting that his 'explanation' "has the same sense that it has in science" and are open to tests as those we have on "empirical sciences", Nielsen, "Some Remarks", p. 34. Of course, Nielsen adds that this program is rather surprising! Collate with his later analysis that although Rawls "recognizes that any serious normative ethical theory needs to have a good understanding of the workings of society" this does not square with his practice due to "extensive ignoring of social facts and sociological knowledge", Kai Nielsen, "Rawls and the Left: Some Left Critics of Rawls' Principles of Justice", *Analyse & Critic* 2, no. 1 (1980): p. 91. It is only natural that criticism of a-historicity and abstractness comes predominantly from left scholars. See, for example, Macpherson who

interpretation, it seems that the responses to the very old methodological question on the proper means for the accumulation of knowledge, or the place of knowledge as such, within the study of man, remain unsatisfactory; and most probably will remain that way. The problem perhaps lies within the very structure of philosophical practice. It may even come down to its own subject, which is man, a subject that, some say, resists to any disciplined inquiry. Or, the problem possibly is inscribed in man's own way of thinking.[22] It seems like there is no way to tell. After all, there is nothing or no one that we can appeal to in order to clear things up, let along to finally resolve the problem.

The question posed in the beginning was "Why Political Philosophy Matters". We initially argued that in order to answer it, we must firstly adjudge whether or not Political Philosophy is Still Alive. Considering the various challenges raised against political philosophy, as well as against philosophy as a whole, we came to wonder whether the structural methodological problem, i.e. the experience/reason, empirical/speculative, question, is going to remain forever unsolved –undermining thus the credibility of political philosophy, even its very reason to exist[23]. Certainly, nothing ceases to exist just because some other says so. Likewise, nothing can claim its right to keep on going just because its practitioners say so. It is the same with the problems of the intellect as in many problems in real life. They can not be resolved unless there is a neutral third party to appeal to. That is the case here as well: both parties keep hopping at the same spot –

claims that Rawls's theory is "deficient in its grasp of class and power", but, never the less, "opens the way […] to a still more realistic humanist political theory", Crawford B. Macpherson, "Rawls's Models of Man and Society", *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 3, no. 4 (1973): p. 347.

[22] What rather safely can say is that it seems like we must reason in a normative way even where an appeal to empirical data should have things cleared up. See, for example, the attempt of Van Parijs and Vanderborght to argue philosophically, meaning ethically, why a basic income for all is justifiable. One would assume that if there are enough data from actual practices of the basic income policy, that would be enough to decide whether is optative or not. See chapter 6, "Ethically Justifiable? Free Riding versus Equal Shares", that precedes the chapters "Economically Sustainable" and "Politically Achievable", in Philippe Van Parijs and Yannick Vanderborght, *Basic Income: A Radical Proposal for a Free Society and a Sane Economy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017). Why is that is far beyond the scope of this paper to examine. Regardless, it is precisely on those grounds that ralwsian political philosophy is valuable. After all Rawls exhumed the core aim of political philosophy –the quest for a fair society– and reactivate it.

[23] Certainly, various reasons, methodological or political, have been introduced in order to describe, explain or justify the obituary of political philosophy. From our point of view methodological reasons, meaning abstractness and speculative reasoning and the disregard towards the sciences of man, are the most crucial. We have to note, however, that science (of man), by contrast to the other fields of philosophical inquiry, does not pose a threat to political philosophy; on the contrary, it is (or has to be), so to say, its monozygotic counterpart.

speculative philosophy by turning all methodological stances to metaphysical matters, empirical oriented theory by reaffirming its stance empirically.[24] Of course, one might say that that was exactly what philosophy itself meant to be: the neutral third party, the metaknowledge court of appeal for all disciplines. In any case, the exigence for an actual mediator was never really satisfied. Until now.

To put it to the test

Hume, the great empiricist, once declared that nothing can reassure us that the sun will rise the next morning as it does every day since the beginning of time. Hume's hypothetical proposition refers to any natural sequence of causes, so it could apply to every natural phenomenon as well. However, it would appear very weird if the same proposition was formulated in the following way: the fact that every single human being that ever lived on this planet eventually died can not reassure us that the same will happen to us. For, if there is a single event that no one ever denied its reality and inevitability is death.[25] We even claimed that the one thing that distinguishes us from animals is the consciousness of our mortality. "Only humanity 'has' the distinction of standing and facing death, because the human being is earnest about Being (*seyn*). Death is the supreme testimony to Being."[26] However, in order for human mortality to be conceived a context is required and that context is the perpetual continuation of the world, meaning the perpetual continuation of our species. Because our species' immortality is considered as certain as the mortality of each one of its individuals. Consequently, not one of our intellectual constructions, neither theological nor philosophical, can systematically enclose the possibility of our species absence –not from purely natural causes and not as a pure natural event at least.[27] A world without man is not systematically conceivable for theology or philosophy because neither of them can say anything about a humanless world.[28]

[24] Turning everything into metaphysics is more or less effective, though rather annoying: "I am well aware that idealists are fond of calling materialism, too, metaphysics, in rather an angry tone, so as to cast discredit upon it by assimilating it to their own systems", George Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, (N.Y.: Scribner's Sons, 1923), vii. Speculations about the natural world, Santayana insisted, are not metaphysics, but simply cosmology or natural philosophy.

[25] Surely, strictly applying Hume's proposition, death is not the sole certain or inevitable fact, birth is –for there are numerous living people that have not died yet.

[26] Heidegger, quoted in Michael Watts, *The Philosophy of Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 95.

[27] See, for example, Kant's rather peculiar essay, "The End of All Things", where we read that "the idea of an end of all things does not take its rise from the reasoning on the *physical*, but on the moral course of things in the world and is occasioned by it only", in Immanuel Kant, *Essays and Treatises,* v.II, transl. by John Richardson (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1993), p. 427.

[28] On the other hand, science can.

Because, in such a case, what of *human exceptionalism*? For man in philosophy is not mainly good or bad, or both, or of a steady or fluid nature; he is primary and essentially an ontological exception within the natural world. That is to say, humans are not merely the species possessing the most peculiar and amazing features but a species of another ontological order – principally, of a higher one, of a different one. Yet, the (self)estimation and revaluation of humanity, and the ontological exception that follows, is partly understandable. After all, man's cultural achievements are so impressive and highly sophisticated that themselves can impose a certainty regarding humanity's quantitative intellectual, and thus ontological, differentiation. Hence, every possible conception (theological as in eschatology, secular as in existentialism or phenomenology) of the end of the world is just a reaffirmation of human exceptionalism.[29]

However, what we are facing now is neither of all that. It is plainly the actual possibility of the natural, biological, plain, extinction of the human race as an aftereffect of climate crisis and environmental collapse (Of course, man's survival as a more or less ultimate criterion is not a novel idea. It dates back, at least, to Hobbes' formulation of the first law of nature. Still, in Hobbes the *threat* although real is merely potential –thus the main characteristic of man's life within the natural state is not war per se but the constant fear of violent death. On the contrary, nowadays the threat is not only real, it is actual. Besides that, in contractarian theories surviving is an individual duty realized collectively. In the case at hand, both the duty and its realization are collective, universal). The fact that the catastrophic process at working has been accepted as an undeniable reality, meaning a fact scientifically confirmed, only makes things more awkward for philosophy. In any case, and regardless all that, is seems like, for the first time in the history of human thought, we finally have something that may serve as an unshaken and solid criterion (which is not the potentiality of human extinction as such but, rather, the actuality of a universal catastrophic event –emphasis on the *universal*). A rather ultimate criterion by which we can adjudge the totality of the expressions of human civilization. Philosophy, most certainly, and thus political philosophy in turn. Therefore, to assert the current validity of political philosophy we have to put it to the test of humanity's potential

[29] See, for example: "Existenz is historical as eternity in time, as the absolute historicity of its concrete empirical existence in a spiritual opacity which is never removed. But existenz is not merely this incompletion and perversity in all temporal existence […] but rather temporal existence thoroughly and authentically penetrated: the paradox of unity and eternity", Karl Jaspers, "The Encompassing", in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. and transl. by W. Kaufmann (NY: Meridian Books, 1956), p. 193. See also: "[Instead of] the Cartesian or Husserlian erasure and annihilation of the world in the name of the cogito or the phenomenological reduction as the possibility of transcendental consciousness, for Derrida the end of the world is the only possible response to the death of the other", Sean Gaston, "Derrida and the End of the World", *New Literary History* 43, no. 3 (Summer 2011): p. 499.

extinction[30]. Thus, the question, "Is Political Philosophy Still Alive", that we raised prior to the initial question, "Why Political Philosophy Matters", has to be reformulated as "Can Political Philosophy Survive the Test"?

But, one may ask, in what human exceptionalism consists, what is the quality that separates man from the rest of the animal world? Various answers have been given to that question, all of them under the form of, "Man is the only animal that …". However, man was distinguished from other animals for being the only one that uses tools, something that in due time was refuted; next, he was distinguished from other animals for being the only one that has a culture, something that in due time was also refuted; finally, he was distinguished from other animals for being the only one that has a language, however now we know that a lot of other animal species posses the same potential as well.[31] Additionally, sometimes man was separated from other animals by another one of his features: "We are distinguished from the brute animals […] by our capacity of self-government […] Brutes may be trained up by discipline but cannot be governed by law. There is no evidence that they have the conception of law or of its obligation".[32] We are, here, already within the domain of ethics –the conception of law and the obligation to obey it and, consequently, the capacity of self-government. In other words, the conditions of righteous and just conduct. Notwithstanding, from there we may enter the domain of politics, for the reason that is in politics that those particular features meet their fulfillment. Still, even more importantly, it is precisely in politics that the ability to conceive and obey the law and the capacity of self-

[30] One may argue, in order to question the validity of any naturalistic grounding for ethics what so ever, that even the preservation of humanity cannot serve as an ultimate criterion, for one may logically question or deny even that (for example, Luc Ferry argues that even though surviving of human species is "utile" does not mean that it is also "morale", see Luc Ferry and Jean-Didier Vincent, *Qu'est-ce que l'homme?* (Èditions Odile Jacob, 2000). However, we may as well suppose that every single one parent, or grandparent or uncle or aunt for that matter, would have found that line of argument absolutely absurd and far beyond any sound reasoning –for no one would ever claim, at real life at least, that securing his child survival is just a useful endeavor empty of any genuine moral purport.

[31] See, Kiriazis, Judith and Constantin Slobodchicoff, "Anthropocentrism and Animal Language", in *Anthropomorphism, Anecdotes and Animals*, ed. by R. W. Mitchell, N. S. Thomson and H. L. Miles (NY: SUNY Press, 1997). See also: "Language is waiting to be invented by any creature with a sufficiently powerful brain, human or non-human […] If language is merely a technology based on symbols and grammar other creatures could have also discovered it. There are some claims that other animals have language as is is defined here –information transfer via symbols. What is unclear is whether nonhumans invent symbols in the wild. No strong evidence for this exists ", Daniel Everett, "Did Home Erectus Speak?", Aeon, accessed 30/01/2022. However, and in order to secure our exceptionality, other features can take the place of language –such as *anxiety*, *authentic existence*, *dasein*, etc.

[32] Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1969), p. 2. Man, argues Reid, has the capacity for self-government and the conception of law due to his "active power no less than by his speculative powers". It is through this powers that he acts properly which "distinguish him so eminently from his fellow animals".

government are mainly at issue. The attribution of the capacity of self-government to all is too long debated, since the very beginning of political philosophy as a distinct field of theoretical inquiry and reflection. The question of who is capable of self-government at bottom raises the question of who is justly entitled to govern, and that is the founding question of political philosophy. That means that it is only when democracy (i.e. the rule of the people, the many, or better, the demand, the claim, of the people, of the many, to rule) emerges that the reflection on politics has a meaning. Aristotle define the task of political philosophy in the following way:

> In every kind of knowledge and skill the end which is aimed at is a good. This good is greatest and is a 'good' in a highest sense, when that skill or knowledge is the most sovereign one, i.e. the faculty of statecraft. In the state the good aimed at is justice […] Now, all men believe that justice means equality in some sense […] The question we must keep in mind is, equality or inequality in what sort of thing? For this is a problem, and one for which we need political philosophy.[33]

Hence, if justice consists in the distribution of equal shares to equal people and if in politics the distributed good is sovereignty, then the "problem for which we need political philosophy" is that of the equal or unequal engagement to the exercise of sovereignty. It comes as a result that that "problem" has an actual meaning only within a political and conceptual democratic context –an established democratic regime or an intellectual debate on/a political struggle about the sovereign claims of the people. It is, thus, defined that political philosophy, along with the presumptions and entailments of its constitution, has to face the reality of humanity's extinction as an ultimate test of its meaningfulness and, even, survival.

Although not many philosophers would agree with Jame's outline of philosophy as "a sanctuary and a place of escape from the crassness of reality's surface", most of them would emphatically agree that "concrete rudeness is not the only thing that is true".[34] All in all, nothing concrete, nor incident nor event, ever occurred to verify the opposite. Even the "noise of facts", towards one must bend an ear in order for his "hart to be in the right place philosophically", is not that loud to silence all other voices. Still, it seems like an incident of that kind, a reality we may say, has occurred. That incident is the imminent environmental collapse as an aftermath of the climate crisis and the consequent possibility and potentiality of human extinction. Due to

[33] Aristotle, *Politics,* (III, 1282b14), revised edition, transl. by Thomas A. Sinclair, (Great Britain: Penguin, 1984), p. 207. Aristotle claims that the "men who believe that justice is equality" are in limited agreement with the philosophy of justice which himself explained in *Ethics*. Aristotle link *Ethics* with *Politics* for that was required for the philosophy of human conduct to be as complete as possible. Because, after all, justice is virtue towards the other, it concerns our relation with other people and its fulfillment lies in politics.

[34] William James, *Pragmatism* (Great Britain: Penguin, 2000), p. 20.

its overwhelming extremity and global wideness, environmental collapse might as well be the first universal empirical fact that no theoretical system, no matter what its methodological presumptions are, can ignore. It seems that the environmental crisis is the ultimate revenge of experience, for every application of theoretical inquiry has to take that crisis into account in whatever procedures might undertake from now on. That there will be a time when *concrete rudeness* will be the only thing that would be true (once more, for there were million of years that concrete rudeness was the only reality) was a possibility never precluded by some. And that time is now.[35]

Yet, we have to further specify the content of the question that concrete rudeness of the environmental collapse directs to the entirety of our philosophical thought. What is the question that all systems of philosophy have to answer in order to verify themselves, to claim their arguable survival? There is only one question that seems valid and justifiable by the circumstances: the question of pragmatism, namely the method of pragmatism. Pragmatism asserts that as long as our beliefs are merely rules for action, to develop a thought's meaning "we need only determinate what conduct it is fitted to produce". Consequently, "to attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object we need only to consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve". Hence, "the pragmatic method in such cases is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences".[36] Therefore, such is the question that all philosophical systems have to answer. What were the actual consequences from the practical application of each systems's axioms, conceptions and postulations? What were the effects, mainly in regard to the emergence of the imminent environmental collapse, of each philosophy's actualization? What, after all, was the whole theoretical complicity, if any, of each system in the environmental crisis? Given the momentousness of the moment and the enormity of the threat, philosophical systems whose complicity is proven have to be dismissed and abandoned.

We claimed above that, in Western ontology, man is not bad or good, or both, he is primary an ontological exception within the natural world. That was not something that remained unnoticed nor adisputed. Spinoza, for example, detect and indicated it: "Most people think of men in Nature as a state within a state. They hold that the human mind is not produced by natural causes, but it is directly created by God and it is so independent from

[35] We follow James in this, though in a slightly rougher manner: "Pragmatism shifts the emphasis and looks forward into facts themselves. The real vital question for us all is, What is this world going to be? What is life eventually to make of itself? The center of gravity of philosophy must therefore alter its place. The earth of things, long thrown into shadow by the glories of the upper ether, must resume its rights", James, *Pragmatism,* p. 57.

[36] James, *Pragmatism,* p. 25.

other things".[37] That independence was actually a separation that impose man's superiority and thus his dominion on earth and every other living thing. Rousseau, amongst others, warn us that the only thing that separates us from animals, our ability to perfect ourselves, *la perfectibilité*, in time makes us the "tyrants of ourselves and of Nature".[38] Nevertheless, it is beyond doubt that our abilities, mainly our unstoppable and expanding technical innovation, put us in the top of the world –the sovereigns that became tyrants. It is also beyond doubt that it is that dominion on earth and all living beings that led us to the present situation –drown in our wealth, "like a child in a bath-tub who has turned on the water and who can not turn it off".[39] It is the ontology of *human exceptionalism,* man's ontological separation from nature, that fueled and empowered humanity's self-estimation as the sovereign species of this world. Such are the practical effects of the actualization of Western dominant ontology and, consequently to the pragmatic method that we adopted, that is why it has to be dismissed and abandoned.[40] Political philosophies that base their systems on that ontology have to be dismissed and abandoned for the same reason. Though, not political philosophy as such, nor philosophy as a whole.

The pragmatic method may serve as our guidance once more. For the reason that pragmatism suggests that we have to turn away from "abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad *a priori* reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems and pretended absolutes and origins".[41] In other words, to turn our back to dominant philosophy but, nonetheless, to choose instead a "perfectly familiar attitude in philosophy". Namely, the empiricist attitude, that suggests we ought to bend an ear to the *noise of facts*. To

[37] Baruch Spinoza, "Political Treatise", in *Collected Works*, tranls. by Shamuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2002), p. 684.

[38] Rousseau, *Discours*, 58. Whether or not this was an unavoidable process is not something that we can deal with here. As for Rousseau's stance on the relation of man to animals, and especially the primates such as the orangutan, the debate is still vivid and heated. We might, nonetheless, suggest that ingenious Voltaire detects something there when he mocked Rousseau's man as a creature that walks on all fours.

[39] James, *Pragmatism,* p. 83. Man is drown due to his "ever increasingly tremendous functions, almost divine creative functions, which his intellect will more and more enable him to wield"!

[40] The abandonment of human exceptionalism, as indicated here, is not a demand based on anthropocentric grounds –inasmuch as any mode of reasoning can be non-anthropocentric. It is based solely on the plain *fact* that as long as humans are responsible for the destruction, i.e. had the power to do it, it's up to them to stop it, i.e. have the power to do it. Furthermore, that kind of dissolution of the very core of Western ontology should be anthropocentric proof, since it has to be the work of the combined forces of, rival to that ontology, philosophical currents and of anthropological recordings of non-anthropocentric world views. That will initially allowed us to put Western ontology to its proper place: as an "native anthropology" amongst others, see Marshal Sahlins, "The Sadness of Sweetness: The Native Anthropology of Western Cosmology", *Current Anthropology*, 37, no. 3 (1996), p. 425.

[41] James, *Pragmatism,* p. 27.

further refine that suggestion we may argue that that empiricist stance has to be more accurately defined as mere empirical in the manner that E. P. Thompson speaks not of "empiricism" but of an "empirical idiom of discourse".[42] Yet, is it only speculative philosophy that separated man from nature? Are the various empirical systems innocent of that fatal conception? That is not something to argue for without reluctance. After all, there may be a number of empirical evidence, as the apparent peculiarity of human civilization with its incredible sophistication, that may serve as an empirical reaffirmation of man's superiority over his fellow primates. We may, nevertheless, argue that there are considerable more chances to refute human exceptionalism by depending on newfound evidence, as for example those provided by ethology, than by self evident speculation and cyclic theorization. Certainly, this line of argumentation admits us directly to the problem of the troubled relation between philosophy and science, between reason and experience. Still, as we argued above, there are very good reasons for that tension to be smoothed and even that problem to be resolved. In favor of experience any way. For, this is the time, after the epistemological split that separated them once and for all, for philosophy and science to be reunited. That reunion is the present extremely urgent demand. Because, if there is a slight chance to alt the disastrous workings of our civilization it requires the reorientation of all of our ways. Yet, one may ask: If it is only science that warns us on the upcoming disaster and if it is through science that we have to try to prevent it, then what is the place of philosophy here? That is maybe so, nevertheless it is also true that even that ultimate effort for our salvation requires an ethical foundation. And that is the work of ethical, and consequently of political philosophy. However, not of a methodological unconditioned philosophical application on the political, but a political philosophy reoriented towards experience, towards the empirical, for that is the unavoidable necessity of our times. Hence, there is one more question to be answered: Is it possible for political philosophy to follow the methodological and epistemological reorientation that the imminent environmental collapse and the consequent potentiality of human extinction demands? Can, in other words, political philosophy survive the test? Does, at the end, political philosophy have a meaning?

Why it matters

"One should not look for the causes and natural foundations of the state

[42] Its characteristics are "the dialectic of making-and-breaking, the formation of conceptual hypotheses and the bringing of empirical evidence to enforce or to break down these hypotheses, the friction between 'molecular' and 'macroscopic' generalization", Edward P. Thompson, "The Peculiarities of the English", in *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London: Merlin Press, 1978), p. 64. Thompson names Darwin, along with Marx, as a practitioner of such an idiom, an indication not without importance for political theory.

in the teachings of reason but deduced them from the nature and condition of men in general", wrote Spinoza.[43] Statesmen argued Spinoza wrote about political matters in a much more effective way than philosophers and that was because statesmen rely on experience as their guide. However, Spinoza himself was a philosopher, not a politician, and he claimed that he will write about politics in an effective way as well. That efficiency was the result of his will to follow, not reason, but experience and practice. Spinoza was not the only one among philosophers that methodologically turned towards experience and base reflection, especially on politics, on actual facts. However, that methodological stance was not the only one, and surely was not the prevailing one. As we mentioned above, even empiricist philosophers were not so empirical, as for example Hobbes who ask us to consider men, not in their sociability, but as beings that mushroomed suddenly from earth. Certainly, the methodological insistence for speculation had a very powerful ally on its side: the normative feature of political philosophy. That feature was further empowered through Hume's distinction between *is* and *ought*. Although Hume was an empiricist that refuted social contract both for its ahistorical character and its explanatory deficiency, and besides the fact that it is strongly argued that "Hume's law" is not a law that he himself followed or obeyed, "it became fashionable in contemporary moral philosophy to say that there is really a logical divide between the *is* and *ought*".[44] Still, whatever the case may be, we would like to suggest once more that there is an *is* now that dictates undoubtedly what the *ought* has to be. We would like to further suggest that political philosophy can comply with that dictation due to a number of aspects of its very constitution.[45]

Firstly, because political philosophy bears in the most importunate way the characteristic of imminent urgency. When it comes to political philosophizing, due to the nature of the object of its inquiry, the stance of *epoché* can not be applied at all. Suspension of judgment of any kind in political philosophy might means rather unpleased outcomes, like

[43] Spinoza, "Political Treatise", p. 682.

[44] W. D. Hudson, "Editor's Indroduction: The 'is-ought' Problem", in *The Is-Ought Question*, ed. by W. D. Hudson, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1969), p. 12. As the subtitle of the book suggests, the is-ought question is the central problem in moral philosophy. See, characteristically: "It is apparent, since Hume gives no prominence anywhere to his own transitions from 'is' statements to 'ought' statements, nor mentions any difficulties about the use of 'ought', that he did not think that on his own ethical theory 'is-ought' even presented a problem at all", D. C. Yalden-Thomson, "Hume's View of Is-Ought", *Philosophy* 53, no. 203 (January 1978), p, 90. It is worth noting that this volume was published some years before *A Theory of Justice* appears.

[45] Consequently, the kind of political philosophy that emerges from all that is an empirical oriented theoretical inquiry, a political philosophy that relates in a structural way the *is* to the *ought*. As we will indicate bellow, that empirical orientation means the epistemological and methodological conjunction of political philosophy, political anthropology and ethology (see also, footnote 46).

disfranchisement, discrimination, even death. Philosophers that reflect on politics usually do it in the heat of the moment, under the pressure of actual demands, of threating potentials, of unavoidable urgencies. One may say, under the pressure of *facts*. Additionally, it is precisely because of the nature of politics that the actualization of philosophy's processings occurs as real, actual, concrete, effects. One may say, as *facts* as well. Secondly, because political philosophy is conceivable and meaningful only within a democratic context. That means, on the one hand, that it is through the actual doing of people that political philosophy emerges, as an effect of that action at the level of reflection as well as a theoretical examination of that action's conditions. On the other hand, it means that it is people's concrete active claim for an equal share to sovereignty that defines the exploratory area of political philosophy and poses its core questions regarding power, authority, liberty and justice. One may say, political philosophy is conceivable and meaningful only through and by *facts*. Thirdly, it is, once more, due to the nature of its object that political philosophy cannot, and has not surrender its merit to science, nor is it threatened by science in that matter.[46] That is due to two reasons. In the first place, no matter the stance towards the is/ought problem, the ethical/political evaluation of the facts is a procedure that comes after the empirical detection and precedes the empirical testing of that evaluation. In both cases ethical/political evaluation consists either as a district proceeding either as a specific phase of the empirical inquiry. In the second place, politics is the only field of human conduct that its solely foundation lies in man himself. That was so in the, pro-enlighntment, classical era that is so in, the post-enlighntment, today. No matter if we speculate on human qualities, powers, inclinations and such, or if we conduct an empirical investigation on them, in both cases the object of our inquiries is man in its mere humanity. In its nature, in other words, whether we agree that he has one or not, whether we agree that is of one nature or not. One may say, political philosophy can maintain its merit because its foundation and its object at the same time is man, i.e. a *fact*.

However, that is precisely the reason why political philosophy can and ought to coincide with science, namely with the scientific exploration of

[46] The same is not that easy for other disciplines of philosophical inquiry. For, due to amazing discoveries and deep explanatory advancements in the scientific research of man and of the world, it is rather difficult for, say, epistemology, i.e. the study of knowledge's formation, or metaphysics, i.e. the study of reality's formation, to claim much authority anymore. It goes without saying that things are much more complicated than that. The various fields of inquiry, say philosophical and scientific, are not so sharply separated or undefiled. After all, the division in two distinct fields of inquiry is a rather recent development in the history of western thought –not of universal acceptance nor undisputed. We, nevertheless, want to accent that the tradition of philosophy that we descant on favors in principle the coincidence with science. It is comprised of the empirical, materialistic, (mild) positivistic, and naturalistic philosophical currents.

human conduct and the scientific exploration of animal behavior as well. Namely, with political anthropology and ethology –that is the kind of political philosophy that the radical abandonment of human exceptionalism leads to. There are epistemological as well as political reasons for that. Epistemological because that is what dictates the necessity for empirical grounding and reaffirmation of our ethical and political conjectures and political because that is what dictates the necessity for a radical reorientation of our political ways. If human exceptionalism is no longer a valid and appropriate ontology that is, again, due to epistemological and political reasons. Epistemological because man has to be scrutinized as an indispensable part of nature and political because what is absolutely required by the hazardous circumstances is the radical extension of our notions of a democratic society. If we are to alt or at least to slow down the imminent environmental collapse and the consequent potentiality of human extinction, we have to include all living beings in a universal republic –and, thus, to treat them as ethical, and for that political, entities[47]. Such is the task of current political philosophy and that is why it has to systematically coincide with political anthropology and ethology.[48] That is, finally, the reason why political philosophy matters.

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[47] Is this an anthropocentric reasoning? Most probably, though man, in that context, is the carrier of that reasoning and not its core –if such a procedure is ever possible. A universal republic that will also include non-human beings is the latest and most radical political conception. In a way it follows the successive progressive extensions of the right to citizenship that occurred in specific historical periods. For a detailed discussion of that conception see Serge Audier, *L' Age productiviste*, Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2019), especially the Epilogue, "Vers un éco-républicanisme conflictuel". Audier mentions favorably the (non prevailing) naturalistic "second pillar of western thought" that does not detach man from nature. In this regard, when Lucács belittle Engels on the latter's claim, in his *Dialectic of Nature*, that animals can develop a dialectical relation with Nature, is dramatically outdated (on the contrary, Engels's "vulgar scientificism" seems much more empathetic). That is not irrelevant with his suggestion that a "theory of reality allots a higher place to the prevailing trends of the total development than to the facts of the empirical world", Georg Lucács, *History and Class Consciousness*, transl. by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1971), p. 183.

[48] That is by no means an influential program within the discipline, nevertheless, there are ongoing theoretical investigations for a systematic approach of political philosophy and political anthropology, see for example Anada Giri and John Clammer, ed., *Philosophy and Anthropology. Border Crossing and Transformations* (London-NY: Anthem Press, 2014).

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Late Merleau-Ponty and Hannah Arendt. The ontological relation between chiasm and "in-between"

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to assess the ground for a potential synthesis, which could emerge from a combinatorial reading of late Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of flesh and Hannah Arendt's political phenomenology of appearance, with a clear view to incorporate our conclusions in the sphere of politics. By focusing, mainly, on Hannah Arendt's *The Life of the Mind* and Merleau-Ponty's *Le Visible et l' Invisible*, we detect two main themes that run through their texts: the notion of intentionality and the interaction between visible and invisible. In light of the intentional structure of both Arendtian appearance and Merleaupontyan perception we disclose affinities between the concepts of perceptual faith and sensus communis. Perceptual faith and sensus communis establish, for Merleau-Ponty and Arendt correspondingly, our sense of realness. At the background of this discussion, though, lies the interaction between visible and invisible, a mechanism which is at work in both thinkers. However, their subtle differentiation implies strong ontological differences. As far as Merleau-Ponty is concerned, we realize that behind the interdependence of visible and invisible there is the notion of flesh, that is "the concrete emblem of a general manner of being", with its chiasmatic structure. Thus, the paradoxical nature of perceptual experience is embraced under the schema of ambiguity. For Hannah Arendt, through the lens of the movement among visible and invisible, we

discover the core ontological notion of the spatio-temporal "in-between". On the one hand, the invisible "in-between" appears as the intersubjective field of the web of human relationships, which stands as the essential requirement for visible actions (out of which something radically new is brought into the world), while, on the other, the "in-between" emerges as the "place in time" where the thinking activity occurs, namely between past and future. At the nunc stans, the mind deals with absent objects, which through metaphor become quasi-visible, eventually producing new meanings. Despite strong similarities, a look into their respective ontological theses is able to uncover the source of their distinction. While in Merleau-Ponty the movement between the visible and the invisible designates the chiasmatic structure of Being, in Arendt's account, this interaction although is not nothing, still cannot be coincided with Being. And that is why Arendt argues for the primacy of appearances, which results in the ontological identification of Being with Appearing. Thus, despite their similar function and their intrinsic ambiguity, chiasm and "in-between" form an antithetical dipole and in those points of differentiation, elements of potential synthesis are hidden.

Keywords
Hannah Arendt, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, sensus communis, perceptual faith, in-between, flesh, chiasm

Despite the remarkable attention that both the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Hannah Arendt have drawn from scholars, it is clear from an overview of the relevant literature that a combined analysis of their philosophical approaches remains at the margin of contemporary research. At first sight, the multiple references of Merleaupontyan arguments in Arendt's last and posthumously published book, *The Life of the Mind*,[1] manifests the need of a comparison between the two thinkers. Although the noticeable influence of late Merleau-Ponty on Arendt's ontological viewpoint is able to inaugurate an entire new line of research, our goal here focuses on a different point, which to us appears to be more fundamental. This paper will attempt to identify those elements in their respective philosophies, which place us at the center of their phenomenological methods and through the arising discrepancies we will highlight a potential direction for a synthesis. We have to keep in mind that the sphere of politics is of major importance for both thinkers, therefore a potential next step would be to assess the implications of our ontological discussion for the realm of action.

Hannah Arendt's phenomenological framework

As far as Arendt is concerned her deep relation with phenomenology is characterized by an attempted break with the first generation (namely Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger) and a fruitful dialogue with the second. Key notion for Arendtian phenomenology is the concept of appearance and in the following lines the theoretical network from which this concept originates along with its relevant aftereffects is briefly presented.

For the German thinker, the world in which we are born consists of other living organisms and lifeless objects. In the worldly context those beings *appear*. But in order to appear they need to be perceived by someone. Hence, the notion of intentionality emerges as one of the principal properties of appearance. As a result, every appearance constitutes an appearance of something for someone.[2] Thus, the Arendtian intentionality of appearance implies a plethora of worldly spectators as a necessary condition for the multiplicity of appearances. "Spectators" in plural, since according to Arendt, "nothing that is, insofar as it appears, exists in the singular".[3]

The main conclusions that can be drawn from the above are the following:

1. The world is a world of appearances.

In the Arendtian framework, the unraveling of an appearance, that is how and to whom it appears, takes place within a spatial region, which is called the world of appearances. In this world every appearance has a double function,

[1] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, (Harvest, 1978).

[2] Sophie Loidolt, *The Phenomenology of Plurality: Hannah Arendt on Political Intersubjectivity*, (Routledge, 2018), p. 57.

[3] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 19.

that of "perceiving and being perceived".[4] Therefore, every living being is not only a subject but also an object. As Arendt aptly puts it: "All objects because they appear indicate a subject, and, just as every subjective act has its intentional object, so every appearing object has its intentional subject."[5] This rationale illuminates Arendt's innovative thinking concerning the world, as she attempts to overcome the Heideggerian being-in-the-world. According to Arendt, "living beings, men and animals, are not just in the world, they are *of the world*",[6] in the sense that we are not just thrown into the world as visitors, as Heidegger would argue. On the contrary, Arendt emphasizes our worldly origin.

In the following lines we will attempt to show that the next two conclusions are interconnected and complementary.

2. Being and Appearance coincide.[7]
3. Plurality is the law of the Earth.[8]

In the world of appearances, appearing means that at least one observer perceives my appearance. In turn, if someone has not yet appeared, nobody could claim that he or she exists. In this sense, appearing implies existence (namely, 'to be').[9] Therefore, in the worldly context, Appearance and Being coincide. It becomes quite clear from the above, though, that the identification of Being with Appearance is a consequence of the law of plurality, namely that "men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world".[10] On the grounds that every appearance needs a space in order to emerge, which cannot but include spectators (in plural), we realize that the law of plurality is interwoven with the world of appearances. In other words,

[4] Ibid., p. 20.

[5] Ibid., p. 46.

[6] Ibid., p. 20. This point, as Sophie Loidolt correctly points out, brings Arendt closer to Merleau-Ponty, taking into consideration the notion of *être-au-monde* which the latter makes use of. Sophie Loidolt, *The Phenomenology of Plurality*, p. 92.

[7] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 19.

[8] Ibid., p. 19.–At the time Arendt was writing *The Human Condition*, the concept of plurality stands as an axiomatic point, which however in *The Life of the Mind* she attempts to found through her turn to the activity of thinking. In broad lines, the rationale which she develops is the following: if in our most solitary activity, that of thinking, we could show that we cannot avoid the law of plurality, then the validity of this law is certified. And, of course, for Arendt thinking does not take place in the context of loneliness (in the Arendtian sense of the term), but it entails collective elements which reflect the world of appearances. In other worlds, the lack of loneliness is recognized in the split of one's self during the process of internal dialogue. And that two-in-one of thinking depends on plurality.

[9] Despite the fact that it is not in the scope of this paper to examine the Arendtian critique on the Cartesian cogito, we could briefly mention that existence for Arendt (and also for Merleau-Ponty) is not the "I" of the "I-think", in as much as the thinking ego is a thought object not an intuition. As Merleau-Ponty aptly states: "Existence is not the thought of existing", Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 192.

[10] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (University Chicago Press, 1958), p. 7.

the concept of pluralized appearance,[11] which Arendt puts forth, becomes the precondition for the identification of Appearing and Being. Conversely, we could approach the law of plurality as a consequence of the coincidence of Being and Appearing. Jacques Taminiaux briefly exposes this rationale as follows: ""[P]recisely because [Being and Appearing] coincide, nothing of what is, i.e. of what appears, is strictly singular: instead, it remains offered to the gaze of several spectators. And those spectators in the plural are also offered as a spectacle, they are at the same time perceiving and perceived".[12]

Living in the world of appearances means that every subject possesses a position from which things and other living beings are perceived. Alongside, other appearances hold their distinct positions and distinct points of view. As a result, every subject perceives the world of appearances in the mode of an "it-seems-to-me",[13] since the world "seems" slightly different for every one of us. According to Arendt: "[t]o appear always means to seem to others, and this seeming varies according to the standpoint and the perspective of the spectators".[14] In other words, the mode of "it-seems-to-me" corresponds to the nature of appearance itself, which is perceived by a plurality of spectators. This conceptual framework constitutes, what Arendt calls, the "phenomenal nature of the world".[15]

Considering that the world of appearance just "seems to me", then how could we establish an objective perception of reality? Considering the common character of the world,[16] an objective ''from above" view of the world cannot be grounded. In this sense, only a subjective view is possible which, though, is not arbitrary as it is balanced by the fact that "the same object also appears to others".[17] It is the condition of plurality, namely the existence of other subjects like myself, which guarantees that the same appearances are recognized by plenty of other observers. Therefore, according to Arendt, our *sense of realness*[18] originates from the intersubjective dimension of the world of plurality. Due to these intersubjective relations that are formed, the world acquires a new dimension and becomes that "in-between" which not only "lies between people and

[11] For further explanation of this term see Sophie Loidolt, *The Phenomenology of Plurality*, Chapter 2.

[12] Jacques Taminiaux, *The Thracian Maid and the Professional Thinker: Arendt and Heidegger,* translated by Michael Gendre, (SUNY Press, 1997), p. 167.

[13] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 22.

[14] Ibid., p. 21.

[15] Ibid., p. 22. As it will become quite evident in the next paragraph, perception acquires, in a sense, a political dimension as long as it is embedded in the collective fabric of the law of plurality.

[16] "[T]he term 'public' signifies the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it", Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 52.

[17] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 50.

[18] Ibid., p. 49.

therefore can relate and bind them together",[19] but also separates them so as to render people discrete, namely visible.

There are four elements that contribute and, eventually, shape our sense of realness. Firstly, my own senses with which I perceive the characteristics of appearances. Secondly, the other members of my species with whom I share a system of perception. Thirdly, the other beings belonging to other species, which validate the existence of the appearances I perceive.[20] However, these three factors seem disconnected from each another and, consequently, unable to provide the sense of realness. According to Arendt though, their unification is attained through a complementary sense. A sixth sense, the so called *sensus communis*, which is based on the capacity of enlarged thought, namely thinking by taking into consideration the perspective of the other. This additional sense, which Arendt draws from the Kantian critique of judgment,[21] manages to fuse the aforementioned factors at the level of the common world[22] and compensates the loss of objective reality. In other words, *sensus communis* is a product of the invisible "in-between" of intersubjectivity, as "when one judges, one judges as a member of a community"[23], and is able to provide the sense of realness of the world.

Embracing ambiguity with Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Moving on to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach, we will focus on *perception*, as the activity which connects human existence with the world. Consequently, the various phenomena of the world will be examined under the light of perceptual experience, thus providing a rebranding of the

[19] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 182. Likewise, Arendt claims that "this in-between is no less real than the world of things we visibly have in common.", Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 183.

[20] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 51.

[21] *Sensus communis*, is a discovery of Immanuel Kant who in the sphere of aesthetics recognized "the idea of a public sense, i.e. a faculty of judging which in its reflective act takes account (a priori) of the mode of representation of everyone else, in order, as it were, to weigh its judgement with the collective reason of mankind, and thereby avoid the illusion arising from subjective and personal conditions which could readily be taken for objective," extracting from this process its intersubjectivity". Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, translated by J.C. Meredith, Edited by N. Walker, (Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 123.

[22] "What since Thomas Aquinas we call common sense, the *sensus communis,* is a kind of sixth sense needed to keep my five senses together […] This same sense […] fits the sensations of my strictly private senses […] into a common world shared by other", Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 50.

[23] Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 72.

world as the world of perception. It is quite clear that perception without a worldly reference is a contradiction since the former cannot emerge without referring to the latter. Inasmuch as perception belongs to a subject and, at the same time, is strongly related with the world, the following web of concepts arise: subject-perception-world.[24] Hence, between the subject and the world a perceptual network is formed pointing towards a spinozistic recognition of reality, in which matter and mind become two interwoven aspects of Being. Therefore, the notion of "perceptual world" takes shape constituting the horizon of every perceptual experience.[25]

In light of those considerations, by placing perception with its intentional structure (i.e. perception of the subject on the world) at the center of his philosophical thinking, Merleau-Ponty moves away from the Husserlian transcendental consciousness. Even though his thesis of the primacy of perception differentiates him from the first generation of phenomenologists, his perspective remains properly phenomenological as, according to M.C. Dillion, "it asserts the ontological primacy of phenomena"[26] as they appear in perception. In other words, Merleau-Ponty conceives perception as a phenomenon[27] and by making it the focus of his analysis he fulfills Husserl's incitement to go "back to the things themselves".

Now a step deeper into the Merleaupontyan conceptual framework is needed. When we observe the world, a perceptual network opens up, a totality of things with interdependent relations, a field with internal structure and coherence. In the context of this world, which we inhabit through our bodies, we have the natural tendency to believe the content of our perceptual gaze.[28] Given the direct access we have to the world, we do not distinguish between the "I see" and the "I see the true".[29] In particular, there is some sort of an "originary faith that ties us to a world".[30] As Merleau-Ponty aptly states: "we see the things themselves, the world is what we see: formulae of this kind express a faith common to the natural man and the philosopher –the moment he opens his eyes; they refer to a deep-seated set of mute 'opinions'

[24] Through these three interconnected concepts it is evident that Merleau-Ponty attempts to overcome the philosophical dualisms of the past which decouple the object-world from the human subject and establishes among them a relation of constant interaction. In particular, perception transcends the antithesis that intellectualism and empiricism have established mainly because it shapes a bi-directional field in which we could state that we both actively practice it and experience it.

[25] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 5

[26] M.C. Dillion, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology* (Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 52-54.

[27] "For Merleau-Ponty, the real world is the perceived world is the phenomenal world", ibid, p. 156.

[28] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Translated by D.A. Landes (Routledge, 2012), p. 44.

[29] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 12 and p. 28.

[30] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 336.

implicated in our lives".[31] *Perceptual faith*, as Merleau-Ponty calls it, signifies our trust in our perception of the world prior to any analysis of our perception,[32] an unintentional adherence to the perceptual world,[33] thus, distinguishing itself from knowledge or opinion.

However, the term 'faith' indicates the intrinsic element of ambiguity. In particular, our trust in our perception is, on the one hand, inevitable due to the unity and cohesion of our perceptual experience and, on the other, deceptive as perception can be the source of a series of illusions. The paradoxical or ambiguous nature of perceptual faith[34] is, thus, revealed. "[S]ince the world […] rather than disclosed, it is non-dissimulated, non-refuted",[35] then a muted, "synergic" relation of commerce between us and the world is established. It is a relation of openness upon it, of an initiation into it,[36] as within the world I am both a subject of perception and an embedded object of its pre-reflective content.

The sense of realness under scrutiny: perceptual faith and sensus communis

Given that both philosophers construct a phenomenological framework in order to proceed with their inquiries, it is quite natural for the notion of *intentionality* to be equally essential. Intentionality is located at the center of their thinking and constitutes the mechanism that sets it in motion. Not only for the Arendtian appearance as appearance of something for someone into the phenomenal world, but also for the Merleaupontyan perception as perception of a subject on the world (thus shaping the concept of perceptual world), intentionality provides the proper background for a combinatorial investigation of the following two notions: perceptual faith and *sensus communis*.

As it was previously demonstrated, the Arendtian intentionality of appearance provides solid foundations for the law of plurality and, therefore, points towards the intersubjective dimension of the world. By virtue of this property, we turn away from any hope of establishing an objective reality. However, through the collective, additional sense of *sensus communis*, which is a consequence of the common character of the world, we restore our sense of realness. For Merleau-Ponty, the sense of realness is reflected on the notion of perceptual faith, namely our inclination to believe the content of our perceptual vision, which at the same time "promises me a pseudoworld

[31] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 3.

[32] Juho Hotanen, *Merleau-Ponty's Reading of Descartes From Cartesian Duality to the New Ontological Structure* (PhD Dissertation, University of Jyväskylä, 2019), p. 190-91.

[33] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 28.

[34] Ibid., p. 31 and p. 28.

[35] Ibid., p. 28.

[36] Ibid., p. 35

of phantasms".[37] The important point, though, is the parallelism among the notion of Merleaupontyan perceptual faith and the Arendtian *sensus communis*, as they both constitute the mechanisms which ground the reality of the world. According to Laura Boella,

> [t]he fact of living in a world where sentient beings, humans and animals, […] are appearances, destined and likely to appear, constitutes the basis of perceptual faith which, for Hannah Arendt, coincides with the *sensus communis*.[38]

Despite the insightful comments made by Boella, to my mind, the crucial point is missing from her analysis. Although perceptual faith and *sensus communis* hold a similar position in each system of thought and share quite common characteristics, they do not coincide. And this fact denotes an important differentiation. For Arendt appearance, though neither exclusively subjective nor objective, is embedded in the intersubjective field, indicating the coincidence of Being and Appearing. Contrarily, the ambiguous structure of perception's relation to the world points towards the notion of *chiasm* and the intrinsic ambiguity of brute Being. In the following lines we will attempt to delve into this issue through the prism of the continuously re-appearing relation between the visible and the invisible.

The interaction between the visible and the invisible

Let us, firstly, examine the concept of perceptual faith. Perceptual faith indicates, on the one hand, our inevitable trust in our perception and, on the other, the deceptive dimension of our perceptual gaze. This is due to the phenomenal nature of the world, namely that reality and illusion are intertwined. According to M.C. Dillion, we recognize an illusion as such only when a "self-corrected" description of reality has emerged, which replaces the former.[39] In other words, the newly emerged image of the world remained concealed, lying at the sphere of the invisible, up to the moment of its disclosure. Therefore, there is a relation of interdependence between the visible and the invisible, which shapes our perceptual reality, in the sense that the invisible constitutes the hidden aspect of the visible.

In the Arendtian framework, as well, the interplay among visible and invisible plays a significant role. For Arendt, the sense of realness depends on the intersubjective field created by the presence of other appearing beings, which provides the additional sense of *sensus communis*. According to the German thinker:

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[37] Ibid., p. 28.

[38] Laura Boella, "Phenomenology and Ontology: Hannah Arendt and Merleau-Ponty", in *Merleau-Ponty in Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. by Patrick Burke and Jan van der Veken, (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993), p. 171-179.

[39] M.C. Dillion, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, p. 157.

> [t]he 'sensation' of reality […] relates to the *context* in which single objects appear as well as to the context in which we ourselves as appearances exist among other appearing creatures. The context qua context never appears entirely.[40]

In other words, the sense of realness is acquired through the interaction between visible appearances and the invisible context of intersubjectivity. Therefore, it is through the prism of visible-invisible that we could better understand the constitution of reality in both Merleau-Ponty and Arendt. Though not identical but largely similar, the relation between visible and invisible is able to provide us the appropriate tool to delve into the core of their philosophy.

Besides the case of perceptual faith-*sensus communis*, the interaction between the visible and the invisible appears as a general characteristic of both philosophies. Starting with Merleau-Ponty, the visible world is not just a canvas on which the reality is established. The visible world possesses depth which exceeds what the subject is able to see. "What we call a visible is […] a quality pregnant with a texture, the surface of a depth".[41] Merleau-Ponty acknowledges the paradoxical nature of perceptual experience and attempts to embrace the conflicting relations included in Cartesian and post-cartesian thinking. This leads him to introduce a new concept which accomplishes to intertwine the opposing poles: the concept of *flesh*, which we must think of as the "concrete emblem of a general manner of being".[42] Flesh provides an escape from the underlying dualisms of traditional philosophy and is aligned with the overall aim of embracing ambiguity. Flesh interweaves the visible and the invisible and develops the necessary relational structures which reconcile antithetical articulations. What is forged is a chiasmatic ontological structure[43] indicating "the crossing and turning back on itself of the single thread that emanates from the spider's body when she spins her web. This web-matrix, the whole cloth, the flesh, of the world is an interweaving, an elementary knotting, which is always prior to its unravelling in language and thought".[44] In this sense, the flesh is the building block, the substructure of every moment of visibility, as "[t]he sensible thing is the place where the invisible is captured in the visible."[45] Therefore, the problem of the perceptual world of experience, which Merleau-Ponty calls *wild Being*, is described through the chiasmatic structure of flesh.

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[40] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 51

[41] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 136.

[42] Ibid., p. 147.

[43] The last chapter of *The Visible and the Invisible* has the title "The Intertwining- The Chiasm", which originates from the Greek letter "chi" (x) and designates criss-crossings and interrelation.

[44] M.C. Dillion, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, p. 155.

[45] Claude Lefort, «Translator's Preface» in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. xli.

In Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, the chiasmatic interdependence between the visible and the invisible is self-evident. For Arendt, though, such structure is not easily recognizable and, on top of that, has a strong political dimension. According to Loidolt,[46] the world of appearance is a threefold notion. First of all, it is the space of appearances, the appearing world.[47] Secondly, it is the world of objects, the *Dingwelt*, created by *homo faber*. Thirdly, and most importantly for our case, the world maintains an additional, invisible dimension which arises out of the law of plurality. It is the world of intersubjectivity mentioned before, an "in-between" world, or *Mitwelt*, which establishes the public sphere. What Arendt calls the "web of human relationships".[48] This field becomes the necessary condition for action and speech, those two activities that realize the human potential of freedom as *initium*, namely as pure inauguration.[49] Therefore, a relation between the invisible web of plurality and the visible deeds and words of human actors is formed.

However, the mode of "in-between" appears not only as the pre-condition for public action, but also during the solitary activity of thinking. If, according to Arendt, the requirement of thought is the withdrawal from the world of appearances, then the thinking ego is spatially located in the 'nowhere'.[50] But when Arendt attempts to alter the spatial orientation of the question and asks, "where the thinking ego is located in time?"[51] we arrive at some important conclusions. By seeking to temporally determine the *topos* of thinking Arendt finds that the thinking ego is at the *nunc stans*, that is "the in-between of past and future, the present, this mysterious and slippery now".[52] Therefore, when we withdraw from the world of appearances towards the world of mind, this "in-between" emerges.

Through the mode of "in-between" we spot once again the close interaction between the visible and the invisible. According to Arendt "[t]he gap between past and future opens only in reflection, whose subject matter is what is absent – either what has already disappeared or what has not yet appeared".[53] That is to say that the thinking ego deals with things that are "absent, that have disappeared from my senses",[54] namely invisible. What is more, through the function of metaphor, thinking brings to light these invisible and absent things, thus, making them visible. "[R]eflection draws

[46] Sophie Loidolt, *The Phenomenology of Plurality*, p. 98-99.

[47] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 27

[48] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 181.

[49] Ibid., p. 177.

[50] According to Arendt, "the thinking ego, moving along universals, among invisible essences, is, strictly speaking, nowhere", Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 199.

[51] Ibid., p. 202.

[52] Ibid., p. 208.

[53] Ibid., p. 206.

[54] Ibid., p. 87.

these absent 'regions' into the mind's presence,"[55] and makes them appear. Therefore, the temporal "in-between" of the invisible world of mind constitutes the *topos*, where a continuous movement among visible and invisible is manifested.

But in order to comprehend the points of divergence that arise as we compare Arendt with Merleau-Ponty, we should not omit to mention the strong political/collective dimension of the solitary activity of thinking. Solitary though not lonely as the world of appearances remains stubbornly present even when we are "nowhere". Let us explain. During the activity of thinking the One that we are in the world of appearance splits into two in order to carry out the internal dialogue. The identity is transformed into a duality reflecting the plurality of the world of appearance. In other words, we would have never been able to carry out the activity of thinking unless we were already part of the world of appearances.

> [I]t never of occurred to him [i.e. Descartes] that no *cogitation* and no *me cogitate*, no consciousness of an acting self that had suspended all faith in the reality of its intentional objects, would ever have been able to convince him f his own reality had he actually been born in a desert,[56]

Arendt claims. So, even when we withdraw to the temporal "in-between" of the world of mind, the collective dimension of the law of the earth is present.

What is even more important in Arendt's philosophy is that those two versions of "in-between" constitute the necessary background for the emergence of new forms. On the one hand, concerning the field of action, the birth of the radically new requires the existence of the public, intersubjective dimension of the phenomenal world, what we spatially translated as "in-between". Without the collective aspect of the appearing world, action as *initium* is eliminated. Hence, the invisible and intangible "in-between" of human affairs[57] forms the basis for the visibility of actions. Turning to the sphere of thinking activity, we showed that the mental "in-between" of the *nunc stans* blends together the absent and invisible things of the world of appearances by making them visible in our internal intuition. Additionally, taking into account that the thinking activity (as *Vernunft*) is orientated towards the quest for meaning,[58] the "in-between" of the world of mind becomes the condition for the emergence of new forms of meaning. To sum up, the spatio-temporal "in-between" is the main ontological source out of which the radically new appears on the earth.

[55] Ibid., p. 206.
[56] Ibid., p. 48.
[57] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 183.
[58] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 57.

Fragments of this discussion appear scattered in Coward[59] and Koishikawa.[60] However, both theorists fail, on the one hand, to properly examine the link between the intersubjective "in-between" of plurality and the temporal "in-between" of the thinking ego and, on the other, to accurately assess the relation among the Arendtian "in-between" and the Merleaupontyan flesh, which remain in discordance. Despite the similar features and the comparable role that "in-between" and flesh play in each philosophy, these two notions are incompatible. In Merleau-Ponty the movement from visible to invisible and vice versa designates the chiasmatic structure of Being, namely flesh. Contrarily, for Arendt this relation although is not nothing, at the same time, is not Being.[61] This is because the interdependence of visible and invisible points to the notion of "in-between" and "in-between" is not identified with Being. In this context Arendt argues for the primacy of appearances, which results in the ontological coincidence of Being and Appearing. In other words, both the spatial and the temporal "in-between" originate from a phenomenological ontology of plurality within which the ontological difference has been eliminated. Consequently, even if there is an invisible ground out of which the visible appearances emerge, a corresponding ontological hierarchy cannot be established.[62] In light of these comments Arendt cannot but reject the idea of chiasm.[63] Hence, as we have traced the point of divergence at the very foundation of their ontological theses, we are in a position to assess the potentiality for a synthesis of their methods, which could inaugurate a new approach upon the phenomena of the world.

Conclusion

The combinatorial analysis of Merleau-Ponty's and Arendt's phenomenological framework reveals significant similarities that until now have not been properly assessed. But, despite the proximity of their approaches, the divergent points direct our attention to the core of their ontologies. The persistent presence of the movement between the visible and the invisible gives emphasis, on the one hand, on the mode of "in-between" which is essential in Arendt's philosophy of plurality, and, on the other, on

[59] Nathaniel Coward, *Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Hannah Arendt: The Intersection of Institution, Natality, and Birth*, (PhD Dissertation, University of Western Ontario, 2013).

[60] Kazue Koishikawa, *A Phenomenological Analysis of The Relationship between Intersubjectivity and Imagination in Hannah Arendt*, (PhD Dissertation, Duquesne University, 2014).

[61] Laura Boella, «Phenomenology and Ontology: Hannah Arendt and Merleau-Ponty».

[62] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 41.

[63] Ibid., p. 33

the Merleaupontyan flesh. The inherent ambiguity of these concepts (in contradistinction to the determinacy of a Being as far as traditional ontology is concerned) provides a firm ground for dialogue between Arendt's anti-metaphysical stance, articulated in the coincidence of Being and Appearing, and Merleau-Ponty's preservation of ontological difference even within the "non absolute" structure of chiasm.[64] Those considerations prompt us to pose political questions which arise out of the ontological debate. Given Merleau-Ponty's gradual detachment from Marxism and his formulation of the idea of "flesh of history",[65] we realize that his (until then exclusively ontological) thesis of reversibility is introduced into politics and, especially, between history and action. Late Merleau-Ponty moves away from a Hegelian type of philosophy of history (an attempt which would find Arendt's complete disavowal) towards a conception of history "whose layers of latent meaning are awakened by action".[66] This conceptual framework brings him closer to Arendt's description of circularity between thought and action, urging us to further examine the political implications of their ontological affinities. Does the close relation between chiasmatic flesh and spatio-temporal "in-between" constitute a sufficient background for a political discussion among Arendt and Merleau-Ponty?

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[64] For example, Merleau-Ponty emphatically states that there is "[n]o absolute difference, therefore, between […] the ontological and the ontic". Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 266. At the same time though his ontology falls within traditional metaphysics, mainly because he names Being as the unique "wild Being". So as Castoriadis claims "if you want to know what being truly means, think of-or look at-what truly is:[…] flesh", Cornelius Castoriadis. "Merleau-Ponty and the Weight of the Ontological Tradition," in *Thesis Eleven* 36 (1): 1–36, 1993.

[65] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, (Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 20.

[66] Joel Roman, «Thinking politics without a philosophy of history: Arendt and Merleau-Ponty», *Philosophy & Social History* 14 (1989), p. 403-422.

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BOOK REVIEW

By Eric Wilkinson

Helen McCabe. *John Stuart Mill, Socialist.* McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021. 368 pp. $39.95 CND (Paperback). $130.00 CND (Hardcover). ISBN 9780228005742.

In his *Autobiography*, John Stuart Mill claims that his views fall "under the general designation of Socialist" (239). This assertion has been variously ignored, denied, and puzzled over in subsequent Mill scholarship given his status as a paradigmatic liberal thinker. Helen McCabe takes Mill at his word, and attempts to explain why he saw himself as a socialist and what his socialism looked like. Her work weaves together threads from Mill's normative theory, economic writings, and political thought to reconstruct his vision. The result is a distinct model of a socialist society that is designed to preserve and enhance individual liberty, promote communal fraternity, and eliminate inequality.

The idea that Mill was a socialist can seem odd to those familiar with his status as a seminal figure in liberal political philosophy. McCabe addresses the common arguments against this notion in the first chapter of her book, and revisits the debate in the conclusion. Mill's first encounter with socialism was with Owenism, which he dismissed as economically impractical. However, he later corresponded with the Saint-Simonians, whose ideas he found more compelling. In particular, Mill was drawn to their philosophy of history, which saw history as oscillating between "organic ages" characterized by stability and adherence to a dominant ideology, and "critical ages" where people criticized existing institutions while transitioning to news ones. For Mill, this raised the possibility that the best institutions for his own transitional "critical age" might not be the best for the coming "organic age." Even if society was not prepared for socialism, it might be at a later stage in history. Second, the Saint-Simonians claimed that the laws governing distribution were not fixed, as some classical economists argued, but instead depended on how a society is organized. Mill agreed with them, and this opened up the possibility of social arrangements amenable to socialist distribution.

The Saint-Simonian connection helps to explain the shift in Mill's views towards a positive appraisal of socialism. Yet, some commentators attribute this shift to another of Mill's influences. Critics of the view that Mill was a

socialist have alleged that Harriet Taylor Mill used her feminine wiles to trick the lovesick philosopher into endorsing socialist ideas! McCabe patiently replies that there is no evidence that Mill was slavishly deferential to his wife. There is nothing in her writings to indicate she was "more" of a socialist than Mill, and the letters typically pointed to as revealing Taylor's complete control over Mill are better understood as depicting normal intellectual sparring.

McCabe does not state it explicitly, but I have always found this argument to stink with the scent of misogyny. Take Michael Packe's bold claim that "Harriet's astounding, almost hypnotic control of Mill's mind was not confined to reversing the direction of his economic theory."[1] Packe and other commentators like him infantilize both Mill and Taylor by insisting that Mill was unable to objectively assess his wife's arguments, and that Taylor was incapable of advancing arguments that might persuade someone to change their mind. There is a long tradition in Mill scholarship of disparaging Taylor for everything that the author dislikes in Mill, especially regarding socialism.[2] McCabe deftly responds to this nonsense by sticking to the evidence. Mill's interest in socialism preceded meeting Taylor, and their relationship was a mutually beneficial intellectual partnership.

After explaining what occasioned Mill's reassessment of socialism, chapters two and three of McCabe's book discuss Mill's critiques of capitalism and socialism, respectively. Mill criticized capitalism for being inefficient, restricting liberty, distributing wealth in a way disconnected from merit or hard work, pursuing self-destructive endless growth, and promoting a selfish social ethic. In *Principles of Political Economy*, Mill examined whether a perfected version of capitalism could address these problems, and decided it could not. Instead, he thought some form of socialism could. By socialism, Mill had in mind communal ownership of both capital and the means of production.

Yet, Mill does not uncritically endorse socialism. He opposed revolutionary socialism that sought to transform society through violence, believing it would herald in a new authoritarianism. Instead, Mill thought that socialism should emerge from gradual reform and social evolution, since much progress in people's sentiments and ethical disposition were necessary to make it practicable. His greatest disagreement with other socialists was on the value of market competition, which they argued lowered wages. Mill disagreed, and his ideal model of socialism sought to preserve market competition between worker cooperatives to secure both higher wages and lower prices for goods.

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[1] Michael Packe, *The Life of John Stuart Mill* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1954), 315.
[2] Jo Ellen Jacobs, "'The Lot of Gifted Ladies Is Hard': A Study of Harriet Taylor Mill Criticism," *Hypatia* 9(3): 149.

In chapter four, McCabe describes how Mill's normative principles relate to his socialism. Mill was a utilitarian, and held that five secondary principles were necessary for the promotion of utility: progress, security, liberty, equality, and fraternity. Each of these are covered in relation to Mill's socialism, but the most intriguing discussion belongs to his conception of fraternity. Mill's fraternity is a kind of fellow-feeling where our sympathies extend to others in a way that facilitates social coordination and pursuit of the common good. It is often a prerequisite to pursuing progress. McCabe cautions that describing Mill's concept of fraternity as "communitarian" is anachronistic, but it is easy to see the parallels between Mill and contemporary liberal philosophers. In particular, Mill's thoughts on fraternity appear to anticipate liberal nationalism. Liberal nationalists argue for cultivating a national identity that embodies certain ethical principles, with this identity becoming the basis for collective action. Fraternity—and the "Religion of Humanity" tasked with promoting it and other values—has a similar role in Mill's "utopia," without privileging the role of the nation.

Prophesizing about the future was something Mill avoided. The institutions that were most suited to one era did not necessarily suit another, thus Mill hesitated to describe his "ideal" society. Nonetheless, McCabe tries to outline the institutions of Mill's "utopia" by drawing on his writings. The economy of Mill's utopia is dominated by worker cooperatives that compete to provide goods and services. Industries and utilities that naturally tend towards monopoly would be nationalized. Regarding the political system, Mill favoured representative democracy, but more controversially opposed the secret ballot and promoted plural voting. McCabe usefully offers a charitable account of how a public ballot and plural voting could be compatible with Mill's egalitarian commitments. Finally, Mill adopted the Saint-Simonian idea of a "Religion of Humanity." An ideal society would have a secular religion based on the principle of utility that lacked any formal institutions. Led by artists and ethicists, this "religion" would provide an ethical education and ensure social cohesion.

Mill hoped that a transition to socialism would occur naturally through the proliferation of worker cooperatives. Since cooperatives would pay workers more and give them control over their working conditions, the better, more skilled workers could be expected to gravitate to cooperatives. As a result, traditional capitalist firms would become inefficient and be squeezed out of the market. This method of reform avoids the pitfalls of violent revolution, which Mill warns is more likely to birth a new authoritarianism than improve people's lot in life—a view that history has vindicated. It also retains the benefits of market competition and prevents the state from consolidating power. But despite these considerable advantages, worker cooperatives have not taken the world by storm. There are factors discouraging their widespread adoption that Mill did not anticipate. For

instance, they function best on a small scale. In practice, this means they cannot enjoy the same economies of scale as large corporations, and are more likely to be squeezed out of the market than the reverse.

McCabe cannot be faulted for failing to address this challenge to Mill's program of reform, as her project is mainly expository, but given her enthusiasm about Mill's view it merits discussion. That there is so much more that could be said about Mill's socialism goes to show that McCabe is right to argue that it is deserving of more attention and still has something to teach us. At the outset, she observes that the apparent tension between his status as a liberal and socialist can be attributed to how more attention is given to political labels than to the ideas and arguments that inform them. Mill argued that ethical transformation at the individual level is necessary for social progress, and the change he imagined can only occur if ideas and arguments prevail over labels and buzzwords.

Appropriately, the greatest accomplishment of *John Stuart Mill, Socialist* is doing his ideas justice.

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BOOK REVIEW

By Theofilos Perperides

Ben Laurence. *Agents of change: Political Philosophy in practice.* Harvard University Press, 2021. 272 pp. $35.00 • £30.95 • €31.95 (Hardcover). ISBN 9780674258419.

Every so often an exceptional work of philosophical investigation happens to be published that presents a new perspective on the nature and the purpose of political philosophy, challenging readers to reconsider some of the established views on the matter. Ben Laurence's *Agents of change: Political philosophy in practice* constitutes such a case. In this book, Laurence unfolds in an elegant and illuminating manner his argumentation in support of the idea that political philosophy requires an exercise in practical thinking rather than being a purely theoretical occupation that is detached from pragmatic considerations and has no practical utility.

The book starts with the Rawlsian assumption that "the primary concern of political philosophy is justice" and that "as a reflective enterprise, the work of political philosophy is theory – the theory of justice".[1] Laurence draws from Rawls the distinction between ideal and non-ideal theory, analyzed by Rawls in *A Theory of Justice*.[2] He identifies two separate notions of his theory of justice – that is, "the compliance conception" and "the teleological conception" – and examines them through the ideal/non-ideal theory dichotomy. He characterizes the ideal theory's aspect of the teleological conception as the "realist utopia theory" and the non-ideal theory's aspect as the "transitional theory", arguing that the latter translates into reasoning for the actualization of a just society expressed through political action, in the same sense that practical reasoning is used in order to solve an ordinary problem.

In the second chapter, the reader is offered a more nuanced explanation of the teleological conception as well as a critical examination of the "practicalist" and "antipracticalist" criticisms it attracts. Practicalists view the teleological conception of justice as too theoretical while antipracticalists consider it to be too practice-oriented suggesting that it should maintain a purely ideal-theoretic character. Responding to

[1] Laurence, *Agents of Change*, 20.
[2] Rawls, *Theory of Justice*.

antipracticalists, Laurence argues that political philosophy entails the reflection on our piecemeal, practical judgments about injustice and the subsequent crystallization of those into interwoven principles of justice that constitute a comprehensive vision of a just society. In other words, political philosophy as justice-theorizing entails both the practical reasoning used in rectifying common injustices and the theory that conceptualizes an ideal society.

In the third chapter, the author responds to the practicalists' critique. He suggests that the ideal theory's visions of a just society guide our political action by determining the factors that would drive against injustice, which he labels "agents of change", as well as the obstacles they would have to overcome. Following that, the author defines the nature and the role of the aforementioned agents of change in the context of the relation between the two aspects of the teleological conception, namely the ideal theory and the non-ideal theory. He explains that identifying the agents of change is inherent to justice-theorizing, and, as such, political philosophy encompasses the elements of the realization of justice. Laurence completes his response to critiques in the sixth chapter where he articulates a deeper and stronger criticism of the antipracticalist viewpoint, examining David Estlund's arguments while also recognizing the latter's valuable insights.

In the fifth chapter, Laurence analyzes the "compliance conception" of the theory of justice. Based on a Kantian approach, the author interprets the pursuit of justice as the legitimate response to violations of duties between individuals, which originate from their shared acknowledgment of their mutual obligations as free equal members of society. He subsequently claims that justice-seeking entails analyzing the human inability to fully adhere to those duties. He concludes his argumentation in the final chapter by presenting an overall picture of his thesis, re-establishing his view that political philosophy cannot be properly understood or exercised without recognizing its practical, pragmatic dimension. He once again sheds light on the teleological conception of justice, considering whether it implies that political philosophy involves practical reasoning, and ends with a reflection on whether this book constitutes political philosophy in itself.

Following from the last question, it needs to be stated that Laurence is quite clear about this book's purpose. He does not argue in favor of a theory of justice, nor does he propose his own view on how people should pursue justice. He wants the reader to understand why political philosophy has a practical nature and he develops a set of arguments to support that. At the same time, it would be accurate to remark that this book is to a large extent the outcome of a reexamination of the works of certain philosophers, especially considering that the author evaluates, adopts, criticizes and arguably completes their views on political philosophy or their approaches to justice-theorizing.

In more detail, the author's whole thesis and reasoning could be described primarily as a critique and a reinforcement of Rawls' approach to the theory of justice. In addition, Laurence's idea of political philosophy is manifestly influenced by Aristotle. He declares his position that political philosophy constitutes a political exercise in the same sense that people use justice claims in the public sphere; a view that originates directly from Aristotle's *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*. As it has already been mentioned, he also draws ideas from Kant's work when he argues that the general conception of justice involves the idea that duties of justice are duties we owe to one another. Moreover, he critically examines Amartya Sen's comparativist approach to justice, as it is presented in Sen's celebrated book *The Idea of Justice*, recognizing Sen's sharp-sighted observations, and explaining the weaknesses of his approach.[3] Lastly, as it has been noted, he evaluates Estlund's arguments, affirming the elements he finds insightful as well as criticizing the views he considers mistaken.

Having underlined Laurence's major influences, it would be suitable to sum up his argumentation. To begin with, his teleological conception of the theory of justice interprets political philosophy as an exercise that includes articulating and supporting principles as well as applying them in arguing towards remedying injustice. He maintains that political philosophy starts as a reflection on the piecemeal judgments that we all make every time we come upon cases of injustice and act upon them, deliberating on how our shared institutions could become more just, hence implementing our sense of justice. As he makes clear, injustice requires the application of practical reasoning in the same sense that any empirical problem requires practical reasoning as an act of overcoming obstacles. Therefore, since political philosophy is an exercise in justice-theorizing, creating logically interwoven principles that reflect our piecemeal judgments in a comprehensive theory of justice, and since justice-theorizing involves responding to societal injustice as a problem-solving activity, then political philosophy should be regarded as a practical enterprise.

In the final analysis, Ben Laurence paints a picture of political philosophy that stands in opposition to the utopian and scholarly one that has been sketched both by critics and supporters of the ideal theory type. He takes neither the side of the theorists who advocate that political philosophy should be free from practical considerations nor the side of those who believe that it has to separate itself from ideal-theorizing and focus on correcting ordinary injustices. Laurence manages to formulate a clear, explanatory and original thesis on that debate by delivering a book that does not constitute a partial polemic but a novel perspective that is based on critical examination of arguments and counterarguments. At the end, the readers are left with a

[3] Sen, *Idea of Justice*.

better understanding of political philosophy as an exercise of both theoretical and practical dimensions and are stimulated to reconsider and appreciate its importance in our everyday lives.

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