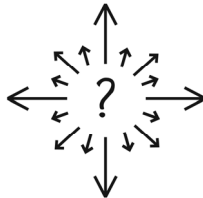


Sofia Philosophical Review

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Dr Alexander L. Gungov
Editor-in-Chief
Sofia Philosophical Review
E-mail: agungov@phls.uni-sofia.bg

Website: www.sphr-bg.org

All prospective contributions should follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

Review materials should be sent to the Senior Book Review Editor at:

Mr. Karim Mamdani
280 Donlands Ave.
Unit 403
Toronto, ON
M4J 0A3
CANADA
karim.mamdani@gmail.com

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I. BOOK REVIEWS

Miglena Nikolchina, *God with Machine: Subtracting the Human (From Romanticism to Transhumanism)*, [In Bulgarian] Sofia: Versus, 2022, 600 pp., BGN 25, ISBN: 9786197390087

Kamelia Spassova (University of Sofia)

The Human as a Locus of Revolt and Resistance

1. Subtracting the human: beyond automatization and animalization

Miglena Nikolchina's *God with Machine: Subtracting the Human (From Romanticism to Transhumanism)* sets itself the arduous task of reflecting upon the future of the human. The study's diagnostic and prognostic function of indicating the crises and failures of various past projects – whether humanist or Enlightenment or political – even as it endeavors to envision a future by means of literature and the arts. That which brings about the annihilation of the human is its dissolution into the animal or the machine. The book devises the conditions for an alternative approach: *the subtraction of the human* as the renewed implementation of the minimal differences contained in the *human quadrilateral* – a concept Nikolchina herself constructs. The sides of this quadrilateral designate the categories *human*, *animal*, *robot* and *god*. The anthropological diagnosis of the study is that the human is an intersection of two forces: *humanization*, or the endeavor of becoming-human, and *de-humanization* as a state of fatigue and inertia leading to animalization and automatization. The subtraction of the human emerges with the historical and theoretical demarcation of the human from the marionette, the divine and the animal.

The book swims against the current of *transhumanism* and its imperative to *augment* the human, as well as that of *animal studies* and its attempts to equalize the human and the animal. In the former, bio-

technocrats wish to bring together the human and the machine, while, in the latter, anthrozoology regards the human as constituting no particular exception, and as simply a part of a much larger ecosystem of human-animal communion. According to Nikolchina, the more capacious tendency of *biopolitics*, which subsumes both transhumanism and animal studies, advances towards the obliteration of the boundaries between the political machine and the organic being.

The term *subtraction* is borrowed from the French philosopher Alain Badiou and designates *the affirmative part of negation*. “Subtraction” displaces the discourse on the annihilation of the human, and, more importantly, indicates the affirmative aspect of any negation brought about by differentiation or transformation. This is why the foremost aesthetic category in Nikolchina’s study is the *uncanny* (*das Unheimliche*), a concept introduced by Freud to explicate the fact that every negation harbors the risk of bringing together the living and the dead, the human and the non-human, the organic and the mechanical, the familiar and the unfamiliar. Nikolchina reviews these dangerous convergences of the automaton and the human, but also constructs an *anthropological customhouse* where the differences between them are brought to light.

2. Technomachia: the living as thought and resistance

The human is therefore conceptualized dynamically and not by means of fixed definitions. It is that which has always changed its demarcation operator throughout history: the human aspires to be a god, but is no god; inclines towards the animal, but is no animal; wishes to be a machine, but is no machine. *God with Machine* introduces us to the history of these approximations and non-coincidences grasped as the shifting boundaries of the human.

Despite all difficulties, a line of demarcation is established. Nikolchina stands for non-coincidence, which makes possible the operation of the *anthropogenetic machine*. This process of differentiation takes the form of a great battle, one in which the human persists as the locus of revolt. Nikolchina’s stake is to situate the human within the framework of European thought, but in the form of a contradiction and a dynamic process, that is, as multiple, internally divided, and heterogeneous. In this sense, the battle is also waged against contemporary ideological apparatuses which operate according to strictly constrained labels. They

aim to qualify the subject by identity markers such as sex, gender, and race, in order to ensure a carefully arranged herbarium where the human being is not allowed to move freely. The forces of resistance against such a herbalist undertaking, according to the author, need to be sought in philosophy, literary theory, political thought, and poetic reflection.

Nikolchina seeks to get past Giorgio Agamben's pessimistic pronouncement that the human is a finished project. Her study is sometimes afflicted by Cassandra's anxiety, in which the darkest (self-fulfilling) prophecies are bound to come true, the traumas of the recent past, related to the Eastern European intellectual experience, not yet overcome, and the visions of a great political project non-existent: the human who was once obsessed with utopia has now grown torpid and the drive to undertake projects has been paralyzed.

Still, seeing the subject not only as a scientific and technical project, but also as a poetic work, the study presents versions of a possible future. Philosophy, theory, and aesthetic experience are equally engaged in the battle to subtract the human from biopolitical snares. The human as a universal and singular being, as the study specifies, is defined by *becoming* and *overcoming*. The human draws the power for its further transformation not only from technological advances, but also from the imagination. This basically Romantic vision retroactively restores the inner senses of poetry and dreaming – the aesthetic and the semiotic – in a time of the depletion, constriction, paralysis, and limitation of the human.

It thus becomes clear that this book on “subtracting the human” is a study of living thought or of the living as thought. Behind the screen of the exact sciences, technocrats and the corporate IT sector hasten to demonstrate the increasingly enviable skills of artificial intelligence, while completely neglecting the humanities. It is the great virtue of Nikolchina's study that it reveals the impossibility of advancing artificial intelligence without the supplement of a humanist rethinking of the subject as living thought – and, what is more, without expert knowledge of the representation of the robot in literature, cinema, and the visual arts in general (including video games). *God with Machine* is as much about delineating new boundaries of the human as it is about the artificial being, one first of all an artistic and only later a technological project.

3. Architectonics of the work: a Möbius transition between *The Human as Utopia* and *Squaring the Human*

The architectonics of *God with Machine* are complex – comprising several books, it propounds a multidimensional universe. The preface and the epilogue address the study's main concern via Julia Kristeva's phrase "I revolt, therefore we are to come." *God with Machine* incorporates two of Nikolchina's books – *The Utopian Human Being* and *Squaring the Human* (the latter consisting of three parts: I. "Unfinished Project"; II. "A Demand for Freedom"; III. "Trasumanar"). The principal thesis, reflected in the overall composition, is that the human is an internally divided and contradictory being, caught between the desire of becoming a god and the non-coincidence of an automaton. There is an implied fissure between the first and the second book – yet they coalesce into a Möbius strip along which the vision of the utopian human (who does not wish to be human, but something more) and the squared human (who remains human despite the shifting boundaries of the human) are not two contradictory conceptions but represent the same plane twisted in different contexts.

The Utopian Human Being was first published in 1992. Its optic on human problematics is mythopoetic and oriented towards the science fiction genre. Human enhancement is serenely reflected upon through the anthropo-chronotopes created by the scientist-engineer as well as the artist who taps into the power of the imagination through creative experimentation. This process is consistently perceived as an alchemical transition beyond the familiar, a transformation of reality, a prognostication of the radically non-present (other spaces, different timelines, non-human encounters). The human is presented as "almost transparent at times, nothing but an eyelet revealing boundless vistas."¹ *The Utopian Human Being* was written in the 1980s and bears the mark of a longing for freedom as a primary ontological and political value, a thirst for pluralism and free passage into the library of Babel beyond the control of the authorities, an expansion of the senses and the daydream of a different world. Apart from offering a reflective optimism, projected into utopian visions, this beginning allows us to see the complex situation of the

¹ Miglena Nikolchina. *God with Machine: Subtracting the Human (From Romanticism to Transhumanism)* (Sofia: Versus, 2022), 73; my translation.

desire for political transition and change before 1989; and also the de-idealizations, *the corpses of utopias*, the disillusionments, the unfulfilled messages signed by Nikolchina until then.

God with Machine operates on several levels simultaneously – poetic, political, philosophical and theoretical. If *The Utopian Human Being* reveals the mythopoetic potential of writing, *Squaring the Human* shows what can be achieved by the zeal of theory and philosophy. We are prompted to recall the implicit capacities of good old continental philosophy (Julia Kristeva, Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Mladen Dolar, Alenka Zupančič). Some of the literary examples employed in the first part of *Squaring the Human* are re-examined in the second part, this time through the optic of complex key concepts. Here we come upon Ernst Hoffmann's automata, but also Homer's automatons, Mary Shelly's monster, Heinrich von Kleist's marionettes, Rainer Maria Rilke's angels, the machine from Stanislaw Lem's "The Mask," the robots from the works of Karel Čapek and Svetoslav Minkov. This litany of literary examples constantly accompanies Nikolchina's reflections and reveals the shifting emphases of her theoretical hypotheses. The repertoire of examples expands beyond literature to cinema and television (Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* and *Devs*, *Battlestar Galactica*, Ridley Scott's *Alien*, among others) and video games (*Mass Effect*, *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*, *Detroit: Become Human*). It is therefore not surprising that at the end of her monograph, in addition to the traditional bibliography, there is also a filmography and a ludography.

Nikolchina's study reflects a specifically Bulgarian perspective by exploring the struggles for free thought as acts of resistance to the dominant ideology in the 1960s and 1970s, battles waged by figures like Atanas Natev, Tsvetan Stoyanov, Isaac Passi, Dimitar Avramov, Tsvetan Todorov, and Julia Kristeva. These thinkers are recognized as intellectuals who defended the complexity of thought against the thin wash of ideology. Nikolchina identifies them as her teachers and precursors, and relates their project to the ideas of the rebellious generation that came up in the 1980s and 1990s. Thus, what the earlier book proposes through a historical perspective – the "utopias" of the 1980s – the later regards from a critical distance, drawing up a genealogy of Bulgarian theory and examining its impact on contemporary situations.

4. Heterotopic homonymy: humanism and antihumanism

God with Machine: Subtracting the Human is a powerful and imposing theoretical work. The book considers the human as a possibility, and the pulsations of this possibility originate from the impossibility of a truce. The study is generous to the academic community, in that it brings together the thoughts of Western and Eastern intellectuals and writers – Merab Mamardashvili and Louis Althusser, Minkov and Čapek, Franz Kafka and Lem, Kristeva and Stoyanov. In doing so it once again pays equal attention to details and their environment, seeking to recover difference and the political effects/defects that an ideology of the same had levelled with ease.

Heterotopic homonymy is a concept Nikolchina developed in *Lost Unicorns of the Velvet Revolutions* (2012), employing it as a means to specify the differences between the conceptual apparatuses of Eastern and Western thinkers. It is heterotopic homonymy that allows her to reveal different ideologies lurking beneath identical names and concepts. The differences in the notion of *subject* between Mamardashvili and Althusser mold “*the human* as the most eloquent example of heterotopic homonymy to have left its mark on the decade after the end of the Cold War.”² Nor is this reversal and non-coincidence revealed solely in the notion of “the human,” but also in the complex philosophical contradiction between *humanism* and *antihumanism*. In the second half of the twentieth century, in the West and especially in French theory, avant-garde thinking operated under the sign of antihumanism, whereas Eastern intellectuals envisioned a new human being along the lines of a humanist project. We can thus see the human square proposed by Nikolchina not only as defined by the figures of man, god, automaton and animal, but also as traversed by the axes of *humanism-antihumanism* and *utopia-anti-utopia*.

The common characteristic of the human being, or that which Nikolchina formulates as its *differentia specifica*, is its condition as an *unfinished project*: the desire to surpass itself, the protean mutation in excess of any given state that has been known to us ever since Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. This transformation is already evident in Dante Alighieri and is embedded in his neolo-

² Ibid., 232; my translation.

gism *trasumanar*: one who passes beyond the human, both in space (by reaching out to inhuman places) and time (by projecting oneself into a utopian future).

To support her thesis that the human consists of its self-surpassing, Nikolchina draws on the works of Aeschylus, Dante, Mirandola, Friedrich Nietzsche, Russian Cosmism, and, above all, on Romantic literature and science fiction. That is, the potential of the human to go beyond itself is not considered simply under its technological aspect, but also according to ideas of free will, imagination and the very choice to go beyond. The latter are well-known to humanists but they are neglected by the zealots of transhumanism, who only wish to augment the human by technological means. Heterotopic homonymy is the conceptual device which Nikolchina employs to articulate non-coincidences and to indicate more clearly that the very notion of “the human” presupposes a being which never really coincides with itself. The human is alteration and displacement, a utopian and antiutopian oscillation traceable only in historical and theoretical narratives. Nikolchina’s study abounds in such narratives.

It is symptomatic that the book’s epilogue is dedicated to Kristeva’s philosophy and the themes of *revolution* and *time*. This gesture traces a connection between Nikolchina’s emblematic monograph *Matricide in Language* (2004) and her forthcoming study on the stakes arising from Kristeva’s philosophical perspective. The diagnosis of our time reveals that the lack of a major project is due to the implosion of the political and the downfall of the West as an intellectual utopia. Faced with such an ending, however, *God with Machine* re-enacts the time of revolt as a necessary antidote, as a dialogical projection which would give us the courage to overcome the increasing *autonomization of the automaton* and the danger of obliterating the human completely.

Nikolchina makes it clear that avant-garde thinking is never simply technological: it is concerned with theory and aesthetics. The human is ultimately understood in terms of risk and anxiety, a standpoint that traces out heterogeneous intellectual trajectories. It should come as no surprise that *God with Machine* sometimes seems to consent: yes, the human is finished. However, this is but the first step, always followed by disagreement and the persistent conviction that the human is yet to come.

Conference Overview: Topical Issues in Studying Consciousness

A. B. Denissova (NRU MPEI), J. V. Sokolova (NRU MPEI), A. L. Gungov (University of Sofia)

On March 15, 2023, a conference on *Topical Issues in Studying Consciousness* was held at the National Research University “Moscow Power Energy Institute” (NRU “MPEI”). The Department of Philosophy, Political Science and Sociology, part of the Applied Humanities Institute of the NRU “MPEI,” named after G. S. Astaf’eva, was the main organizer of the conference. There were two co-organizers of the conference:

- the research team of the Institute of Neurorehabilitation and Restorative Technologies under the leadership of its Director, Member-Correspondent of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Prof. Doctor of Medical Sciences Suponeva Natalia Alexandrovna, FSBI “Scientific Center of Neurology;”

- the Department of Ontology and Theory of Knowledge at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Peoples’ Friendship University of Russia, headed by Professor Vladimir Nikolaevich Belov.

The conference was attended by Russian and international researchers, representing various fields in the sciences and humanities.

The special interest in the study of the phenomenon of consciousness today is associated with recent interesting developments in neuroscience, which make it possible to significantly expand our understanding of consciousness and the mechanisms of brain activity.

In the course of the interdisciplinary discussion, various innovative approaches to the study of consciousness were proposed. This encompassed examinations of neurological and psychiatric practices, such as the phenomenon of “hidden consciousness,” the “locked person” syndrome and “near-death experiences.” Additionally, discussions concerned contemporary philosophical inquiries and explorations within the framework of quantum physics. Of notable importance were considerations relating to artificial intelligence and neural networks, as well as understanding the phenomenon of consciousness within the modern scientific paradigm.

The interdisciplinary nature of the discussions demonstrated the rich heuristic potential of this approach and the productive interaction between representatives of different fields in the sciences and humanities.

Zoran Dimić, *Političke životinje i zveri. O Aristotelovom zasnivanju filozofije politike (Political Animals and Beasts. On Aristotle's foundation of the philosophy of politic)*, Novi Sad: Akademska knjiga, 2022, \$31, 167 pp., ISBN: 9788662633958

Luka Matić (University of Zagreb)

Traditionally, students of Aristotle's philosophy of politics focus on the taxonomy of right and wrong forms of government and his famous definitions of a man as *animal sociale* and *animal rationale*. In the recently published monograph *Political Animals and Beasts: On Aristotle's foundation of the philosophy of politics*, Zoran Dimić offers an innovative interpretation of Aristotle's *Politics*. On the one hand, he draws on anthropology, biology, history, and sociology to contextualize Aristotle's writings and the objects of his research. On the other hand, he pays careful attention to the original Greek, relying on the principle that the most literal translation is the most accurate. Studying man in *pre-polis* communities and the reasons and practices whereby the *polis* is founded, Dimić gives a whole new meaning to the definitions of man as *animal rationale* and *animal sociale*. In this way, he opens a space to discuss Aristotle's philosophy of politics beyond the narrow realm of the history of Greek or ancient philosophy.

This text arrives nine years after Dimić's first book, *The Birth of the Idea of the University*, a seminal study of both the sources and the neglected aspects of European university heritage. The same guiding principle informs both works. Dimić studies a canonical text alongside a subject that is too often taken for granted and through a detailed analysis of the text he uncovers hidden and overlooked motifs, leading to a new and innovative understanding.

Innovative methodology

The book consists of an introduction and four chapters: “1. Domestication and household,” “2. Household and economy,” “3. Genesis and the development of the political nature of man,” and “4. Aristotle’s establishment of a philosophy of politics.” Dimić’s use of secondary literature goes beyond the limits of philosophy and its subdisciplines. He breaks free from disciplinary boundaries and achieves this not only by incorporating general conclusions from other fields, but also by basing his investigations on empirical material. In the best sense, he exemplifies Hegel’s maxim that philosophy is its own time apprehended in thoughts. His method is also close to the French *Annales* historians and theorists, like Fernando Braudel, or even Marxists like Henri Lefebvre, in recognizing the importance of everyday life. Dimić links the subject of his philosophical study to the practices of life contained in it.

Although Dimić is not at all a Marxist, he nevertheless confirms Marx’s maxim that there is “only a single science, the science of history.”³ Dimić grounds Aristotle’s philosophy of politics in its historical context. In this study, Dimić does not do what is usually expected from a philosopher. He does not take one or several concepts, or conceptual assemblies, and then examine them etymologically, phraseologically, or otherwise. On the contrary, Dimić starts his investigation by stepping out of philosophy and into biological anthropology. He says that the key to understanding Aristotle’s *Politics* is Paleolithic stress and the Neolithic revolution that abolished it. Why does that matter? Only in sedentary communities, like the ones that emerged after the Neolithic revolution, did politics develop as one of the aspects of human praxis. However, it did not develop immediately but only after evolving from more primitive and smaller human communities, such as households and villages.

Dimić’s reconstruction of Aristotle’s text

In his work, Dimić patiently follows Aristotle line by line and introduces material from other philosophical works as well as from anthropology, biology, history and sociology. He does so to reconstruct, step by step,

³ Marx, K & Engels, F, *Collected Works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Vol. 5: Marx and Engels 1845-1847* (London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd 1976), 28.

how pre-political forms of sedentary human life developed according to certain principles, functions and purposes. In doing so, he fundamentally and patiently takes apart traditional ideas that we take for granted. One of these is the Judeo-Christian view of man as created in the image of God. However, Dimić reminds us that humans were once wild animals who lived a day-to-day existence, gathering fruit and hunting other animals. Before we learned to grow crops and domesticate animals, we experienced constant uncertainty about our food supply and lacked any existential security. Simply by domesticating ourselves, we domesticated other living things.

It is in the last chapter that Dimić reveals the key to understanding his study. He does so by methodologically opposing Plato's and Aristotle's philosophies of politics. Where Plato seeks to found the ideal *polity*, a one-size-fits-all solution based on the idea of the Good, which would transform any given political community into the best one possible, Aristotle analyzes the formation of particular political communities, examining also their creators and their purposes. Following Aristotle's method, Dimić uncovers human political practice layer by layer, in this way reconstructing the meaning and implications of Aristotle's famous statements.

To arrive at Aristotle's policy considerations, Dimić starts with the Neolithic revolution, which led to the establishment of permanent settlements. The transition from a hunter-gatherer to a more sedentary mode of living, one involving cultivation and stockpiling, changed the rhythm of life. To survive, people had to perform repetitive, tedious, and unpleasant tasks. The first community to emerge was the household (*oikos*), which formed around the joint execution of these tasks. The mission of the household was the reproduction and continuation of the species, secured by providing shelter, food, and progeny. However, contrary to popular belief, a household is not a community of people but a community of domesticated animals, humans and non-humans alike, living under the same roof. A functional division of labor develops within the household, and its members are divided into roles such as husband and wife, parents and children, or master and slave. The success of the household in meeting its purpose or nature, or *physis* as Aristotle would say, depends on the effectiveness of this division of labor. On the basis of the presence or absence of an effective division of labor, Aristotle divided households into Greek and barbarian.

Aristotle argues that only one person manages the household and it is their nature to rule the household, not because they were born to rule, but because they have acquired the necessary skills. This skill is known as *oikonomia*, which is not to be confused with *ktetike*, the skill of gaining wealth. The purpose or nature of the village is similar to that of the household, although on a bigger scale, but Dimić does not explore this at length. As in the household, a functional division of labor is present, along with vertical management. Dimić argues that households and villages are formed because of the human tendency to associate, whose purpose is the reproduction of the species. This tendency is rooted in the prominent role of the Paleolithic period in the development of the human species. However, the nature of the *polis* does not include this. Unlike households and villages, which are based on a consensus around a functional hierarchy, the foundation of the *polis* is dissensus. At a level higher than households and villages, people can live in communities that are organized around relatively constant functional hierarchies.

From this, Dimić proceeds to offer a novel interpretation of Aristotle. Humans are not simply political beings or social animals, but, through his reconstruction of Aristotle's understanding, Dimić's view is that man is both *zoon* and *politikon*. A man is both a domesticated animal that associates with others to ensure his reproduction and a being that lives in a political community. As a *zoon*, a human functionally differentiates: husband or wife, parent or child, master or slave. While as *politikon*, this individual transcends their function in the reproductive process and becomes a part of the *polis*. In other words, people only become human through political practice.

Thus, in Dimić's interpretation, Aristotle is not the Aristotle of traditional academic expositions. Dimić's work reveals an eminently modernist Aristotle – an author whose thought goes beyond the limits of the time in which he lived and can inspire political discussions of contemporary matters. In contrast to Plato's idealism with its fixed and eternal ideal forms, Dimić emphasizes Aristotle's evidence-based approach as essential to his conclusions.

Aristotle – a modern philosopher

The modern aspect of Aristotle's *Politics* lies in a conclusion that Dimić does not explicitly draw in his study: what Aristotle calls *polis* we know under the liberal or socialist name of democracy. In Aristotle's text, Dimić

discovers the principle of limited government, a feature recognized as a prominent aspect of John Locke's political philosophy. He also observes that Aristotle acknowledges the conflict of interests within a political community, in a way that recalls Hegel's definition of society in his *Philosophy of Right*. Moreover, Aristotle perceives a fundamental conflict between politics and economics, which we can say is the starting point of Marx's philosophy of politics, if we can speak of his having one.

Finally, Dimić's interpretation of Aristotle emphasizes the radical instability of politics. If the function of politics is to determine what is good and just for a particular political community, it cannot provide eternal solutions. Instead, it has to continuously question what is good and what is just, and this accords with changing authority holders and the necessity for the political community to resolve conflicts of interest. The *polis* recognizes and respects these disputes; it doesn't suppress them. On the contrary, the community constantly engages in disputation, allowing individuals to employ and demonstrate their rationality, evoking Aristotle's definition of man as *zoon logon ehon*: a rational animal.

In his conclusion, Dimić abandons his strict interpretation of Aristotle's text and shows instead that his theses, findings and methods can still be relevant today. He does this by criticizing the depoliticization of the community in which he lives, explaining that great powers produce stability and consensus in peripheral capitalist countries such as Serbia. This is just one of the possible lines of discussion opened by this remarkable study. It is my hope that it will not remain the only one, because Dimić's interpretation of Aristotle's *Politics* deserves a broad and lively reception.

II. LETTER TO THE EDITORS

Transgender Ideology Literature in Elementary Schools: An Open Letter from a Professor, Researcher, and Psychologist

David L. Tomasi (Vermont Academy of Arts and Sciences)

Preface

The following article is an adaptation¹ of an open letter sent by the author to the local U.S. Elementary School Administration on October 14, 2022, in response to the introduction of Transgender Literature in grades 2 and above (starting age 7) in the local US elementary school attended by the author's children. More specifically, children have been introduced to three books: *I Am Jazz*, by Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings; *Jacob's New Dress*, by Ian Hoffman and Sarah Hoffman; and *Born Ready. The True Story of a Boy Named Penelope*, by Jodie Patterson. As part of this, children have been asked to join discussion in class to talk about the contents of each book and other related literature. Of note, several meetings with the administration and the school board have followed, but no changes have been made to the administration and content of the literature presented to children, with the exception of parents' voluntary exclusion, per direct request, of their children from class time in which the books above and related new literature will be discussed in the future. Furthermore, these topics have also been discussed as part of a recent Lecture the author presented at the Academy of Sciences of

¹ Required to follow editorial guidelines and in order to remove personal names or identifiers of the school, teachers, and administration, to respect privacy and to foster an open and respectful dialogue. The content of the letter has nevertheless been kept intact.

Rome with the title “Science or Ideology?” in November 2022.²

Letter

Thank you very much for your quick and detailed response to our concerns as parents. It is wonderful to hear that in class, teachers read books on a variety of very important topics such as kindness, diversity, difference, acceptance, and many other which I fully support. I have absolutely no doubt that, regarding all of the above, we agree on all the basic premises and the focus on the overall respect, love, tolerance, education, and protection for our children, and I thank you for that.

The only remaining issue, from my perspective as a parent and more importantly from the perspective of the scientific fields I am involved in, is that the books discussed, in my personal and clinical judgment do not align with the intent and the expected pedagogical, social, and psychological outcomes of the ethics we all share. It is therefore necessary to at least provide some of the reasons why I feel this way. To keep this email short and to the point, I will only make a few, very brief references on the current research studies, without the proper bibliographical notes which should otherwise be included in any scientific paper.

Let us therefore examine the content – again, not all of it, but selected sentences from each book – with my best efforts not to be biased in any way in the selective process.

Book 1. *I Am Jazz*

In my judgment, the ethical premise of the book is to narrate the story of a child, from a healthy perspective of love, self-discovery, acceptance, tolerance, and a proper fight against stereotypes which could be potentially harmful to a healthy development. Of course, I do agree with these premises. However, already in the very first page of the book the author quotes the child saying: “For as long as I can remember, my favorite color has been pink.” If the intent of the book is to question (certain?) gender

² David Tomasi, *Gender: Science or Ideology?* Rome, I: Accademia Tiberina, 2022. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0zByPUuGRs&list=PLVrDMdxssIRZFtbU8NhMh-Z4vvf1rfFq>

stereotyping attitudes, starting with what in the US³ is usually perceived as “feminine” (the *color pink*) might miss the point. Of course, a child is free to express whatever he or she feels is appropriate, and we should encourage this self-exploration. Unless, of course, our “socially constructed” assumption that “pink is for girls only” becomes an etiological factor in any clinical decision-making process to determine the sex of the child.⁴ This is possibly the central issue in all the books: Presenting a decision of accepting vs. rejecting a child’s perception, definition, and ideation / identity of self solely based on perceptual narratives from the child, without any references to the normally⁵ occurring process, itself predicated on examination of the tetrad *chromosomes, hormones, genitalia*, and especially *gonads*, to which I should add, from a neurobiological standpoint, both the examination of *neurotransmitters*⁶ and the examination of neuroanatomical and neurofunctional elements.⁷ Attacking the application of these processes as **biologistic**⁸ is both incorrect and misrepresenting the scope and underlying mechanisms contained therein. As I claim throughout this message, I would certainly not expect a children’s book to delve into the intricacies of electro-bio-chemical processes. However, to present the situation of parents deciding to accept or reject this type of claims from a child, simply based on (what the book describes as) an open, **non-judgmental**, caring attitude – as opposed to a sound clinical and scientific **judgment**, itself based on solid research and examination – is not only unhelpful to children, but can also be extremely dangerous.

³ Not necessarily in the rest of the Americas, and certainly not in the rest of the world.

⁴ Not because of an intrinsically faulty methodology, but because we would be dealing with circular, pseudo-deductive thinking.

⁵ I.e., scientifically based norms to clinically make a judgment of this nature.

⁶ Themselves linked to the previous examination of hormones, and through the mutual biochemical influence of nervous system vs. endocrine system through pituitary gland and hypothalamic processes.

⁷ Such as right vs. left hemisphere distribution, cortical vs. limbic (predominant and context-related) activation, and cognitive-emotional selective preferences on a binary distribution

⁸ As opposed to *biologist-informed* or *biology-based*.

To continue with this analysis, the sentence quoted above⁹ is just an example, of course, and despite the fact that it is already concerning that this faulty deductive process is displayed on the first page, it is further corroborated (in a negative sense) by similar statements in the following pages, like “here are some of my other favorite things: dancing, singing, back flips, drawing, soccer, swimming, makeup, and pretending I’m a pop star.” Furthermore, there is another questionable cognitive merging, i.e., the idea (ethically acceptable) of allowing a child to dream, explore, and develop in a non-judgmental way, with the *con*-fusion¹⁰ ***in and of*** the child. The logical sequence thus sees the subject of the experience described as both displaying behaviors that are deemed¹¹ empirically verifiable, or at least being aesthetically/perceptually visible data (for instance “dancing” and “makeup”), with the neurodevelopment, emotional, cognitive, and behavior striving towards the poetic¹² rehearsal and training toward the future (for instance, “pretending I’m a pop star”).

These aspects are in themselves very problematic, as they present a situation in which the author¹³ literally – *literally!* – confuses the logical premises and the deductive conclusion drawn therefrom. This is unfortunately a relatively common issue in the application of the scientific method: As scientists we aren’t less prone to have some confirmation bias; in fact, as the literature indicates, we might be just better at cherry-picking results which fit our worldview, but one would hope that the peer-review process,¹⁴ could help distinguish evidence-based facts from incorrect assumptions and interpretations.

Moreover, I also want to point out the intrinsically incorrect assumption that there should be a disagreement, or even an opposition, between parents and scientists or clinicians. An example of this is found a few pages later: “At first my family was confused. They’d always thought of me as a boy.” This is an extremely problematic statement. Talking about my

⁹ I.e., “for as long as...”

¹⁰ In a strictly etymological and clinical sense of “merging together” or, more specifically, “melting,” “pouring,” or “spilling” together.

¹¹ Both by the author and by the possibly inattentive reader.

¹² Again, etymologically intended, thus “creative.”

¹³ Not specifically the author of *this* book, but any author who could fall prey to these logical fallacies.

¹⁴ And evidence from meta-analysis, or at the very least solid study designs such as triple-blind randomized case-control studies.

clinical practice and teaching, specifically, when I meet with the family members of my patients, I refrain from making any – any – assumptions of incorrectness in the way the parents¹⁵ understand their children. In other words, and at the risk of sending a too simplistic, “bumper-sticker” message, “Moms know best” – moms know what’s best for their children. I am saying this because that is what **both the scientific literature and common sense** clearly say. Of course, in cases such as difficult and problematic upbringing, trauma-related and/or provoked/provoking experience, verbal, physical, psychological, emotional or sexual abuse, a clinician couldn’t/shouldn’t assume that parents are always right¹⁶ about their children, as both their perception and parenting skills might negatively affected by this, but a well-informed clinician should never assume – even in these cases – that the traumatic experiences themselves always fully delete any healthy parenting instinct. To be clear, in stating this I am simply emphasizing how, in the absence of any other parameters, when both science and parental instincts agree, there should be very little room for a level of doubt which could be extremely detrimental to the proper development of the child. But what about problematic issues raised by an extremist, intolerant, hyper-religious mentality at the basis of very poor decisions by parents, which would ultimately harm their child? Should science and medicine speak against this as well, in order to promote empathy, tolerance, inclusion? Yes, of course. The process is the same. The initial premise, clearly demonstrated by the scientific literature is that, more often than not, “healthy”¹⁷ parents know what’s best for their children, at least in such early developmental stages – given my specific background, I would strongly emphasize that this should generally speaking be the rule until the proper development of the child’s prefrontal cortex, and more generally of the child neuroanatomical structures, i.e., around the age of 19, on statistical average, given individual and sex-specific differences. So, what if the parents’ so-called intolerant perspectives are in conflict with science? I could certainly agree with what the Thomistic literature has had to say, for centuries now, about this: “If there is a clash between

¹⁵ In general, their mothers, simply due to statistically relevant facts according to which they are more often the ones discussing their children with the psychologist, physician, or other doctor.

¹⁶ As in “clinically correct.”

¹⁷ In this context, read as: “clinical issues/trauma-free.”

your religion and your science, one of two cases is under scrutiny. Either your (way of interpreting) religion is wrong, or your (way of interpreting) science is.”

To use an example regarding this issue, a few pages later in *I Am Jazz*, we find: “I hardly ever played with trucks or tools or superheroes. Only princesses and mermaid costumes. My brother told me this was girl stuff.” From a logical standpoint, this could be indicative of a variety of premises and causes. I could list at least a few:

- The child¹⁸ is indeed a girl, and further psychological, psychotherapeutic, social-cultural, clinical-pharmacological, medical-surgical help (**in this very order!**)¹⁹ might be needed. This could be extremely hard on parents, who might feel discouraged, shocked, helpless in figuring out how to best help their children, but pretending that medical conditions *beyond* body dysphoria and body dysmorphia,²⁰ are not true, is both unscientific and evil, with extremely detrimental effects for all children and adults suffering from it. This cannot and should not be ignored. Ever. Of course, this is the interpretation presented in the book. It could be true, but the cognitive/logical-deductive process, in terms of taxological, and decision-making steps and processes to reach this clinical conclusion is completely ignored in the book. Of course, this book tells a story, and it is not meant to be used and/or viewed as a diagnostic manual. Making a clinical diagnosis in areas at the intersection of the mental and the physical,²¹ is ex-

¹⁸ “Jazz,” in this case, and only from a theoretical standpoint, especially given the current development and statements by the very individual at the center of this book.

¹⁹ This also speaks to the importance of solid psychotherapeutic efforts before any pharmacological or surgical intervention is applied, contrary to the claim that psychotherapy in this area is “conversion therapy” in the negative sense of the term, which is in itself problematic, given the “metanoetic” component of such healthcare practice.

²⁰ Just to name a few. This is certainly not the place to discuss the clinical details around activation or lack thereof the SRY gene, or about DSDs such as (C)AIS, 5-ARD, OD, MRKH, Turner, Klinefelter, or to talk about karyotype analysis, etc.

²¹ Although the vast majority of clinical issues could present a psychosomatic component.

tremely difficult, and that's precisely why the manuals we use in a clinical setting are called *diagnostic* and *statistical* (thus neither *etiological*, nor *ontological*) manuals of mental disorders (DSM). However, my concern with using this book in class is predicated upon the fact that, without proper clinical and scientific training, which takes several years – not a few hours per semester, delivered to fully²² formed adults and not children – **books like this could be misinterpreted by loving, well-meaning, open-minded but medically/scientifically untrained, uninformed or misinformed parents who might cause very serious damage to their children.**

- The child likes both trucks and mermaid costumes. No further interpretation²³ needed. While this type of behavior is statistically uncommon,²⁴ even when accounting for variables on the level of upbringing, education, sociocultural and/or ethno-religious factors, **boys can play with mermaid costumes, and girls can play with trucks.** This is healthy and should be welcomed as part of an appropriate development. To claim that only boys could²⁵ play with trucks (and vice versa, in the case of girls) is an attack on the healthy development of the child. It is unscientific and dangerous. Just as antiscientific and dangerous is the claim that playing with trucks makes a girl automatically a boy.
- The child's brothers told her that this was girl stuff because that's the general assumption. An assumption, as evidenced by the considerations above, fully grounded in both science and empirical²⁶ observation and experience. Again, no further interpretation needed.
- The child's brothers told her that this was girl stuff but *did* so in order to provoke and/or offend Jazz. Certainly, a possibility. Read any scientific paper in the areas (or much better: Literally-

²² Neuro-anatomically/-functionally.

²³ Read: "pseudo-psycho-analytical" inquiry.

²⁴ I.e., boys tend to play with trucks more than girls do and, conversely, girls tend to play with mermaid costumes more than boys do.

²⁵ And, even more concerningly, *should*.

²⁶ Both subjective/personal and cultural/social.

ask-any-parent-of-siblings) and you will find out that, yes, siblings provoke and offend each other. In no way this behavior is indicative of the fact that Jazz was not a boy, and it is a girl instead.

- The child's brothers told her that this was girl stuff but *did not* do so in order to provoke and/or offend Jazz. Jazz perception of this was incorrect. This does not make the child physically or psychologically ill, it is just a question of inappropriate interpretation of behavior and emotion (both internally and externally, as multiple fMRI studies and the literature in general indicate)

Similar arguments could be made about many other sentences in this book, for instance *"whenever I Int out, I had to put on my boy clothes again, this made me mad!"* It could be what the child actually says this is. The child does not want to put on boy clothes again. Any further interpretation, besides what is commonly perceived as a very common behavior in children in general, at this developmental stage, is not well founded, at this level. The same analysis, in all these steps, can be applied to all the following books, thus I will only reference it here and I will not repeat it below.

Book 2. A boy named Penelope (*Born Ready. The True Story of a Boy Named Penelope*)

This book presents similar logical fallacies, circular thinking, and misinterpreted or misconstrued assumptions. To quote just a few, I can start with the very first sentence of the book: "I'm no ordinary kid. I'm a ninja." Again, another example of questionable cognitive merging of dreaming, exploring, and developing in a non-judgmental way, with *confusing* messages. As in the previous book, this logical sequence thus sees the subject of the experience described as both displaying behaviors that are deemed empirically verifiable/visible²⁷ with the rehearsal and training toward the future, i.e., "pretending" (see, a few pages later "transfer some of my ninja powers to help her understand") in the etymological sense of moving, tending, striving towards, more specifically stretching forth, and pa-

²⁷ For instance, the fact that ninjas are strong and smart **and the tautological claim that ninjas have ninjas names.**

rametrically “demanding,”²⁸ as in “demanding that other people recognize me as I want to be recognized,” regardless and/or at times in spite of external and verifiable factors. Of course, everybody has a right²⁹ to view himself/herself in the best way he or she would like to see himself/herself; however, demanding that others do so could be empirically and experientially inconsistent.³⁰ Basic examples of this would be demanding to be called a teacher without the proper training, experience, and/or expertise to do so. Of course, one might argue that the term “teacher” (similarly to the term “doctor”) could be “extended” parametrically, metaphorically, and figuratively to define admiration of one’s excellence in certain areas, regardless of the recognized/recognizable academic training and certifications/degrees demonstrating such excellence. Of course, recognizing this excellence is again predicated on the recognition *by others*, not oneself. In other words, I could claim to be the best psychologist ever, but if nobody else besides me recognizes this, it would make it a mistaken, false claim. Furthermore, even if this excellence were to be recognized by others, the selection process of this “other” group, just like design in a scientific study, should be subjected to scientific rigor, to avoid selection bias in the subject selection itself. In other words, one could not appeal to excellence for excellence itself as in the now common saying: “eminence-based science is not evidence-based science.”

Now, these issues might create further confusion in parents who are actually doing their best to find the right (group of) professionals to help their child. Are we to reject any type of excellence just because it might be predicated on false assumptions? Are we to reject all medical, clinical, scientific, pedagogical training? Of course not. There are multiple situations where an appeal to authority is indeed the best option, particularly when such authority is exercised in an area which is to a very great extent foreign to us, to our experiences, and to our training. An example of this would be trusting your surgeon to perform surgery on your knee:

a) Because you are not a surgeon yourself, and you do not possess the necessary training, clinical experience, and degree/board certification, and

b) Because the surgeon **does not have to have the same experience**

²⁸ Lat./it. *pretendere* = to demand vs. *domandare* = to ask .

²⁹ Moral/ethical, social, and legal.

³⁰ Another example: “Because everyone thinks I’m a girl.”

as yourself (i.e., he/she does not have to have experienced a similar medical issue in his/her knee or have had surgery performed on her/him for similar reasons).

To clarify the second point, a professional **does not have to be you**³¹ **to be helpful to you**. In fact, in many cases diversity/difference is power: a professional might see problems and issues³² which you might be completely unaware of. Of course, any professional could make mistakes, but one would hope that experience, training, and degrees could at least to some important extent vouch for the integrity and ability of such a professional. If this professional is then able to tell a person that what the person perceived as a problem of societal and/or familial acceptance (as is claimed throughout the book) is actually a physical or mental problem, this does not constitute an attack, or offense, or a crime. It is a tool predicated on verifiable (scientifically speaking) truths used to help the person. To be blunter, in clinical settings, calling someone *mentally ill* (or, more properly calling someone as affected by a *mental illness*) is not different³³ from calling someone *physically ill*. The fact that a person, in our case, a child, might struggle with certain (in this specific case, sex/gender) identity issues, and could be therefore labeled³⁴ with a mental health disorder, is not different than calling (as an example) a professional athlete with a knee injury, someone with a physical disorder. I do not call the first person “crazy” or “stupid” or “immoral” or “evil” (etc.) just as I do not call the second person “weak” or “faulty” or a “loser” (etc.). I should always demonstrate respect, integrity, honesty, love, and tolerance. Let’s restate this: “If a doctor is labeling something in a person’s behavior³⁵ as “mentally ill” the doctor is not saying that the person is *bad*. Even in the most objectively assumed bad behaviors³⁶ a doctor refrains from calling the person “bad,”³⁷ but will label the behavior “bad.” Of course, at times we all get so attached to a relatively small (though prone to increase in size) part of ourselves such as a certain behavior,

³¹ Read: your group, your affiliation, your self-identification, etc.

³² Medical, clinical, etc.

³³ Ethically, morally, and clinically.

³⁴ Again, clinically.

³⁵ Or emotion, cognitive process, clinical presentation, affect, etc.

³⁶ Killing someone, abusing someone, etc.

³⁷ In the etymological sense “*captivus*,” i.e., “prisoner”

emotion, thought, etc., that if someone else, even if qualified, calls that clinically “ill”³⁸ it might *feel* offensive, but it is neither an offense, nor a lie, nor an attack on our identity or self. It is simply a tool for healing. Not telling the truth might feel good in the moment,³⁹ but it will ultimately create far more damage that either the child or the parent⁴⁰ could have envisioned. Logically speaking, it would be the same as telling a person: **“If this feels good to you, it must be good for you.”** Of course, to some extent we are our best therapist, because being an expert means having (had) an experience, and we are the only ones who have lived in our bodies since birth.⁴¹ However, everything about us can get sick, including our self-perception, proprioception, minds, and bodies. This is why someone affected by diabetes mellitus might be told not to eat meat, or another piece of chocolate cake, despite the fact that “it would feel so good to have another one.” What might be partially harmful at first, could become life-threatening.

And because of that, I should also not necessarily expect, wish, or want any doctor telling us **how we should live our lives** in terms of assimilating, flattening, our true self to be just like everybody else,⁴² because we are indeed beautiful in our uniqueness. This precisely why *we should be free to be ourselves*. I should be free to be me. This means that a caring, inclusive, well-trained, helpful, open-minded, nurturing professional should help me realize the beauty that **is** me, not telling me (or agreeing with me with what I believe at that stage) that I will feel better if I will become something different than myself. This is not only not helpful; it could be extremely dangerous. One of the examples that I⁴³ sadly encounter in some very hurt, broken, suffering patients at the beginning of their therapy is their full wish to die, to disappear from this world, to fade away in nothingness. If I try⁴⁴ to convince them other-

³⁸ Ger. *Übel*

³⁹ Ibid., same page: “I will make a plan to tell everyone I love what I know. What is that? You are a boy.”

⁴⁰ Or the ill-informed professional who did not address this appropriately.

⁴¹ Metaphysical assumptions aside.

⁴² As far too often “group identity” policies do with the pretense of helping people.

⁴³ This time talking about my psychological practice.

⁴⁴ And I most certainly do, as it is the right ethical, professional, and moral thing to do.

wise, they often perceive this as an attack, not dissimilarly from what one could call hate speech and infringement on personal liberty. Again “do not tell me how to live – or end – my life. My body (mind, spirit, identity, etc.), my choice.” One could argue that “Yes, it sure is,” but as with any other choice it could be misinformed, mistaken, confused, hurt, suffering. My job and my moral obligation are to go against what these patients might define as their true self at that moment, and push them (gently, openly, lovingly) beyond what they are able to see as a possibility, at that time. Their very sense of self, their whole identity is *mis-taken*. I should not simply agree with them to make them feel better in the moment, because this won’t be the truth, it won’t last, it is not what they need. And this is again a central issue: **I confuse what I want with what I need. I confuse healing with relief.** And this happens far more often and more intensely (plenty of scientific literature in this area),⁴⁵ when we are suffering, and even more so if we do not want to admit to ourselves that we are suffering, and that one of the things we think could ease our suffering actually makes the suffering worse. This is the very nature of addiction. **Confusing wants with needs has this effect:** Telling someone that they are what they feel or think or behave⁴⁶ as they are, or what they pretend⁴⁷ they are, **is not healing; it is relief.**

And that is precisely why we should honor our teachers much, much, much more than we do in our society. Schools are indeed the extension of our family (in the best possible sense of the term), and teachers should be mentors, guides, because they are wonderful in what they do. They should make our children *whole*.⁴⁸ Children should thus be accompanied,⁴⁹ stimulated, in a way to extract beauty and wisdom from them, not the other way around, which is what the books describes as optimal: “Well, Penelope. Today you’re my teacher.” This is one of the most problematic parts of the book. It is masked as a nice, tolerant, generous, and warm way to see how truly wonderful, and smart, and empowered, and sensitive, and strong our children are (which is itself a true and great

⁴⁵ See brief bibliographical suggestions provided below.

⁴⁶ The commonly referenced “emotion-cognition-behavior” triad.

⁴⁷ Again, in the strictly etymological-clinical sense.

⁴⁸ Which, etymologically speaking, is connected to *healthy*, and even *holy*.

⁴⁹ Lat. *Educare*.

thing), but it is actually putting enormous pressure⁵⁰ on those children who seek – at times without being aware of this need – education, guidance, and role models. To utilize the same medical analogy, it would be utterly disheartening to see a surgeon telling a child in the operating room, “Well, Penelope. Today you’re my surgeon.” Of course, children also learn by playing, role-playing, and make-believe,⁵¹ but there should always be a distinction between the person who does not yet have full mastery of the topic (above all if the topic is as complex as one’s identity) and the one who does. Plus, if we have such huge respect and admiration for people like doctors who only see children on a less regular basis to address clinical issues, shouldn’t we have even more respect and admiration for our teachers, who literally see our children every day, and help them grow, develop, and become who they really are?

And again, just as the scientific literature is extremely clear about the fact that there is a wonderful, incredibly complex variation between how⁵² a man can be a man and a woman can be a woman, it is also extremely clear that pretending that, simply because an individual might feel different or completely opposed to what a certain society claims is the proper behavior for their own sex, this does not warrant the person having to be another sex. This aspect is at the center of the very last two pages of the book, where, after presenting the “ninja-value” of (masculine) strength as admirable throughout the narration, and despite the fact that this type of stereotyping could be harmful, Penelope still has to bow to the fact that, in order to be recognized as who she is,⁵³ she has to act⁵⁴ as the opposite sex. Two things come to mind in this context. The first, also a well-known fact in research for at least fifty years, is the fact that if I were to divide children in three categories (1. Children who are not liked/are hated by other classmates; 2. Children who are liked/loved; 3. Children who are neither liked nor hated), Categories 1 and 2 are often

⁵⁰ We are not talking about proper alternative pedagogical modalities such as Montessori or Steiner – I used to be an elementary school teacher back in the day, and I still admire many aspects of their pedagogy.

⁵¹ And I should certainly allow them to help us in our jobs, when the situation is appropriate and safe.

⁵² Thus, not “that.”

⁵³ Not being socially transparent.

⁵⁴ Again, in the clinical sense of behavioral activation.

predictors of much better psychological outcomes than Category 3. Rather than using harsh and unscientific terms such as “this child is only looking for attention, that’s why he/she is acting differently than the norm,” we should actually truly understand what this means, i.e., **children want attention. We need to make sure that the attention they want is the one they need.**

The other issue is much more complex, although it is relatively easy to solve with a proper knowledge of neuropsychological aspects in conjunction with basic knowledge of historical, and possibly developmental, linguistics. It is the issue of **sex vs. gender**. I am more than happy to address this in a different section, although let me also point out that the artificially constructed separation between these terms, together with a wide array of neologisms and derived adjectivization, is a phenomenon which does not have solid evidence, beyond certain “post-modernist poetic” constructions. In truth, poetry –and the arts in general – can tell us much more profound things about ourselves than a laboratory exploration. However, to see the very biological origin of the term gender (rooted in purely Indo-European etymology, through **gene*, cognate of the Greek γενετικό, as in *genetics*, *genes*, *genome*, *genitalia*, but also *Genesis*, *gynecology*, and even the very word for the creative sex, i.e., *woman*: γυναίκα [Greek] женщина [Russian], žena/жена [Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian], etc.). Rather than trying to destroy the very origin and creative power of the term “gender,” we should honor the very beings who are the embodiment of creation itself: **Women**. In this sense, gender is not only extremely related to the term sex, but it is actually the very synonym in the area of mechanical/physical activation/activity. In other words,⁵⁵ if the dictionary definition of sex is “gender, or a state of being either male or female,” the root is through Lat. *sexus*, itself connected with dividing, separating, cutting.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Pun intended.

⁵⁶ Same etymology as C-section, both in the “C” of caesarian, and in the very term “sec*t*ion,” which has nothing to do with Caesar Augustus, itself connected, according to most scholars, to either τίκτω (same meaning as above: procreation, generation), or ἐξίς or condition, state, as in “*Stato di gravidanza*” (=pregnancy).

Therefore, adding any other⁵⁷ descriptor such identity, behavior, expression, etc. can help distinguish certain aspects of the way sex/gender manifests itself inwardly and outwardly, just the as the concept of being green is distinguishable from green(-ness) itself, and yet one cannot exist without (and is entirely defined by) the other. Green can be a tree, a leaf, a book, a shirt, or the ““Green Mountain State.” In any case, as evidenced above, adding more descriptors does not change the ontological or⁵⁸ biological nature of the concept and its manifestation (epiphany) in such reality.

Book 3. *Jacob's New Dress*

My analysis of this book will be the shortest, as most of the issues it presents are substantially equivalent, and in some cases fully coextensive with the ones noted in the previous two books. In fact, most of the narrative focuses on what most professionals and parents would simply define as occurring within standard / normal behavior in children. And yet again, we are faced with the false premise that there is something narrowing, controlling, choking, moralizing, dehumanizing, labeling, ostracizing, or at least not individual(istic), “special” enough about normality. The main character in the book struggles and succeeds in fighting the repressive nature of what normal society imposes on Jacob, despite the repeated attempts of “society”⁵⁹ to “imprison” Jacob in something he is not. Of course, all the *topoi* of standard literary narrative techniques are present, including the opponent, adversary, the “bad guy” Christopher, who behaves as (yet again) “normal society – the expected bad kid,”⁶⁰ making fun of the main character.

As expected, both mom and dad are surprised and puzzled by their son’s behavior,⁶¹ especially because the book clearly claims⁶² to be against

⁵⁷ Socially constructed or otherwise, although the latter begs the question: constructed by whom, other than someone in some type of society?

⁵⁸ To remain “**grounded in the ground,**” as in “material reality.”

⁵⁹ Which is quite similar, from a psychological standpoint, to certain conspiracy-prone descriptors such as “they don’t want you to know” and the like.

⁶⁰ To go further in our conspiracy theory version of the “facts,” it is quite amusing to see that the “*Christ-bearer*” (Χριστόφορος) is opposed, on the very next page, by the “Black Witch Dress” Jacob, as in the best Netflix narratives.

⁶¹ I would argue: to an extent that far exceeds normal parental concern regarding dress codes.

gender stereotyping, and yet fails to notice how the “bad character” relates to all the stereotypically male things (armor, dinosaurs, etc.) while the “good character” gravitates to all the stereotypically female things. This is nothing new, as it is simply a binary reversal of the story of the previous book, except that the novelty in this book is to add some pseudo-historical unscientific claims about the societal norms which were predictors of this stereotyping. Oxymorons aside,⁶³ there are sentences such as “Not very long ago little girls couldn’t wear pants” – a statement that only applies to such a minute part of history, something less than 185 years in 5000 years of Indo-European anthropological clothing and costume research.⁶⁴ This part of the book is not too different from the embarrassing moments of certain claims made in the media that neckties are a sign of British imperialism⁶⁵ or the fact that blue jeans represent US supremacy, despite that the very name of this item defines its origin,⁶⁶ and yet some people seem to ignore that this garment represents the most autochthonous folklore piece of ethnic-tribal clothing in that part of the world.⁶⁷

Again, mom and dad are not depicted as necessarily bad, just unaware, uneducated. They do their best to make sense of the situation, but again they mistake⁶⁸ a psycho-somatized confusion between trigger and trauma, between healing and relief, and they attribute the suspension of phenomenological symptomatology (i.e., Jacob has difficulties breathing) as an indication that they have to change their attitude toward things. Finally, a nice addendum to the recipe comes from the usual neolo-

⁶² As in all the other examples above.

⁶³ And there are plenty for all in this volume.

⁶⁴ Where one of the clearest examples of such fallible assumption is the differences between Graeco-Roman culture (and, to some extent, fertile crescent / Unani, Perso-Berber-Arab and, by extension, Protosemitic/Canaanite culture) and their proclivity for tunics and long dresses, in juxtaposition to what I know from research on Germano-Celtic and to some extent Slavic, Thracian, and Illyrian cultures (to name a few) and their preference for pants.

⁶⁵ Despite the fact that they originate in the Dalmatian part of Croatia, hence the name *kravata* as a basis for most European and non-European languages.

⁶⁶ Jean or Genova, in the Italian Liguria.

⁶⁷ Of course, the fact that Genova was the city of Columbus, and the fact that he might have been a *marrano* does not help the narrative.

⁶⁸ Or rather, the author is the culprit in this sense.

gisms⁶⁹ such as “dress-thing” and the grand finale with the confusion between plot and (absence of a) moral of the story, with Christopher yelling that, because Jacob wears female clothes he is now part of the girls’ team. Again, the reader is gently accompanied into believing that this is an offensive statement, a mild form of hate speech⁷⁰ but the truth is this is precisely the message of the book: The identical essence, in ontological terms, between an extracted displayed behavior and the identification of the stereotypical owner of the behavior with the new identity of the carrier. Of course, since the author -rather the authors- cannot escape their conditioned, society-induced, subconscious “self”, they still present the masculine archetype of the armor as its binary -binary- opposite, i.e., “*a soft, cottony, magic armor*” of which the main character, **is proud of**.

A perfect script. For an adult novel. For children, I would rather see more pedagogically sound literature.

To conclude, my examination is by no means an attack or an empty criticism of the parameters, ideas, and overall thought process that the school, the administration, all the teachers and all the staff put into including these books and other teaching materials in the curriculum. I share the exact same perspective, and I want to restate that **I have full trust and admiration for what you do**. I also believe that most of you might have acted and are still acting out of love, care, integrity, and honesty, and all of this is evident in the way you interact with each other and with the students.

I simply want to shed some light on some of the darkest and dangerous aspects of this type of material, which, without deep and solid scientifically informed analysis, might be considered appropriate and educational, but contain far too many issues to be considered healthy for our children.

Thank you,

David Tomasi

⁶⁹ Which we argued elsewhere (see bibliography) is an intrinsic problem in many cultures, but in this context particularly of English-speakers in the US, given the progressive distance between usage, understanding, and etymology of this simple (simplified?) Germanic language.

⁷⁰ An oxymoron in itself.

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III. ASPIRATION CORNER

Irony, Fragmentation and Urbanity*

Evangelos Kalfopoulos (University of Sofia)

Abstract: The ties between the concept of irony on the one hand and urbanity will be explored in this study. Philosophically, irony has emerged with Socrates and his teaching in the city of Athens, in its agora. The urban setting and its relevance in the development of philosophical irony is further hinted at, if someone takes into consideration Cicero's term for it as 'dissimulatio urbana'; although the use of the adjective urban here means mostly refined and is contrasted with the more clumsy and coarse sense of humor of the rural people, it can be maintained that urban environment contributed to the nature of this kind of dissimulation. The ancient city itself, as a context of Socratic irony, is also a place of fragmentation in two principal ways. Firstly in the sense of the various experts, be it technicians or sophists, who boastfully suggest their own versions of virtue – while Socrates is portrayed (by Plato mostly) as trying to find a unified definition of virtue, but doesn't seem to succeed in this endeavor. Secondly in terms of politics – a term itself derived from polis (city) – which appear to be in a fragmented form, not only because of the existing political fractions of the oligarchic and democratic party, but also since everyone is able to address the assembly and articulate his positions. Irony is the Socratic way of dealing with these fragmentations without making them disappear under a unitary metaphysical view, as is the case of Plato and his academy. Therefore it will be shown that Socratic irony is a phenomenon that sprang within the city limits and the urbanite way of living and tries to accommodate the fragmentations that this way of life provides for human beings without reducing them to the famous platonic onto-theological way of think-

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ing. Finally, the consequences that this kinship has for modern cities, philosophical irony and fragmentation will be discussed as a conclusion.

1. Introduction

Irony is usually taken to be a mode of speaking, a trope of writing; when taken in a more theoretical context can also be considered to be an articulation of a way of doing philosophy, a way of living. The first person to inaugurate the philosophical aspect of irony, which we will discuss here, is generally believed to be Socrates (c 470-399 BC). There are of course many issues in surveying the thought of Socrates, even more when someone claims to attribute a philosophical importance to a characteristic that was exercised mainly as a means of expression. But nevertheless, the image of Socrates as an ironist has again gained prominence primarily in the works of Vlastos (1991) and Nehamas (1998). We accept the characterization of the historical Socrates as an ironist and we will try, in the present paper, to explore the urban context as a possible factor in establishing this way of expressing and subsequently thinking. We will argue that the historical Socrates, since he was confronted in the agora of his beloved city of Athens with a multitude of opinions and proclamations of teaching virtue, he developed his ironical skills in a way that allowed him to accommodate this fragmented philosophical landscape without succumbing to the need to provide a reconfigured or systematic way of thinking. Instead his most famous pupil, Plato, sought to provide a much more systematic way of thinking, through his *Academia* mostly, thus interpreting his teacher's stance as one that pointed to a certain metaphysical system. Plato's hostility to that fragmented way of the Athenian intellectual- and not only- life has prompted him to provide a different framework of a city and governance, articulated more famously in the *Republic* and the picture of the philosopher-king. More often this dichotomy is articulated in political terms between democracy and oligarchy or open society and autarchism. But the ironic way of approaching these matters is more profound and is not reduced in any political dichotomy of the sort (although it might be partly reflected on them). This means that for example Plato is not taken here to misinterpret Socrates, but rather as providing a viable interpretation of his philosophy, especially since his teacher was an open-ended thinker.

It seems that the distinction between a historical and a fictitious Socrates is an important one to make, because the former has philoso-

phical characteristics that the later one lacks and in some cases even contradicts. Following Kahn (1996), we can distinguish between a maximal and a minimal view concerning historical Socrates¹. The maximal view, taken by Vlastos, has it that the historical Socrates is portrayed in the early and some of the middle platonic dialogues² up to the introduction of the theory of recollection in *Meno*. In these dialogues Plato is taken to represent through his fictitious Socrates the philosophy of the historical one, whereas from the *Meno* onwards Plato's fictitious Socrates is used as a mouthpiece for the former's theoretical position. The minimal view, articulated by Kahn, takes as a portrayal of the actual Socrates only Plato's *Apology*, because in his view "...the *Apology* can be properly regarded as a quasi-historical document, like Thucydides' version of Pericles' Funeral Oration"³. I intend to follow mostly Kahn's view here and take the *Apology* as a primary source for the reconstruction of my view of the Socratic irony, in the absence of any direct tradition by Socrates himself.

Following the Foucauldian definition of genealogy as the opposite of the search for origins, we are not presenting here a possible birth of irony from the urban setting, but rather we are making the claim that the urban setting frequented by Socrates might have a more profound impact on his conception and use of irony in the philosophical context. We will start by examining the definition of ironia in Cicero, which is the first hint of a relationship between irony and urbanity. Then we will turn our attention to irony and urban fragmentation in Athens of the Socratic period. And finally, through the romantic use of fragments and irony, we will try to establish a lineage that could view philosophical irony as an urban characteristic in the modern period.

2. Irony and Urbanitas in Cicero

The first and only explicit connection between irony and urbanity is to

¹ Both views share the primacy of Plato as a philosophical source for the historical Socrates over Xenophon and Aristotle.

² See the division of the dialogues in Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: ironist and moral philosopher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 46-47.

³ Charles H. Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: The philosophical use of a literary form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 88.

be found in the work *De Oratore* of Cicero (106-43 BC). This definition of irony is closely followed by Quintilian (c35-c100 AD). The work *De oratore* is a dialogue that concerns the nature of rhetoric and the definition of irony is provided as humorous rhetorical trope. The definition and the full excerpt are as follows:

"Irony (dissimulatio urbana) too gives pleasure, when your words differ from your thoughts, not in the way of which I spoke earlier, when you assert exactly the contradictory, as Crassus did to Lamia, but when the whole tenor of your speech shows you to be solemnly jesting, what you think differing continuously from what you say... Fannius in his 'Chronicles' records that Africanus (the one named Aemilianus) was outstanding in this kind of thing, and describes him by the Greek word 'dissembler' (εἰρωνία), but, upon the evidence of those who know these subjects better than I do, my opinion is that Socrates far surpassed all others for accomplished within this strain of irony or assumed simplicity. This is a choice variety of humor and blended with austerity, and suited to public speaking as well as to the conversation of gentlemen".⁴

Let us first start with the reception of the above definition of irony from two scholars that, in their relevant discussion, shaped Socratic studies in the late 20th century. We start with Gregory Vlastos and proceed with the reaction of Alexander Nehamas to the former's treatment of the definition of irony, before turning to our own account. Gregory Vlastos in his groundbreaking treatment of Socratic irony follows the aforementioned two Roman authors to argue for a concept of irony that is different from the classical Greek meaning of the word εἰρωνεία, which is taken to mean dissembling and it is "...commonly used to denote sly, intentionally deceptive speech or conduct..."⁵. He finds in the work of Cicero first and later Quintilian the prevalence of the positive undertone *dissimulatio* on the negative aspect of dissemblance, and states that this change in meaning is due to Socrates as a prime example of irony. Vlastos writes "Laundered and deodorised, it now betokens the height of urbanity, elegance and good taste: T5 Cicero, *De oratore* 2,67:

⁴ Cicero, *De Oratore (On the Orator)*, translated by E.W. Sutton (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical library, 1967), 2,269, 271.

⁵ Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: ironist and moral philosopher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 25.

Urbana etiam dissimulatio est, cum alia dicuntur ac sentias...Socratem opinor in hac ironia dissimulantiaque longe lepore et humanitate omnibus praestitisse. Genus est perelegans and cum gravitate salsum..."⁶. Quintilian writing some two centuries after Cicero follows him and affirms that positive character of latin ironia contrary to the classical Greek εἰρωνεία, adding that irony more than a trope can characterize the totality of a person's life (*vita universa*)⁷. Vlastos, focusing on the word *dissimulatio* of the above definition, goes on to search from this point on for the ironist Socrates who enabled that transformation by creating "...a new form of life realised in himself..."⁸ and provides many examples for his playful irony, which culminate in the notion of complex irony. So for him a dissimulation, a complex irony, of this sort is contrasted with simple irony and defined as follows: "In simple irony what is said just isn't what is meant: taken in its ordinary, commonly understood, sense the statement is simply false. In complex irony what is said both is and isn't what is meant: its surface content is meant to be true in one sense, false in another"⁹. He identifies four such ironies that can be found in the earlier dialogues of the platonic corpus and they refer to his simultaneous disavowal and avowal of knowledge, of being a teacher of virtue, of doing politics and of his erotic stance towards Alcibiades¹⁰. In all the above cases Vlastos provides with textual evidence where Socrates either verbally or in opposition of words and deeds provides for the others a paradox.

Nehamas finds that the device of complex irony is too analytical and provides a false sense of clarity into Socratic irony. He claims that the distinctive element in Socratic – and perhaps all real forms of – irony is that it is a puzzle from anyone except the ironist: in the particular case of Socrates he constitutes a paradox even for Plato, who tried through his dialogues to respond to the fact "...that he (Socrates) is aware that he lacks what he believes the art of living requires but is still their best practitio-

⁶ Ibid., 27.

⁷ Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 55, n. 37.

⁸ Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: ironist and moral philosopher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991), 29.

⁹ Ibid., 31.

¹⁰ Ibid., 237.

ner”¹¹. This opaqueness, this silence of Socrates can be also found on the different - than Vlastos’ - treatment Nehamas offers to the definitions of Cicero and Quintilian, with which we are mainly concerned here. Nehamas rightly observes that in the original Ciceronian definition it is more than certain that irony is taken to mean exactly the contrary of what the ironist is saying. Even more surprisingly Cicero says that irony is not to be confused with the act when you say the exact opposite of what you mean and provides the example of Crassus and Lamia. For Nehamas the real clue of the definition is to be found if we retain the simplicity of the Latin term ‘alius’, to mean just ‘other’ and not ‘quite other’ as Vlastos does and therefore allocates the meaning of contrary¹². More than that he is pointing to the fact that Cicero says a little bit further in the definition that what you think is different from what you say, and the whole tenor of your speech points to the fact that you are jesting. He concludes saying that speaking differently is not the same as saying the opposite and that it “...is not deceit, but neither is it revelation”¹³, thus highlighting his claim about the opaqueness of Socratic irony. Nehamas, starting from this point of criticism against Vlastos’, view rejects the latter’s notion of complex ironies, because they are based on the dichotomy between true and false. For Nehamas, Socratic irony is “Intermediate between lying and truthfulness, it shares features with both: like truthfulness, concealment does not distort the truth; like lying it does not reveal it. Once we have rejected the view that irony consists simply in saying the contrary of what you mean, concealment cannot, even when the irony is detected, lead us to the ironist’s real meaning”¹⁴.

Both philosophers agree though in their basic claim that Socratic irony does not necessarily – in the degree of necessity found in the treatment of the Greek εἰρωνεία at least – entail deceit and wrongdoing (although Nehamas is softer on this point). But their main difference lies in the importance they both attribute to Socratic irony as a way of life (per Vlastos) or an art of living (per Nehamas). The distinction Nehamas does between two strands of philosophy, the theoretical and the practi-

¹¹ Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 86.

¹² Ibid., 55.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 62.

cal, helps explain the different approaches. According to Nehamas at least, Vlastos begins with the theoretical endeavour to make Socratic irony more transparent and to place it closer to theorising. He tries to make sense of Socrates's paradox and he implements his device of complex ironies to achieve that. Nehamas on the other hand, places the weight of his analysis on the practical side of philosophy and therefore thinks that opacity and silence on the part of Socrates is essential to make sense of irony as a cornerstone of the Socratic paradox of living. According to Bernstein, both of these approaches are compatible and even complementary on their goal to make sense of Socrates, but their different emphasis on the analytical and the practical criterion is an important one¹⁵. Although I am in favour of that view and the importance of these two thinkers is truly enormous in treating Socratic irony, I would like in what follows to propose a genealogical approach that might highlight the Socratic paradox and is related with urbanity.

Both these thinkers do not pay enough attention to the word "urbana", but instead focus mainly on the word "dissimulatio". The adjective of course is accountable for the positive sense of the noun in this case, but I will try to suggest that it might be more that the mere concept of refinement that is usually attached to it. In fact the noun phrase "dissimulatio urbana" is usually translated as irony. That would suggest that the ciceronian adjective "urbanus", taken in this context to mean mostly refined, is inseparable from the noun to deliver the desired meaning "irony". But the translation as refinement is not completely satisfactory. To be refined implies for someone else to be coarse, and that is how it is usually taken to be, the humour of the persons of the city was more refined, more nuanced than the jokes of the people living in the rural areas. And to suggest that irony is a specific trope of urban dissimulation, leaves things to be explored.

Let us first detect the various meanings "urbanitas" has in the work of Cicero, who is perhaps the first to coin and use the abstract noun, followed by Quintilian¹⁶. For Cicero according to Ramage there are three

¹⁵ Richard J. Bernstein, *Ironic Life*. (Malden, MA: Polity, 2016).

¹⁶ Edwin S. Ramage, "Urbanitas: Cicero and Quintilian, a Contrast in Attitudes." *The American Journal of Philology*, 84, no. 4, (1963), 390–414, <https://doi.org/10.2307/293235>. Accessed 7 May 2022.

ideas related to urbanity: firstly “...it is a general urban refinement”¹⁷, which contradicts usually with the city as a physical space and denotes the way of the city. Secondly urbanitas is taken to be “...a careful, refined wit...”¹⁸ contrasted with a general humour or a lower type of humour that Cicero despised. Thirdly “urbanitas” is connected with a certain way of speaking that was exhibited by the people of the city and cannot be completely accounted for even from Cicero himself, but seems to have to do with “...a certain tone of voice and a careful urban pronunciation”¹⁹. These characteristics of the sophisticated notion of urbanitas during Cicero’s time need to be further supplemented by two other elements.

The first of these is the opposition between city dwellers and rustics. That opposition was a fact before Cicero’s time and as we will see it is a fact even for Athens of the time of Socrates. Cicero is explicit on its existence and he contributes to another distinction between the real urbanites and the pretentious “perurbani”²⁰, who are inferior to the rustics. That opposition is relevant to our discussion of urbanity because it will allow us to detect the reasons for the urban refinement. The second is the nature of this urbanity and how it can be acquired by the persons exhibiting it. Cicero is explicit that the characteristic of urbanity is not premised upon any kind of education instead “...would presumably consider life in Rome and association with refined Romans as more contributing factors”²¹. Of course urbanity is related to a certain degree of education and cultivation, but it is not exhausted by them. The case of “perurbani”, or hyper-urbanites, is characteristic, since this type of person takes cultivation too far and losses the true urbanite feeling. In the time of Quintilian though refined wit becomes more clear and tangible, thus enabling him to offer not just a definition but also a method by which it can be inscribed in the speech and comportment of a

¹⁷ Edwin S. Ramage, “Early Roman Urbanity.” *The American Journal of Philology*, 81, no. 1(1960), 65–72, <https://doi.org/10.2307/291760>. Accessed 7 May 2022.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Edwin S. Ramage, “Urbanitas: Cicero and Quintilian, a Contrast in Attitudes.” *The American Journal of Philology*, 84, no. 4 (196), 390–414, <https://doi.org/10.2307/293235>. Accessed 7 May 2022.

contemporary Roman. We should of course note, that although the primary reason for this difference between the two authors is the progressive stability of the concept of urbanitas as per Ramage (1963), it is nevertheless important to state the position from which the two Romans are writing from. Cicero is a native of the city of Rome, representing the optimates party and relating with the maintenance of urbanitas in Rome – which he saw under erosion from rustic ways- with the preservation of the Republic. Cicero was a staunch supporter of the senate and the republic and he fought against its dissolution and fall into the Roman Empire, a fight that cost him literally his head. On the other hand Quintilian was born outside of Rome, in Spain, and he is writing well into the age of the Roman Empire. It would seem more natural for Cicero to defend a more elusive sense of urbanitas, restricted primarily to Roman citizens and especially to the optimates.

One also needs to be reminded that Cicero, as a representative of the classic Roman Culture of his time, was always keen on stating the affinities between Rome and classical Athens. Indeed the relationship between Rome and classical Greece was a complex one and probably was a source of deliberation for the Romans as we can be evidenced by their claim to be descendants of the Trojan Aeneas in the Augustine poem of Virgil's *Aeneiad*. Cicero is making constant effort to link Rome and Roman urbanity in particular with Athens and its classical period, which played the role of the School of all Greeks, as Stated in Pericle's funeral oration. But as Ramage (1960) states, although there is a parallel feeling of Greek 'urbanitas' in Pericle's funeral oration and also parallels with the Greek word ἀστεῖος it would nevertheless sprang in Rome independently of any Greek influence. Nevertheless, one should have this point of Cicero's linkage of Athens to Rome in mind.

Turning now to Socrates and trying to see to what exactly amounts this urbanity, this refinement that shaped his wit and helped it take the form of Socratic irony that became emblematic for its carrier and also through him acquired a deeper philosophical meaning. It is a well-known fact that Socrates travelled only rarely out of Athens, to perform his military duty in Potidaea, in Amphipoli and in Delium, as he himself inform us in the *Apology*²². Unlike the Sophists that were traveling throughout

²² All references to the *Apology* are from Plato, *Apology of Socrates*, translation by Harold North Fowler (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, 2005).

Greece to teach, Socrates remained all of his life in Athens and refused to be exiled even when he was convicted of disrespecting the Gods and corrupting the youth. Of course it can be argued that there was no need for an Athenian to travel abroad to get educated since Athens was the school of all Greece at the time. But nevertheless, the city played an important role in Socrates' overall formation. The irony through the city then arises in two occasions: in the Socratic search of virtue that is channeled towards its citizens; and in the complex attitude of Socrates towards the politics of his city. In both these cases Socrates was confronted by a fragmentary view of virtue, which, although he tried to overcome, he nevertheless never provided himself a closed and rigid definition of.

Let us first turn to the search for virtue and the knowledge of virtue. Now the concept of virtue is not taken here to merely imply ethical virtue, but rather and following Nehamas it is taken in a broader sense to mean "...the feature that accounts for something's being justifiably notable"²³ and notes the inevitable social dimension of the Greek word for virtue, ἀρετή. Socrates says in his apology that after receiving the news from the Delphic oracle that he was the wisest of all men started to inquire if there can be found anybody else that would prove wiser than him and, if not, at least to understand to what this wisdom consist of. So he goes first to the public men both of high and lower repute and finds out that they do not possess the excellence in public virtue, the wisdom, which the others thought of them to have, instead the reputation proved to be a wrong guide. Then he goes to the poets that excelled in their craft and he finds that also they are not entitled to be called wise, because they cannot give an account of their poems and concludes that it was not wisdom that helped them compose their poems, but nature and divine inspiration.

Finally he turns to the artisans. This class is more important for our argument because it is the most populous and the most characteristic of the city and the urban way of living. Although they are not the ones to exemplify the best specimen of the refinement that Cicero had in mind, this indispensably urban class must be where that same refinement was carved out against. Socrates says that he went to the hand-workers (χειροτέχνας) and he does at first find a sort of wisdom that he lacks, in contrast to the

²³ Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, 78.

first two classes. According to Nehamas, it is exactly that kind of knowledge of virtue that the artisans possess, a technical knowledge of virtue, that Socrates would like to have and that would enable him to transfer virtue to others, but he knows that he is lacking it, therefore being more wise than all of the ones that claim that they have it and are able to teach it to others. The same virtue or craftsmanship is said to be possessed by the poets as well; the problem with both artisans and poets is that, because of possessing technical knowledge of their art, they think that they can speak wisely, in possession of the relevant knowledge, for the other, the most important matters. For Nehamas these ‘most important matters’ was actually the good life, the art of living.

One more class of professional teachers of virtue, whom Socrates frequented in the streets of Athens but are implied but not being explicitly mentioned as a class in the *Apology* were the Sophists. Plato’s many early dialogues are discussions between the philosopher and some sophist; one can think of *Hippias Minor*, *Gorgias*, *Protagoras*, and *Meno*. It can be said that all four of them are concerned with issues that arose in the *Apology*, Hippias with an early form of Socratic intellectualism that is exemplified by his thesis that no one does wrong voluntarily, *Protagoras* and *Meno* with the teachability of virtue and *Gorgias* with the distinction between the philosopher and the rhetorician. Of course the main differences between Socrates and the Sophists are not just in the content they ascribed to virtue, but also in their practices. Especially the issue of having a fee for teaching virtue is important, because it rests upon a number of premises: that virtue is the most important topic there is, that its teaching can be achieved, that the teacher in question has the method of doing it and that there is a way to measure its success. Furthermore all the above require a form of boasting from the part of the sophist that touted them, and that also helps explain Socrates’ ironic stance as opposite to that arrogance. Socrates was putting all these premises in to questioning with his practice of elenchus.

We can say that Socrates, when turned to his fellow citizens to prove the Delphic oracle was confronted with a fragmented picture as to what was wisdom and to what virtue consisted of. This fragmented picture is best exemplified by the artisans, who through their fragmentary technical knowledge of their art were claiming the whole of the human life, or the whole of the political realm. Inevitably such claims to the whole came under intense scrutiny by Socrates.

Before we turn to the more overtly political fragmentation of the politi-

cal sphere, let us see if a unified Socratic response to this fragmentation is warranted. In the *Apology* Socrates articulates some positive moral and philosophical principles that can be argued are held by the historical person. According to the minimal view of Kahn, Socrates claims that philosophy is the search of wisdom, and he himself is a constant seeker of wisdom and not a teacher of it since he does not possess any; he claims that he does have "...practical good sense (phronesis) and moral excellence (arête)"²⁴; that the most important thing is not money and power but care for the soul, which is attained through just acts; that a life worth living is the examined life, the Socratic elenchus being the main tool for this examination and is always portrayed by Socrates as having negative results, not positive. Of course these characteristics are the prevalent in the *Apology* and, setting aside a possible allusion to the famous Socratic intellectualism and the unity of virtue (that is roughly that all virtue is basically wisdom and therefore a rational and intellectual capacity that can be in principle taught) a picture of Socrates as a seeker and ironist emerges. That picture was, according to Khan and Nehamas, interpreted by Plato in a way that would pave the way to the thorough metaphysical system of Forms, better elaborated in the *Republic*.

I now turn to the second domain of discussion where Socrates faced a fragmented landscape, which he tried to accommodate in his thinking not by providing a system of governance but through irony. The political landscape that was more present during Socrates' lifetime was the one of the Athenian Democracy. His views for the democratic regime were not favourable, yet he seems to be a model citizen that participated in his civil duties and in the battles, where he was commanded, and he rejected the oligarchic regime of the thirty tyrants, as equally. His stance towards the political realm is a form of complex irony for Vlastos, because Socrates claims in the *Gorgias* that his is the "...one of the few Athenians, not to say the only one, to engage in the true political art, and of the men today I am the only one to do politics (Gorgias 521 D)"²⁵, when just before he had denied doing politics. The same denial can be found in the *Apology* but there he distinguishes between the private and the public sphere. The passage is as follows: "A man who

²⁴ Charles H. Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: the Philosophical Use of a Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 90.

²⁵ Quoted in Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: ironist and moral philosopher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 240.

really fights for the right (τοῦ δίκαιου), if he is to preserve his life even for a little while, must be a private citizen, not a public man”²⁶. It is usually taken to be critical of the changing attitudes of the multitude in a democracy, but this reading is not warranted, since it is conceivable that a public man in an oligarchic regime might equally be in danger of his life. What is meant here is that justice and the perpetual seek for it cannot be a public matter, but rather it must be a private affair, away from any restrictions of the public sphere.

Plato of course interpreted his teacher in a different way, a way that was overtly critical for the democratic regime of Athens and pointed to a positive conception of justice. According to Boris Groys, Plato was the first to claim a totality for his political ideas and “...defines the philosopher, in contrast to the sophist, as someone who does not use language to represent, legitimate and defend private and partial interests, but instead conceives of society as a whole”²⁷. This totality is to be defended by the philosopher king and the citizens should restrict themselves to their place, as the totalitarian regime of the *Republic* states. This is the way that justice will be preserved in the ideal city, because justice is defined as “to do one’s business and not to be a busybody”²⁸, and hence the citizens should attend to their own affairs (τὰ αὐτοῦ πράττειν) and not to interfere in the affairs of others (μὴ πολυπραγμονεῖν) and to be quiet (ἡσυχία ἄγων). As Frederick G. Whelan suggests, all this traits belonged to the persons that wanted to have a rural life, opposed to the urban life of Athens and its democracy²⁹. We could say that Plato wanted to reconfigure the fragmented political landscape and urban lifestyle of Athens to more just order, following his metaphysical views.

Both Socrates and Plato were confronted with this meddlesome-

²⁶ Plato, *Apology of Socrates*, translation by Harold North Fowler, (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, 2005), 1.

²⁷ Boris Groys, *The Communist postscript*, translated by Thomas H. Ford (London: Verso Books, 2009), 1.

²⁸ Plato, *Republic*, translated and edited by K. Georgoulis (Athens: Sideris Publications, 1939), 433A, 123.

²⁹ Frederick G. Whelan, “Socrates and the ‘Meddlesomeness’ of the Athenians.” *History of Political Thought*, 4, no. 1 (1983), 1–29, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26212364>. Accessed 12 May 2022.

ness (πολυπραγμανεῖν) that was characteristic of Athenian politics in two principal ways according to Whelan: in the Athenian imperialism that culminated with the Peloponnesian war (431-404 BC) and with the phenomenon of litigation that constituted a massive phenomenon of the 5th century Athens. Socrates was a participant in his city's wars, which for him were not deemed to be unjust. He nevertheless criticizes in the platonic dialogues the heads of the Athenian imperialist democracy, such as Themistocles and Pericles, and in the *Apology* the public men are the first to be submitted to his elenchus. But as Whelan says in Plato's work there is not an explicit condemnation of imperialism, because his primary interest is justice within the city.

Litigiousness on the other hand was a trait of Athenian meddlesomeness that was largely confined within the city walls. Through that act of meddling in the affairs of others in judicial courts, Athenian democracy was advanced because of payment to jurors that went to the extreme of creating a class of citizens dependent on that pay, advancement of young orators with political ambitions who exercised their art in courts and made a name of themselves and finally a distinctive trait of class welfare, because it was usually the rich Athenians that were dragged in court by the sycophants, citizens that had the habit of prosecuting others in the courts usually with false allegations in order to gain some material reward. The most vivid portrayal of the situation in the Athenian courts are the comedies of Aristophanes, where we can find as a usual victim of litigiousness the rustic ἀπράγμων, the person that attended his own affairs and did not meddle in the business of others. The division between city and country is again evident here. Socrates was of course very critical of this particular habit of his fellow citizens. He references his inexperience in courts in the *Apology* and, according to Whelan, he resents it because in courts popular opinion and not justice is prevalent and because rhetorical skills are more important there than true philosophy.

Whelan, after surveying these two characteristics of the Athenian democracy and contrasting them with Plato's definition of justice in the *Republic*, comes to an interesting conclusion. He states that Socrates in the *Apology*³⁰ presents himself as a restless seeker of justice that will never stop to examine himself and others in search of wisdom. How the use of the verb, πολυπραγμανῶ, in particular can coincide with his treat-

³⁰ “Περιῶν καὶ πολυπραγμανῶ” are the two words he uses.

ment of “πολυπραγμοσύνη” as the main characteristic of injustice? Whelan himself provides an answer to this new Socratic paradox, stating that “Socrates’s pursuit of philosophy, and his special conception of the philosophical life, set him apart from all the political parties and several passages in the Apology in particular compel us to look more deeply into the unique position he occupies”³¹. Writing before Vlastos gave to the Socratic irony the philosophical depth that it actually possesses, he urged his readers not to take Socrates’ claim of being a meddler as ‘ironic’, but at face value since “His philosophy as well as his own spirit of initiative was thus a characteristic product of Athenian life, as he acknowledges in declining the opportunity of exile, although his activism manifests itself in a different fashion from that of the other Athenians”³². But, if we take the definition of Justice in the Republic as a Platonic interpretation of Socrates’s practical wisdom concerning justice and if we postulate that Socrates himself did not possess and was not interested in possessing a positive definition of justice, then we can understand irony as being his way of coping with the fractured intellects of Athens without offering himself a closed fracture in the place of the always eluding whole.

3. A metaphilosophical argument

This conception of irony will become more evident, if we take its philosophical aspects as actually informing different philosophies in different times and thus - although it is not strictly theoretical- attains a metaphilosophical dimension. Certainly in the last quarter of the 20th century there were many such attempts in the work of De Man, Nehamas etc. The philosopher that was responsible for the revival of the concept of irony in modern time philosophy (modern is taken to be philosophy after Descartes) was Friedrich Schlegel, a prominent figure of early German romanticism, who also developed a very interesting way of getting together the Absolute, fragments and irony.

The absolute is taken to be “...the unconditioned totality of all conditions. While the absolute itself is conditioned by nothing, it conditions all

³¹ Frederick G Whelan, “Socrates and the ‘Meddlesomeness’ of the Athenians.” *History of Political Thought*, 4, no. 1 (1983), 26, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26212364>. Accessed 12 May 2022.

³² *Ibid.*, 28.

the finite and physical manifestations of the world”³³. Influenced by Spinoza’s substance and more directly by Kant’s metaphysics, the idea of the Absolute was received by both the early romantics and the German idealists; the reception, thought, differed greatly in one important sense. The Idealists took the absolute to be graspable in principle by the human intellect whereas the romantics argued that it was elusive and opaque to the human mind. This view turns Schlegel who “...endorses uncertainty, because the Absolute (that which is without limits) will never be grasped by finite human knowers (limited beings)”³⁴. Still Schlegel and the Romantics are drawn to the absolute and therefore always strive to approach it. But since this approach is not possible by the intellect, Schlegel turns to irony and the fragments to approach the Absolute in his desired way, in the way that would not falsely think that it knows the Absolute, that it can exhaust its possibilities by knowing.

The fragment for Schlegel exhibits three very important elements that serve to illustrate the connection between the fragment and the whole, the finite being and the infinite absolute. First, stylistically the fragment is thus structured as to give the impression of a forced detachment from a supposed whole that once used to be a part off. Rush (2016) contrasts this characteristic of the fragment to the aphorism to make it clearer; whereas the aphorisms are “...typically self-contained, polished, and rounded thoughts presented in a condensed form”³⁵, which give an instant pleasure to the reader, the fragments defer that pleasure to the infinite and invite different perspectives and contexts to be constantly implemented upon them. Secondly the fragment is always liable and open to further interpretation. This characteristic is jointed with the idea of ‘symphilosophien’, the romantic notion that philosophy is a social practice, meant to be done not in solitude but in a constant dialogue with a circle of friends. The third element is the fact that the fragment needs to

³³ Keren Gorodeisky, "19th Century Romantic Aesthetics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta(ed.) URL=<<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/aesthetics-19th-romantic/>>.

³⁴ Elizabeth Millan-Zaibert, *Friedrich Schlegel and the emergence of romantic philosophy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 146.

³⁵ Fred Rush, *Irony & Idealism: Re-Reading Schlegel, Hegel & Kierkegaard* (Oxford: OUP, 2016), 81.

be open-ended to reflect the ironic tension of affirmation and distance that exist between the subject and the absolute. Schlegel views that by composing a system of fragments he can surpass the deadliness and obsolescence of complete philosophical systems while on the same time he can be taken as an entry point of thought to any system that would try to approximate the absolute conceptually.

The points of contact between Socrates and Schlegel in terms of metaphilosophical irony are explicit. Schlegel was influenced by the definition of irony provided by Quintilian, who advanced the view of irony as a way of living, with the primary example of Socrates³⁶. Schlegel's view of philosophy as a communal process is also mirrored in the way Socrates understood his philosophy as a way – perhaps the principal and only way – to discuss with his fellow citizens and try to make them examine their beliefs and care for their souls. Schlegel developed a literary system of fragments to mirror the primary ironical attitude towards the absolute, that of affirmation and distance. He was convinced that the absolute could not be grasped and exhausted by intellectual means although we are destined to always try to thus understand it. It is argued that “With all due historical distinctions, both Socrates and Schlegel are subjects who tend and “strive” towards truth, essence and the Absolute, even if they are (ironically) aware of the constitutive exceeding of this Absolute with respect to the means of language and reason”³⁷.

4. Conclusion

It was the intention of this paper to show that Socrates was confronted with a fragmented Athenian society and that his famous irony was a means to cope with this fragmentation without reducing it to a closed philosophical system, but to retain the tension inherent in the examined life between the striving towards the truth and the un-reachability of it.

Starting with the definition of Cicero for irony as “*dissimulatio urbana*” and the impact that definition had for modern theorists of irony, we showed that both Vlastos and Nehamas, did not pay much attention

³⁶ Ibid., 65-66 n.92.

³⁷ Giacomelli, Alberto, “Review of “Karolin Mirzahkan, An Ironic Approach to the Absolute: Schlegel's Poetic Mysticism, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2020, xix + 120 pp. ISBN978-1-4985-7891-2”, *Symphilosophie* n.3 (2021), 387-388.

to the adjective *urbanus*, but rather hastily dismissed it as meaning refined. Surveying the meaning of *urbanitas* for Cicero, we showed that he took the characteristic of an urban way of living as inherent and distinct from a strict sense of education but still with a vague overtone, thus leaving open the exact nature of this refinement. For Socrates the search for wisdom and virtue is taking place on the background of the Athenian agora, with the public men, the poets, the hand-workers and the Sophists as the subjects of his inquiry, as he explicitly states in his *Apology*. Through Plato's dialogues we mainly have his most philosophically interesting exchanges with the Sophists, the ones that maintained the art of teaching for themselves. But there is no reason not to take Socrates' own account into consideration and not to assume that his own irony was a way of coping with this multitude. Furthermore, irony was also a way for Socrates to participate in his own way to the fractured political life of his time, without claiming a unified, total political system, as did Plato in the *Republic*. This characteristic of irony as a way of both keeping the distance and the affirmation of the Absolute, or in other terms as a way of productive negativity, can be also found in the treatment of literary fragments of Schlegel.

For all of the above reasons it can be maintained that Socrates's irony was a way of him responding to the fragmented urban life without projecting his own examined life as an object of teaching with claims to the whole.

The Crisis of Ethics: A Levinasian Response

Tomas Pewton (University of Sofia)

Abstract: In historical and contemporary philosophical discourse, the concept of ethics has endured profound challenges that necessitate critical reflection and novel approaches. This article delves into the history of ethics from which is also revealed an ever present crisis of ethics: from the ancient sceptics; contrasting enlightenment moral normative frameworks; analytical challenges to the place of ethics within philosophical discussion. By tracing the trajectory of ethical thought and its inherent problems, we recognise the need for a ground-breaking response. I propose that Emmanuel Levinas' ethics can offer such a response to philosophical ethical tradition and its accompanying crisis in its revolutionary and novel approach. Rejecting the egocentric and rational foundation of traditional philosophy and ethics, Levinas recognises a primacy and priority of "the Other" as an inexhaustible source of ethical significance. As this meeting with Other occurs before any totality or rationality is possible, there is also revealed to be a primacy of ethics over other traditionally privileged philosophical categories. By engaging with Levinas' philosophy, this article endeavors to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the crisis of ethics in a rapidly changing world. It argues for the pressing need to reevaluate ethical frameworks in light of the Levinasian response, emphasizing the moral imperative to prioritise ethical responsibility and the ethical significance of the Other. This essay invites readers to reevaluate their understanding of ethics and engage in a renewed commitment to the ethical imperative presented by Levinas' philosophy.

Keywords: crisis; ethics; Levinas; responsibility

Introduction

It is certainly no exaggeration to conclude that ethics today is considered to be in a state of crisis. Although it is a branch of philosophy that can be traced back to its very beginnings and has always been prominent, some have argued that it has resulted in nothing but dissatisfac-

tion and failure. Throughout its history it has taken on many forms. There have been many different normative frameworks, many different applications, and “metaethics” has tried to truly define its subject matter, but today we see little progression in ethical discussions since Plato. A host of writers have picked up on this sense of crisis from the Sceptics in antiquity, to Friedrich Nietzsche and contemporary thinkers such as Alisdair MacIntyre. After all, in a world that has seen endless war, violence and crisis, how can we say that morality exists? Did it not die at Auschwitz? If God really is dead then can there still be a place for morality? The ancient striving for a good life seems as distant as reaching Eden or a progressive free society founded on rational principles. This paper will begin by tracing the history of ethics and the recurring crisis that will be revealed to be omnipresent. After this, I will present Emmanuel Levinas’ original and revolutionary theory of ethics which can serve as a response to this apparent crisis and show how such a crisis of ethics is actually an impossibility.

The Crisis of Ethics

Philosophical inquiry into ethics and morality has been of interest to philosophers since ancient Greece, but from these very beginnings the idea of a crisis within ethics is evident in the form of moral sceptics, most famously Pyrrho, who questioned whether it was possible to have knowledge of, or achieve, the Good and virtue. For example, Aristotle’s “virtue ethics” lists many virtues, such as temperance, courage and wisdom, as characteristics that a moral agent would have. Acquiring such virtues leads one to live a moral life with the aim of reaching “eudaimonia,” which is a full and flourishing life. In response to this, the Sceptics would ask why certain characteristics are chosen over others? If courage leads to getting oneself killed and denying the opportunity for a full and flourishing life, would meekness not have been a better choice? Whereas Aristotle argues that “eudaimonia” is objective, he fails to offer a satisfactory definition or explain how it is realisable; the Sceptics would state, in opposition, that it is undefinable and relative. For every argument that can be used to support one moral position, another contrasting opinion can also be made and the sceptics

therefore adhere to a “suspension of judgement.”³⁸

Such a sceptical outlook sought many to find the justification and source of ethics in a transcendental source that lay beyond our understanding or rational capabilities, with the root of such thought being evident in Plato and his “Good beyond being.” This trend would continue during the dominance of Catholicism and religion that spread throughout the European middle ages, where ethics seemed to become subsumed and integrated into religion, evident in thinkers such as St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Ethics and moral action now belonged to faith and a life in accordance with the eternal and objective scriptures rather than rational reasoning or debate. For instance, I must not kill others because God's commandments tell me that it is immoral to do so. However, such thought itself descended into crisis with the rise of the scientific method during the enlightenment period, which brought with it a questioning of the previous foundation of our moral codes and conduct. Arguably, such practices seemed no better with the endless religious wars that plagued this time.

Immanuel Kant, who is often heralded as the father of the enlightenment period in Europe and the philosophy of this time that followed the religious age, developed a new ethical framework to suit the nascent systems of thought that began to appear. His normative ethical theory, what is known as “deontology,” argued that there were moral codes that could be uncovered by an autonomous individual’s utilisation of reason which could then be applied universally. Kant argues that ethical action be centered around what he called the “categorical imperative” which consists of two maxims: 1) “*I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law;*”³⁹ 2) “*to treat himself and all others never merely as means but always at the same time as ends in themselves.*”⁴⁰ In a similarity to religious commandments, I must not kill because such an action does not pass either of the two maxims. However, where this theory differs is that this commandment and duty does not come from a transcendental source, but

³⁸ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonsim* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2000) 79.

³⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 15.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 41.

from my own rational capabilities. But again, it did not take long for a similar crisis to appear with this new form of ethics, such as Nietzsche's questioning of the foundations of both religion and these new now-dominant enlightenment values. Other ethical theories were sought, such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill's "utilitarianism." This is the view that ethics was determined by utility and that ethical actions were those that created the most happiness. Yet for every ethical framework that was developed, further problems and crises arose in both theory and practice. For example, the utilitarian framework had no response to the rise of national socialism in Germany where the happiness of the majority, i.e. German nationals, was increased by the cleansing of minorities. When presented with such varied ethical frameworks, the problem of epiquollence presented by the sceptics returns: why should I choose one over the other when both have advantages and problems?

Such problems with traditional ethics culminated in many thinkers becoming disillusioned with ethics, which was simply part of the wider concern with the whole of philosophy in general because of this perceived lack of progress since ancient Greece. Ethics was no exception to the crisis that European thought found itself engulfed in at the beginning of the 20th century and a result of this was the "analytical turn" that philosophy underwent. There was a philosophical shift that now concentrated upon language, meaning and logic, which brought with it a questioning of ethics and other long held philosophical traditions. It was hoped that by turning our focus onto language and logic, such progress would be made. This resulted in a fundamental change in the study of ethics and the rise of what has become known as "metaethics." With this, instead of what actions or framework were considered to be good, other questions were asked: can the good ever be known? Is the good objective or relative? What are the limitations of ethical questioning? This turn towards language and logic can be seen in Moore or Mill's discussion on the meaning of the word "good" which came to dominate philosophical circles concerning ethics. At the forefront of academic philosophy at the beginning of the 20th century were the logical positivists, who sought to determine what we can and cannot speak about in philosophy; what was meaningful discussion and what was meaningless conjecture? They argued that for something to be worthwhile discussing it must either be a tautology or empirically verifiable. As ethical statements are neither, it resulted in any discussion on ethics being consid-

ered logically meaningless, not worthy of philosophical discussions, or simply emotive statements that meant no more than “boo!” or “hurrah!” This culminated in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s declaration that “whereof one cannot speak one must be silent,”⁴¹ and ethics fell into such a category. But again, and we are beginning to notice a pattern here, such a theory of ethics soon descended into a crisis and its method and aims were questioned once more.

Soon after the rise of such metaethical theories, many crises of the 20th century occurred: World Wars, massacres and violence of an unprecedented level, the green movement, identity and gender politics, to name but a few. How could ethics and philosophers continue to stay silent on such issues? While they were arguing over definitions and meaning, society, people’s actions and what it meant to lead a good life was changing in the concrete lived world outside of classrooms and conference halls. Technological, medical and scientific advancements brought new questions and concerns into the ethical realm. Due to this, we again begin to see the questioning of the metaethical methods, tasks and aims, and ethics began to take on a new form: what has come to be known as “applied ethics.” The analytical method and task was consigned as too abstract and rejected as not offering enough guidance and practical application to real life situations and dilemmas. The many crises of the Western world brought discussion about ethics back into the mainstream and public debate. However, such crises and the lack of response from either contemporary or historical moral frameworks also fuelled anti-humanistic rhetoric to the problems posed, resulting in ethics descending either into relativism or scepticism. Responses to this took up traditional arguments such as trying to find a foundation for ethics in reason or biology, but this simply led to the reappearance and dissatisfaction of these old and traditional views. On a theoretical level, questions continued to be raised about our traditional values and meaning, resulting in the overall sense of existential dread throughout Europe. Edmund Husserl summarised the feeling of the time when he declared a “crisis of European humanity itself in respect to the total meaningfulness of its

⁴¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Edinburgh: The Edinburgh Press, 1922), 90.

cultural life, its total ‘*Existenz*’.”⁴² Husserl states that a crisis occurs when “the whole manner in which it has set its task and developed a methodology for it, has become questionable.”⁴³ Looking back upon this short history of ethics it is undoubtable that we can conclude that it has recurringly found itself in a state of crisis.

Today, ethics continues on as it always has. Debates continue surrounding the correct normative framework, questions of what “good” means, and the application of ethics to contemporary matters such as technology and the environment replace those on abortion and sexuality. The disillusionment with ethics is also still very evident in thinkers such as in Alasdair MacIntyre, Sabina Lovibond and many others. Maria Dimitrova notes that in our current epoch “moral codes are now finished. The chant of a universal moral law as well the particular has long been sung.”⁴⁴ The result is that “morality appears in a rather misty atmosphere in which its contours and meaning are difficult or almost impossible to outline or grasp.”⁴⁵

Levinas’ Original Ethics

Emmanuel Levinas also picks up on the failures of ethics, asking in his work *Totality and Infinity*: “whether we are not duped by morality.”⁴⁶ His response was to formulate an original and revolutionary notion of ethics that recognised its primary and foundational nature. It’s originality is noted by many thinkers: Sean Hand describes it as a “post-rational ethics;”⁴⁷ Micheal Morgan calls it an “ethics without (an) ethical system;”⁴⁸ and Zygmunt Bauman a “postmodern ethics.”⁴⁹ One originality

⁴² Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy* (Evanston: Northwest University Press, 1970), 12.

⁴³ Ibid, 4.

⁴⁴ Maria Dimitrova, *Sociality & Justice* (Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2016), 209-210.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 211.

⁴⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 21.

⁴⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *The Levinas Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Ltd, 1989), v.

⁴⁸ Micheal Morgan, *The Cambridge Introduction to Emmanuel Levinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 24.

⁴⁹ See Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 1993).

when compared with traditional ethical systems is that Levinas does not seek any normative rules like those found in Kant's deontological ethics. We can see here how it is "post-rational," for, unlike these traditional theories, he does not seek any foundation via rational support but instead his support is found in the immediate everyday relation of what he calls the "face-to-face meeting." This meeting is *the* primordial and primary relation that we find ourselves involved in. It is pre-rational, pre-theoretical and, although seemingly bizarrely simple, deeply profound. Levinas states that before knowledge, subjectivity, language and any ontological or epistemological claims can be made, there is the appearance of another person upon our horizon who is the motivation for all of these. For, in an isolated world, what need is there for these? The Other (*Autrui*) confronts and demands a response from us, creating a separation between I and You, and this is the primordial communication. This meeting is inherently ethical because their face commands an ethical order of "you shall not kill!" While many traditional theories argue that violence is primary, such as standard Darwinian interpretations which both the social and natural sciences tradition adopted, Levinas argues this ethical command comes first and violence is only possible if we reject this. The face is one of "poverty," "weakness," and "destituteness." It is "the face of the poor, the stranger, the widow, and the orphan,"⁵⁰ demanding that we do not kill and this burdens us with freedom to enact upon it and responsibility to them, which in turn also grants us with our subjectivity, freedom and meaning.

Here we can see another difference from the traditional ethical theories. While deontologists will argue it is unethical to kill because such an action cannot be made universal, and it therefore fails to pass the categorical imperative, Levinas would argue that this reasoning is secondary. If we turn to utilitarianism, killing can be rationally supported if it results in an increasing amount of happiness for the majority. Levinas argues that already inherent in the face, before any rational deliberation, is this command, or if we want to abide by traditional ethical language we could call it a "categorical imperative," of "you shall not kill." Kant and other ethical thinkers have mistakenly placed ethics in the world of what Levinas distinguishes between the *said*, which is the

⁵⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 251.

world of thought, rationality and reason, whereas with Levinas it is in the primary world of the *saying*, of concrete lived action and communication. It is ethics that founds and grounds rationality rather than vice versa, thus his proclamation of “ethics as first philosophy.” As of this, we see that Levinas’ ethics has its foundation in *praxis* over theory and can therefore help to bridge the troublesome gap between these two that most of the tradition, in ethics and wider philosophy, has failed to close. It is, as Diane Perpich argues, an ethical theory that offers us “normativity without norms.”⁵¹ Ethics is not to be found in normative frameworks, theoretical definitions or grand systems but it is “entirely here and related to us....We do not conceive of relations, we are in relation.”⁵² Levinas brings ethics back into our concrete everyday lived experience and we can therefore begin to see how it can serve as a response to a tradition which has relegated it to but a branch of philosophy.

A Response to the Crisis

This placing of ethics in the primary world of the concrete and everyday is why the ethical sceptic can have no place in Levinas’ theory: to deny ethics is to deny the everyday, language, knowledge and norms, my subjectivity and all social relations. But Levinas does take the sceptical challenge seriously, as we have seen in his questioning of “whether we are not duped by morality.” As with Descartes, Levinas could certainly not be classed as a sceptic but he does see the use for scepticism as a tool. Scepticism can be positive and advantageous for philosophy because without it a totality, which Levinas’ classed as dogmatism, might be reached and we could get lost in the *said*. Scepticism always confronts these two notions which have been taken as granted in philosophical tradition and we therefore see its necessity. Rather than a closed totality which proclaims eternal and objective truth, Levinas seeks an infinite openness and for this scepticism is necessary. This should not be viewed as a negative because this infinite ethical responsibility allows us to transcend our own finitude and being. Ethics, and wider philosophy,

⁵¹ Diane Perpich, *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas* (California: Stanford University Press, 2009), 126.

⁵² Levinas, *Difficult Freedom* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 140.

has never successfully managed to shake off the sceptic: from Pyrrho, to Hume, Nietzsche and Mackie. But now, with our Levinasian understanding of the primacy and foundation of ethics, which reveals an infinite openness, the sceptical challenge is no longer conceived as a problem but a tool that must be utilised and is necessary for knowledge. An objective ethical framework can never be reached for ethics is an infinite task; “there is no end.”⁵³

Levinas also offers a response to the analytical critique and metaethical concerns such as the attempt to define the Good. As an ethical philosopher, it at first seems strange that Levinas is in agreement with the logicians, who were hostile to ethics, that the Good is transcendent and lies beyond our understanding. He argues that a perfect definition or understanding of such notions as “morality,” “virtue” or the “Good” can never be reached as our world and its meaning are always changing and we should therefore not waste our time discussing such matters. But whereas for the logicians this leads to an abandonment, or at least a deep relegation of the importance, of ethics, for Levinas such an abandonment or degradation is a neglect of our now revealed inherent ethical being. This misunderstanding has not only led to the crisis of ethics but can be seen as a contributor to the wider crisis of European humanity in both its thought and practice. The logicians are right that we should not spend so much time discussing ethical definitions or the limitations of language but they misunderstand, as the majority of tradition has, that real ethical matters, ones that could lead to a state of peace, are concerned instead with our everyday relations with Others that we meet in the face-to-face meeting. Peace is achieved through taking up responsibility and care for the Other which is revealed in this face-to-face meeting rather than in normative theory or logical concerns. Quoting Vasily Grossman, Levinas states that “there is neither God nor the Good, but there is goodness.”⁵⁴ Hunger, war, violence, poverty, responsibility, clothing, shelter and enjoyment; these are Levinas’ ethical concerns and isn’t this more of an ethics that speaks to us as humans? Philosophy must return to immedi-

⁵³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 44.

⁵⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Is it Righteous to Be?* (California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 89.

ate concerns and the world of *praxis*; by recognising ethics as first philosophy we do not lose the ideal of a *universal practical philosophy* but reestablish its very possibility.

Any problem of language concerning ethics can also be avoided, for Levinas reveals language is itself inherently ethical. Language comes from the face-to-face meeting and this is an ethical relation. Communication begins with the very appearance of another upon my horizon and the first thing that is communicated is the primordial ethical command of “you shall not kill.” If we are to accept the primacy of ethics, the crisis of ethics that appeared with the rise of analytical philosophy no longer confronts us. Ethics is there from the very start and we are wholly ethical beings. Every word we speak, every action we undertake and every relation we find ourselves in is rooted in the face-to-face meeting and this is primarily ethical. The so-called “crisis of ethics” is a simple misunderstanding and neglect of this. The only crisis that we can speak of is this very neglect and misunderstanding of ethics, which in turn has fuelled other crises, rather than a crisis of ethics itself.

Conclusion

The moral philosopher Bernard Williams describes ethics as “how one should live,”⁵⁵ whereas for Levinas ethics is *living itself*. Williams, who can be seen as describing the typical traditional view of ethics, from Socrates to Singer, mistakes the theoretical form of ethics with the practical ethics that we meet in our everyday relations and which has now been revealed as primary. It is this misunderstanding of the foundational role of ethics which has been the root of the crisis that has plagued it throughout its history. Morality is always there, omnipresent and inescapable. Ethics is not a theory or normative framework; it is our everyday practical actions. The primacy of ethics can therefore be seen to solve many of the problems and crises that occurred, and still do today, in ethics. If we take Levinas seriously, ethics is there from the very beginning, revealed in the face-to-face meeting that occurs in our everyday lived experience. It cannot be relegated to a secondary branch of philosophy. There is no escaping ethics, we are ethical beings and we no

⁵⁵ Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2011), 5.

longer have to rely upon some transcendental or universal source for its foundation. Before any totality or system is conceived, or even possible, we are first in an ethical encounter with the Other who, with their very presence and communication, bring an ethical challenge as soon as they appear and to which we must respond to. Levinas' ethics begins not from a normative or universal foundation but from the utterly particular, and it is from this that universality is reached. It is unique and unlike any other ethical or philosophical system that we find in our history and can offer an escape from the ethical crisis.

In The Search of Immortality – From the Imprisonment of the Body to the Imprisonment of the Machine

Seçil Özergan (University of Sofia)

Abstract: Transhumanism is a movement that believes as species we need to evolve further and defy the limits of our condition, which is closely linked to having an organic body. The Transhumanist assumption is that as human beings, we are more than what we are in our current form. To achieve our destiny, we need to defeat the limitations that come with the condition that we were born with. While Transhumanists aim to free us from our corporal body and its limitations, critics express concerns about re-designing human beings and claim that these attempts may bring the end of humanity as we know it. This article will briefly discuss the topic of human nature and Transhumanist views about it.

Key words: Transhumanism, human nature, human body, enhancement, posthuman, mind-upload, immortality

On The Strangeness of Being a Human

As Sir Julian Huxley described it, up till now human life has generally been, brutish and short and the great majority of human beings (if they have not already died young) have been afflicted with misery in one form or another - poverty, disease, ill-health, over-work, cruelty, or oppression. They have attempted to lighten their misery by means of their hopes and their ideals. The trouble has been that the hopes have generally been unjustified, the ideals have generally failed to correspond with reality.⁵⁶

Although it may not be a very optimistic or cheerful way to start talking about human beings, the problems listed above are indeed a big part of the human experience. Even reading a daily newspaper makes us

⁵⁶ Huxley, J., 1957. *Transhumanism*. [online] jhp.sagepub.com. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/002216786800800107> [Accessed 20 September 2022].

realise the horrors of wars, cruelties and other human realities such as illnesses, ageing and mortality.⁵⁷ The majority of these intentional or non-intentional evils are closely related to who we are. Frailty and vulnerability are essential parts of our body and our human condition in a large context.

As human beings, we all have a body, which enables us to experience the colours, emotions, sensations – anything that can be associated with being a human. Yet, our bodies also bring us limitations. There are many things we wish we could do, but we simply cannot do them just because of our particular human experience. For example, no matter how hard we try we are not able to fly like a bird, swim like a fish or reach immortality. For improving our lives and actualise our higher ideals and wishes, we use the help of machines.⁵⁸ However, this situation reminds us of our limitations once again. Although machines integrate with our biological bodies more and more each day, they are still external to us. If one day we find ourselves out there in nature, on our own and without the help of machines and tools, we would be in a very vulnerable situation. Our bodies are fragile and open to attacks and perhaps this is the reason why we have such strong survival instincts. We try to improve and be stronger to protect ourselves from external attacks. Our human nature is closely related to our organic body⁵⁹ with its animalistic side. In this context, if we see human nature in a negative light, our body is our limitation. It is something that prevents us from being our higher self (which has traditionally been associated with cognitive abilities such as reason and imagination) and from achieving our aims and ideals.

We do not have full control over our body, oftentimes it controls us. If we argue that its purpose is to protect us and help us survive, it also fails us in many ways. Although it may look beautiful and harmonious from a distance, when we look inside we see things that are unpleasant to the eye.⁶⁰ Some people are also not content with the way their body looks from the outside or they think it is not in the way they

⁵⁷ O'Connell, M., *To Be a Machine* (London: Granta Books, 2017), 3.

⁵⁸ Hausekeller, M., "Messy Bodies: From Cosmetic Surgery to Mind-Uploading", *Trans-Humanities Journal* 6(1) (2013), 63-75.

⁵⁹ Hausekeller, M., "Human Nature from a Transhumanist Perspective", *Existenz*, 2013, 8(2), 64-69.

⁶⁰ Hausekeller, M., "Messy Bodies".

would like it to be, they believe they can improve it. In this context, “re-shaping and transforming individuals that are in a perfectly healthy condition gain a larger presence in the present-day medicine, although restoring the wholeness and intactness still play a central role.”⁶¹ The desire to improve one’s body is one of the reasons why biomedical enhancements or cosmetic surgeries are so popular and gain support among the public. It appeals to our sense of re-gaining control, rebelling against our bodily limitations and exceeding them, which are characteristically human as well. Human beings have the ability to imagine and create like no other living being. Perhaps this is the reason why we as human beings have higher notions about ourselves and the idea of the original sin is so relatable, especially when we think about the strangeness of the human condition. Maybe we genuinely see ourselves as “gods in ruins” as Emerson once put it.⁶²

Transhumanism and their view of the Human Nature

The idea of altering the human condition, radically transforming human beings and our imprisonment to our bodies, appears most strikingly in the movement of Transhumanism. The supporters of this movement strongly believe that as species we need to evolve and defeat our nature to be what we are supposed to be. For them, we can shape ourselves and gain total control.

The developments of science and technology herald a new stage for human existence, Transhumanists believe we will be and should be able to transcend our genetic inheritance. One of the main reasons for that is the mind-blowing pace of technological development and the threat of Artificial Intelligence surpassing human intelligence. Many Transhumanists believe we need to merge with machines to successfully compete with them. Yet, our survival instinct against technological development is not the only reason why proponents of this movement enthusiastically support this change. At this point, we should also note that although Transhumanists can differ in their views and may have disagreements with each other, they agree on central arguments such as radical life extension and defying

⁶¹ Gordijn, B. and Chadwick, R., *Medical enhancement and posthumanity* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), 9-25.

⁶² O'Connell, *To Be a Machine*, 1.

the limits of our nature in general. What they promise overall is the radical improvement of the human condition: radically extending human life span, reversing and stopping ageing, improving our focus and mood and ultimately freeing ourselves from our corporal limitations. In other words, what they offer is a happier, healthier and longer life and potential immortality. What is not to like?

According to critics of the movement, if Transhumanists achieve their aims through radically altering human nature, if this is achievable, the future humans will be unrecognisable to us and this can potentially prepare for the end of humanity. The Transhumanist promise can be seen as a new technological utopia, where human beings exist as cyborgs or do not exist in their corporality at all.⁶³ This is where minds can be uploaded into computers and transferred into various machines eternally. All these possibilities raise the questions of what we understand from being a human and where we cross a line with all these modifications. Is it achievable or is it desirable? The topic also brings us straight back to the discussion about the essence and the nature of human beings. Is it something flexible that can be shaped or is it fixed and must be accepted as it is?

“Transhumanists view *Homo sapiens* as a “work in progress” with the potential to be radically transformed by technology.”⁶⁴ If human nature was fixed, it would not continue to evolve and science and technology would not be able to help the Transhumanist goal. Yet, if human nature is changeable, it can be configured, constructed and de-constructed. According to Transhumanists, human nature and human identity are not fixed and the essence of human nature is information.⁶⁵ This information can be and should be transferred between humans and machines and the communication between them should be meaningful. In this context, it can be argued that Transhumanists have a rather instrumentalist and reductionist view of human beings, as they reduce them into data patterns that can be configured indefinitely. Transhumanists foresee that soon

⁶³ Hausekeller, M., “My Brain, My Mind, And I: Some Philosophical Assumptions of Mind”, *International Journal of Machine Consciousness*, 04(01) (2012), 187-200.

⁶⁴ Elkins, G., “Transhumanism and the Question of Human Nature”, *American Journal of Intelligent Systems*, 1(1) (2012), 16-21.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

there will not be a significant distinction between human beings and machines, as the interaction between them increases each passing day. Chips and implants will enable the communication flow between human beings and machines.

The ultimate Transhumanist goal is to transfer the human mind into a machine and this will enable human beings to defy the limits of their nature once and for all by not existing in a bodily form anymore. Transhumanists see the human body as fragile and defective in its current state. If it is a biological machine that is designed to make us survive, it is failing us because we get sick, we experience pain and we die. In this context, Transhumanists seem to criticise the design of the body and want to replace it with something more durable. The change can start with small parts, by replacing the ones that do not work or that we do not like. The process can be seen in doing maintenance work on a machine. We can replace the parts that no longer function or are no longer desirable. In such cases our bodies cannot decline but can only improve with the latest technology. In this context, it can be argued that Transhumanists would like to redefine the meaning of a human being by redesigning it through technology and making it less biological and something more than the animal that it currently is.

By defying its nature and eventually becoming nature-less, the human being will turn into a posthuman. The true essence of a posthuman is information, which can be translated into other machines and consciousness which can reach immortality by existing on various digital platforms. If the human mind can exist in machines and somehow preserve its identity, that would mean there will not be much difference between human beings and machines. In this way, the mind can be uploaded to any platform and continue its existence in endless combinations and possibilities.

Transhumanists believe “the human life is too short for all the possible lives we could experience.”⁶⁶ In other words, they believe we are limiting ourselves by committing to one particular way of life chosen by the individual in this lifetime. They also hold the view that our life is not long enough to wait for natural evolution to happen and for that reason, we need to use the help of medicine and technology to improve our-

⁶⁶ Hausekeller, M., “Human Nature from a Transhumanist Perspective”, 64-69.

selves and potentially defeat death. Preserving consciousness is the ultimate way of achieving this. Overall, Transhumanists believe our conscious and intelligent mind is imprisoned in the weak and fragile body and it must be freed. In this context, they seem to have dualistic and materialistic views about human existence (although it is not necessarily in the classical sense we understand the terms). They appear to see the human body as something material which can be replaced by more durable machines and the human mind is something that can be separated from the body and preserved. According to them, identity can also be kept in this process and we do not need to fully understand how the brain works when trying to copy it. In other words, for them, the attempt to preserve consciousness is better than not doing anything and losing the chance of immortality.⁶⁷

This utopia may remind the reader of the famous brain in a vat theory, where an evil genius (or maybe a Transhumanist with evil intentions) can feed the brain with daily information and designed experiences; the brain can be manipulated forever with constant back-ups, without the brain being able to put an end to it because there is no physicality. It may not even be aware of the manipulation. Even a small thought experiment shows that the potential separation of the mind and the body can lead to many problems while trying to solve others.

Criticism

Transhumanism claims to solve human problems such as illnesses and death but risks dehumanising human beings by seeing them as mere data. We can argue that this is a reductionist and instrumentalist way of seeing a human being. As Michael Hauskeller points out, it appears that Transhumanists also create a dichotomy between the negative part of human nature (mostly associated with the human body and the animal side of the human being) and the positive part of human nature (which is generally associated with the cognitive abilities and higher ideals). Bio-conservatives such as Francis Fukuyama, Michael Sandel and Leon Kass reject such dichotomy and argue for a whole, united experience. This united experience comes with limitations and this is exactly what bio-conservatives believe makes life beautiful and exciting. We fall into

⁶⁷ O'Connell, *To Be a Machine*, 22-40.

this world and we find ourselves in various situations which create crucibles for us. We overcome these crucibles and become stronger. We love, we suffer, we empathise and all these emotions are due to our frailty and vulnerability. In other words, our limitations make us ethical beings and our crucibles make life interesting and worth living.

Here the question is whether living inside a computer would be life at all. Even if it brings us immortality, would we genuinely want that? What happens if our uploaded consciousness falls into wrong hands? While we try to escape the imprisonment of the body, do we actually create a worse form of imprisonment?

Cyborgization of the human body in an attempt to reach post-humanity and also creates the risk of establishing an immense difference between the enhanced and non-enhanced. The human mind merged with AI would most likely be a lot more capable than the unenhanced human mind. This situation does not only apply to our cognitive abilities, but to our physicality as well. Here the danger is there might be an immense gap between the enhanced and non-enhanced people, which may result in bigger cruelties and potentially more suffering.

Conclusion

Today many prominent researchers are working towards achieving better mind and machine interaction. For example, Elon Musk's brain-machine interface company Neuralink has recently announced that direct mind-machine interactions are performing well on monkeys and soon there will be clinical trials on human beings as well. Potentially this technology will enable people with paralysis to use items with their minds.⁶⁸ This can be seen as an example of how technology can help people by reducing their bodily limitations. It can also be seen as an example of using technology therapeutically. Yet, restoration or treatment is not always the purpose of biomedical interventions. These alterations can be made with the purpose of radically changing the human being. As discussed above, these interventions can have catastrophic effects.

⁶⁸ the Guardian. 2022. *Elon Musk's brain chip firm Neuralink lines up clinical trials in humans*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/jan/20/elon-musk-brain-chip-firm-neuralink-lines-up-clinical-trials-in-humans>> [Accessed 03 April 2023].

While we try to escape from one imprisonment, we may find ourselves in a worse one.

We fear machines and we are fascinated by them at the same time. We celebrate when the machines that we create become more human-like. Yet, we also want to turn ourselves into machines. We want to improve and perfect ourselves. We often complain about suffering and the shortness of life and we want to live forever by eliminating death. For achieving these goals we are ready to do alterations that can completely change who we are. At this point, we can perhaps stop and reflect on the urgency of our lives and instead of complaining, we can start living to the fullest.

As Seneca put it,

It is not that we have a short time to live, but that we waste a lot of it. Life is long enough, and a sufficiently generous amount has been given to us for the highest achievements if it were all well invested. But when it is wasted in heedless luxury and spent on no good activity, we are forced at last by death's final constraint to realize that it has passed away before we knew it was passing. So it is: we are not given a short life but we make it short, and we are not ill-supplied but wasteful of it... Life is long if you know how to use it.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Seneca, L., n.d. *On the shortness of life*.

Biopsychopolitics: A Marxian Perspective on the Society and Individual

Cengizhan Kaptan (University of Sofia)

Abstract: In this essay, I introduce the term "biopsychopolitics" to provide a critique of biopolitics by Michel Foucault, in consideration of the term "psychopolitics" by Byung-Chul Han. I argue that biopsychopolitics signifies proper relations and dimensions a) between society and the individual, and b) between individuals' central nervous systems and thought. The main goal of the article is the re-establishment of a way of thinking about the relationship between society and the individual and the problem of individual accounts in society. Except for psychoanalytical attempts, mainly by Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse, biological and psychological processes of individuals have not been satisfactorily explored by the thinkers of the Marxian framework. It would be useful to point out that my article does not yet constitute a detailed framework; instead, it sets forth a progressive development tool of the concept by means of further studies.

Keywords: biopolitics, biopower, psychopolitics, biopsychopolitics, Foucault, neoliberalism, Marxism

Biopolitics of Foucault

Foucault referred to biopolitics during his lectures at the Collège de France. In this regard, he first began to give lectures in 1975-76⁷⁰ and continued to elaborate on this theme in 1977-78⁷¹ and 1978-79⁷². In fact,

⁷⁰ Foucault, Michel. *Society must be defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975–1976* transl. by David Macey (London: Penguin Books, 2004). See Lecture 11 on pages 239-264 especially.

⁷¹ Foucault, Michel. *Security, territory, and population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978* transl. by Graham Burchell (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2009). These lectures, among other topics, discuss government and governmentality.

⁷² Foucault, Michel. *The birth of biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978–1979*, transl. by Graham Burchell (Hampshire, New York: Palgrave, 2008). Foucault discusses neoliberalism at large extent in these lectures.

his lectures on the birth of biopower focus on several themes such as governmentality, liberalism, neoliberalism, and so on. It seems as if Foucault wanted to introduce such topics in twelve lectures and then elaborate on biopower in his last lectures. However, the content of biopower can only be grasped between the lines through the other topics he spoke about.

Foucault's philosophical framework is a negation of Althusserian Marxism, which is structuralist. Althusser claimed, without any convincing evidence, that the mature Marx distanced himself from Hegel in an epistemological rupture and break⁷³. On the other hand, he was not fully wrong in his claim, but his statement was vague; in fact, Marx distanced himself from Hegel, Young Hegelians, and Feuerbach; nevertheless, he retained the notion of sublation in Hegelian dialectics. I will not include this discussion in its detailed form in this study, but a rudimentary re-reading of *Grundrisse*⁷⁴ and *Capital*⁷⁵ (especially Volume 1) would suffice to refute Althusser's view of this constructed young-mature Marx distinction. Marx seems to appreciate the logical structure of the Hegelian system, declares himself a pupil of Hegel in *Capital* Vol. 1⁷⁶, and applies Hegelian thought to a large extent in his political economy studies. Foucault, on the other hand, seems to have had problems with the ideological and structural interpretation of Marxism and with Marxism itself. Instead, he sought to construct a genealogical framework fed by archaeological method⁷⁷.

Concerning surveillance and panopticons, we must admit one thing:

⁷³ Althusser, Louis and Balibar, Etienne. *Lire le Capital I* (Paris: François Maspero, 1973), 53, 111, 150.

⁷⁴ Meaney, Mark E. *Capital as Organic Unity: The Role of Hegel's Science of Logic in Marx's Grundrisse* (Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht, 2002).

⁷⁵ Moseley, Fred et al., *Marx's Capital and Hegel's Logic: A Reexamination* (Leiden: Brill, 2014). This book entails several discussions about how Marx employed Hegelian logic in his *Capital*.

⁷⁶ Marx, Karl. *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works, Vol. 35* (International Publishers, 1996), 19. This volume of the Collected Works (CW) consists of the 1st volume of *Capital*.

⁷⁷ Foucault, Michel. 'What Is Enlightenment?' [1984], in *The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984*, ed. by P. Rabinow and N. Rose (New York and London: The New Press, 2003), 43–57.

today, what Foucault pointed out has an even stronger impact. We are more digitized, more controlled. In every macro- and micro-ecosystem, we see how the apparatus of control locates itself. When we use electricity, when we go on vacation—whether we consume unusual amounts of energy sources—all of this can be easily controlled through surveillance and monitoring. Whatever language we use- art, music, health, politics, or others - is easily and effectively monitored, and this is a perfect opportunity for cookie sellers such as Facebook, Google, and others to provide us with fantastically tailored advertisements. Maybe one crucial point should be discussed: most of us do not care about being monitored; therefore, the perception of surveillance has changed as well.

In an abbreviated form that is generally far from capturing the whole, Foucault emphasizes how the art of governing has changed throughout history. When he speaks of biopower, he attributes biopower to a population that has evolved into a different structure and concept than before. For Foucault, political economy constitutes a new concept of governmentality⁷⁸. Law means the external intervention of the state, while political economy is an internal factor: both a science and a new form of intervention⁷⁹. Political economy is based on the fact that the state should limit itself. For Foucault, this is what causes a great shift in governmentality. When we talk about liberalism, we should understand that it is a type of governmentality that is connected to truth based on this self-limitation:

What does “the self-limitation of governmental reason” mean? What is this new type of rationality in the art of government, this new type of calculation that consists in saying and telling government: I accept, wish, plan, and calculate that all this should be left alone? I think that this is broadly what is called “liberalism.”⁸⁰

For Foucault, liberalism is the precondition for understanding the concept of biopolitics:

⁷⁸ Foucault, Michel. *Security, territory, and population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*, 106.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 108.

⁸⁰ Foucault, Michel. *The birth of biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978–1979*, 20.

Consequently, it seems to me that it is only when we understand what is at stake in this regime of liberalism opposed to *raison d'État*—or rather, fundamentally modifying [it] without, perhaps, questioning its bases—only when we know what this governmental regime called liberalism was, will we be able to grasp what biopolitics is.⁸¹

Lectures by Foucault

Throughout his lectures, Foucault explained to his audience the evolution of governmental approaches from punishment and discipline to liberalism, and how this evolution was manifest in a rational opposition to previous attitudes toward government. Firstly, Foucault claims to be going beyond Marx - a fair claim - and secondly, he sees that the Communist bloc, in his real experience, did not provide freedom to its own society - another fair claim. However, making fair claims does not mean that his analysis is true. The historical fact is: Foucault's methodology, partly inherited from Deleuze, did not last long and did not trigger the will, desire, and action for the transformation of society.

Let us now look more closely at Foucault's claims. When he claims to go beyond Marx, he falls back -anachronically- beside Marx, because he rejects the importance of the transformative forces. I cannot say whether he does this deliberately or simply because he cannot grasp the role of economics, but what he does in a lengthy manner is a change in the flow of historical facts. For Foucault, the change from the mercantilist to the physiocratic form of government was the product of thought and art. He refers to technological advances and urban transformations several times, but does not adequately emphasize the role of changes in modes of production as a shift in thought. He discusses governmentality as though it is an isolated art of governance. But he does not provide enough evidence that the shifts are based on either relational or causal developments; or, he does so only through the shifts in governmentality, and almost completely missing their connections to the modes of production. Foucault misses the major point: he only discusses the situation of the capital owners, not that of working class or oppressed people in a broader sense.

⁸¹ Ibid., 22.

For me, Foucault fits perfectly as a subcategory worker. He is very good at working out the details and has provided a lot of rich information about the archaeology of knowledge, the history of sexuality, the prison, mental illness, and so on. These details allowed him to challenge what Marx and other Marxist thinkers like Althusser said about the state. Foucault apparently found such statements inadequate. These kinds of accusations against Marx and Marxists are very popular today as well. Nevertheless, what Foucault declares does not bring anything justifiable into the light of day. The fact is, Foucault could never realize the method of Marx in *Capital*; Marx, in short, does not discuss the nature of the state and focuses his dialectical critique on the political economy of capitalist modes of production. Foucault obviously wanted to build a new system in order to abolish historical materialism and Marxism, but his ground was weak to support his false premises.

Using a scenario from everyday life, I will illustrate Foucault's method. Let us suppose that we are discussing football. I offer the general view that when both teams in a game play offensively, the spectators enjoy it and witness more goals in a game. I give some examples from the history of the World Cup or from national leagues and so on. I also mention that some exceptions can apply. However, my interlocutor says, "But there was a game between England and Germany, and although they both played attacking football, the game ended 1-0. Germany won. What the interlocutor says is not a refutation of my claim, but is a fair and justifiable example; it is an exception. Foucault generally plays the interlocutor in this example. He provides more details, more details, and more details, but to a great extent the result is still the justification of the historical material framework of Marx on the power of the state, on transformative modes of production, and on many others. Engels' *Dialectic of Nature* can also be considered. In his work, most of what he provided was valid at his time in terms of scientific knowledge, but is no longer valid today, as it is falsified. Some would criticize him today for having written about Kant-Laplace theories that are no longer true. But the methodology and proposals of Engels are still largely valid today because his methodology recognized the falsifications in the field of science. Therefore, it may always be useful to refer to Foucault on a particular topic, but it would be more meaningful to assess his historical analyses as material complementary to a given main category - e.g., economic and mercantilist history and prison conditions. What Foucault

tried to do, it seems, is create a new, definitely anti-Marxian framework from these exceptions. However, his premises are false or inadequate.

Although he mentions that his analyses are focused on Western societies and that the layers of punishment, discipline, and biopower can exist simultaneously, Foucault presents biopower and biopolitics as an art of governing that focuses on life. Perhaps unconsciously, Foucault provides a typical example of sublation (*Aufhebung*) in the Hegelian sense. What he offers as developments of governmentality are undoubtedly examples of Hegelian preservation in sublation. He does not deny that the right to kill can be preserved even in biopower, which focuses on life (*bio*). However, it is not through faith but through scientific knowledge that this preservation is justified. In other words, even the right to kill is justified in terms of scientific codes. Nevertheless, his emphasis on rationality is not justified in most cases. He seems to use the terms rationality instead of rationalization. What is defended under scientific justifications was not based on true scientific knowledge when the Nazis massacred the Jews. It was simply barbarism based on pseudoscience and manipulation of science. From the point of view of the murderers, there is no rationality. There is only rationalization.

Foucault's ambiguous use of language and his vague explanations have led to confusion among scholars. For me, from a historical perspective, there was a gradual distancing of Foucault from Marxism. This distancing was mainly due to his hatred of Soviet Marxism - including the attitude of the French Communist Party - but it went further and was directed against Hegel and Marx, in other words, against the whole Marxian framework. The attitude itself cannot be criticized just because it is anti-Marxist; however, the error lies in his interpretation of facts. For example, equating the scientific knowledge used by German Nazism to justify the Nazis with the entire framework of scientific knowledge is illusory and confusing. Foucault dismisses the oscillation between democracy and fascism simply in order to defend his own construct of power and governmentality. Then, he totally ignores the more robust analyses -e.g., those of the Frankfurt School thinkers- that existed even when he lived. He wanted to defend at all costs the "bio"-function of the so-called new governmentality, while he was forced to deny important facts that he was synthetically trying to overcome.

Neoliberalism and Foucault

Foucault's analyses of liberalism and neoliberalism are no different. He provides rich information and knowledge about these systems and their governmentalities. Foucault's analyses lie in his historical approach, which negates previous ways of exercising power and knowledge. Since it is more relevant to this study, it is more appropriate to focus on how he assesses neoliberalism in particular. Foucault speaks at length about neoliberalism in his 1978-79 lectures. He elaborates on the governmentality and rationality of neoliberalism, which for him is divided into two categories: first, the German neoliberalism of the so-called Ordoliberals, and second, the American neoliberalism: the Chicago School.

Foucault has a two-pillar construct: he criticizes Nazism as a defect of liberalism, while he praises German neoliberalism for its efforts to rebuild Germany after the Second World War. He praises the Chicago school because their common enemy is also the authoritarian, interventionist state. When we talk about the state, we mean a state that controls the economy by intervening when and if necessary. Although these two schools have their own peculiarities in terms of theoretical perspectives, their attitude towards the intervention of the state is common.

What Foucault could never understand is the difference between the appearance and the essence of neoliberalism. He assessed the neoliberal type of governmentality as a vehicle of a productive subjectivity that tolerates different identities, choices, preferences, and the like, as if it were a type of governmentality that opposes disciplinary governmentality in its essence. In the eighth lecture, Foucault begins to talk about social and political issues in France. When? At the end of the 1970s, when neo-liberalism was moving towards its own hegemony and globalism. In other words, France was at the beginning of the turn to neoliberal political economy while Foucault was giving his lectures. It seems that Foucault used this change to overthrow socialist remnants through the use of neoliberal governmentality and values. For him, social problems and poverty could not be ameliorated by socialism, and yet there was a neoliberal solution. Was Foucault unaware of Margaret Thatcher's TINA (there is no alternative)? Was he unaware of the coal miners' strikes in the United Kingdom? His allergy to those who mention state repression seems to have blinded him to what was coming. Defending society and providing tools did not seem to be about proposing better living conditions for oppressed people or social classes. The fear of the

Nazi or Stalinist states - as if they were equivalent forms - and the claim that only those who are state-phobic cannot see that the reduction of state power has taken place, is the essential part of the Foucauldian paradigm. Foucault could never understand that socialism refers to a society and not to the state. In fact, the state and its apparatuses can easily be replaced by other organs that may not be directly owned by the state. Therefore, when he criticizes those who criticize the concept of the state, he misses the basic point: what creates the state. Today, nation-states are back on the scene, and it can be argued that they are stronger than ever. Foucault completely misses the dialectic of economy and politics because of his false premise.

Foucault claims that sovereign power was mainly based on the right to kill, whereas neoliberalism is the negation of this type of power, and neoliberalism defends free competition and represents a relapsing juridical power. Thus, he argues that the law is becoming more normative, while the new technology of power is focused on life - not on murder⁸². For Foucault, this new governmentality could be a motivator for emancipation against the disciplinary sovereignty⁸³. Thus, Foucault's individualistic, subject-oriented approach describes the neoliberal subject as a self-interested, rational being capable of conducting an adequate analysis of the social domain that will yield rational conclusions and results. The subject will do this in order to maintain itself in the competitive environment of social life and its demands. It is simply a defense of the current social environment in accordance with capitalist realism. Foucault maintains a position that, at its best, can provide a critique of such a society to make some reforms only in some extreme cases. For Foucault, a radical transformation does not seem necessary, and some improvements in neoliberal governmentality can produce more rational people. Foucault considered and promoted neoliberalism as a form of governmentality that can be both opposing and governing. Interestingly enough, from the reverse angle, this means that the same statements could be made for, say, any political entity that supports Keynesian economics today because it opposes deregulated markets. What could Foucault think when the state intervened in the 2007-2009 crisis and when

⁸² Foucault, Michel. *History of Sexuality Vol. 1: An Introduction* transl. by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 144.

⁸³ Ibid.

Goldman Sachs, for instance, asked to be subject to regulations? Foucault cannot draw the line between intervention for pressure and intervention for the greater good – typical neoliberal attitude.

Foucault, exploring his own concept of governmentality, completely rejects the ownership and components of these forms of intervening governmentality. His aim may be different, but it is beyond his capacity to provide an adequate critique of capitalism or Marxism, since his categories are not relevant to them. His analyses of neoliberalism depict a secured competition that ensures the preservation of the free market and transforms the ethical and political environment of society and individuals. Individuals (or subjects in his words), while accepting this competitive order, act properly and learn how to make strategic choices, mathematical calculations and precise investments. Perhaps Foucault should have written a textbook on economics. It is obvious that such a book would have been one of the most popular even in today's educational system. He would also praise how individuals would settle into such a system. As Gabriel Rockhill mentioned, Foucault constructed a system not far from that of Ptolemy, who created a model of the universe that had the earth at its center⁸⁴. The content of his categories is rich and full of historical facts, but the categories themselves (in-themselves) are either false or irrelevant.

Concluding remarks on Foucault

Thus, we do not know whether Foucault did all these analyses on purpose. We are not mind readers, nor can we accuse anyone unless there is obvious information that justifies such accusations. One thing we do know about Foucault, however, is that he increasingly distanced himself from Marxism, especially after the failure of 1968. His hatred and despair of Marxism seems to have forced him, as it did other French anti-Marxist thinkers, to create a new framework that follows a completely different path of social and subject-oriented analysis. Another reason for this interpretation is that the historical trend of neoliberalism begins in the 1930s, even in Foucault's lectures -*Ordoliberalismus in Deutschland* (Ordoliberals in Germany). Nevertheless, Foucault chose to praise the governmentality of

⁸⁴ Rockhill, Gabriel, "Foucault: The Faux Radical", *The Philosophical Salon*, 12 October 2020. <https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/foucault-the-faux-radical/>

neoliberalism towards the end of the 1970s, when the world was entering a new type of capitalism that welcomed financialization and deregulation. The indoctrination and pernicious nature of neoliberalism was evident in 1979 when Foucault gave his lectures. It is hard to believe that such a thinker could have ignored what was happening in Chile, where a neoliberal government was taking power, even more so than in the United States and the United Kingdom. And today, we do not need to repeat it here in this section, but neoliberalism has since captured our daily lives with its economic policies, at the expense of the working class. To praise such a governmentality, in the naivest interpretation, can be considered a great failure in a thinker who claimed to be radical. In fact, for me, Foucault is the defender of the neoliberal system and fought against Marxism and the transformative forces of society.

Strangely enough, Foucault, who called Marcuse a pseudo-Marxist, claimed that the state is not only oppressive - I explained why above. For Foucault, this governmentality does not produce a uniform, standardized or, in Marcuse's words, "one-dimensional man". On the contrary, for Foucault, it encourages multitude, free choice and rational thought, through which we are our own entrepreneurs and competitors in a free market. Foucault's analysis goes back to where Marx began his analysis of the myth of the free market – unfortunately, inadequately and irrelevantly. Foucault completely misses the point and advocates neoliberal governmentality on the basis of appearances only - which is exactly what capitalist governments also aim to do!

Foucault's ontology is therefore as irrational as his approach to subjectivity. The dominant neoliberal governmentality does not offer us a free market; it only opens the gates for the owners of capital who, through their illustrious success stories, make us believe that we can become one of them in such a free market, where we can become entrepreneurs. Beyond the philosophical deficit of such a view, the Foucauldian framework could not offer a solution to the ecological catastrophe. It is a clear fact that destruction of nature accelerated after the 1970s, because of the insatiable nature of finance capital and financialization. Praising the neoliberal governmentality is only a contribution to these crimes from a philosophical point of view. To confront neoliberalism in this respect is also to negate the false arguments of Foucault about it.

Biopsychopolitics

Foucault challenged, perhaps gradually, the Marxist framework of power. Not only did he target Marxism, but he also challenged the efforts of, for example, Herbert Marcuse to bring a biological-psychological dimension to the Marxist framework.⁸⁵ Marcuse tried to bring in this dimension through his inspiration from Freud and his theory of repression. For Marcuse, life is a struggle between Eros and Thanatos - pleasure and death drives. Foucault rejected this model, arguing that it overemphasized repression. For him, power and the state were not only agents of oppression. On the contrary, they cared for the lives of citizens, sought to prolong their lives, educated them, etc. Interestingly, Foucault's defense is almost like that of a defender of capitalism. His false radicalism gradually began to defend and even advocate neoliberalism. Strangely enough, the years in which he began to promote neoliberalism were the years in which our planet first became much more vulnerable to the devastating effects of neoliberal politics and economics. It is obvious that the great defeats of 1968 and 1991 produced a new profile of intellectuals who tried to find irreparable gaps and setbacks in socialist theory and Marxism. Some of them, e.g., Laclau and Mouffe, aimed to transcend Marxism through radical democracy, and some seemed to replace demands with desires, as in the case of Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou and others. One of the commonalities of these radical thinkers is that they reduce revolutionary and transformative demands to desirability. They all promote subjective desire while distancing themselves from social transformation. And yet they claim to be on the left side of politics.

Biopsychopolitics has two main components: the first is the central nervous system, which receives impulses from the external world, such as the state, society, other individuals, and nature. The second is its internal processes that make the psyche work on it. This concept draws upon biopsychology. Biopsychology “*is the scientific study of the biology of behavior*”⁸⁶. Biopsychopolitics, in this framework, represents the

⁸⁵ Marcuse, Herbert. *Five Lectures: Psychoanalysis, Politics, and Utopia* transl. by Jeremy J. Shapiro and Shierry M. Weber (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1970) 9.

⁸⁶ Pinel, John P. J. and Barnes, Steven J.. *Biopsychology* 11th Edition (London: Pearson, 2022), 28.

case of an individual who interacts with the external world while his internal world processes such interactions. This is the biopsychopolitics of the individual; it is built upon biopsychology and cognitive psychology. Cognitive psychology would be a good companion to biopsychology, defined as follows:

What is cognitive psychology? It is concerned with the internal processes involved in making sense of the environment and deciding on appropriate action. These processes include attention, perception, learning, memory, language, problem solving, reasoning and thinking. We can define cognitive psychology as aiming to understand human cognition by observing the behaviour of people performing various cognitive tasks. However, the term “cognitive psychology” can also be used more broadly to include brain activity and structure as relevant information for understanding human cognition.⁸⁷

As we see, cognitive psychology, too, is an important tool to understand biological-psychological processes. In addition, its components such as linguistics, perception and such consist of concepts that are elaborated in philosophy as well. The reconsideration of these concepts can enable philosophy to work based on more robust grounds.

The second pillar of biopsychopolitics is its societal level. In this sphere, one speaks of the formation of society and the individual in society based on upward and downward relations (upward, e.g., individual versus society; society versus state or governmentality, and downward; the impact of society and state on the individual; and mutual relationships among individuals in the society as well). This sphere would be closely related to other social sciences such as sociology. Sociology examines society while social psychology examines individuals in their connections to society. This pillar is also important given the fact that social psychologists also increasingly explore social cognition⁸⁸ - cognition at the societal level.

Freud, regardless of the validity of his psychoanalytic claims, was courageous in his attempt to revive the role of the unconscious in our eve-

⁸⁷ Michael W. Eysenck and Mark T. Keane. *Cognitive Psychology: A Student's Handbook* (London, New York: Psychology Press, 2020), 1.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

ryday lives. His emphasis on the pleasure and death drives is still important in our individual and social relationships. My aim, however, is not to put Freud back into a philosophical framework, as Herbert Marcuse did. My goal is to build on Marcuse's framework while using a different set up to transform society into a better reality than the existing one.

Biopsychopolitics should therefore focus on the following main points:

- a) The effect of society on the individual and vice-versa - social psychology
- b) The impact of the individual on the self through its own central nervous system in connection to other individuals and society – biopsychology and cognitive psychology.

These two points should be elaborated in their interconnectedness. They are not isolated from each other; on the contrary, they influence and complement each other. The main connection between the two was made long before by Marx in his famous essay *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.⁸⁹

Marx grasped the nature of society in its essence. He mentions the transformative agency of society and individuals, while being aware of the impact of the existing structures that happened in the past and still rule, guide, or direct society and individuals. Therefore, these essential aspects have not changed, but their forms have evolved and transformed throughout our history. Overcoming nightmares means transforming society and individuals into a society in which such nightmares are minimized and, at best, eliminated. What Marx brought to light was that institutions shape society and individuals, but individuals and society - from a collective perspective - can also influence and even transform

⁸⁹ Marx, Karl. *Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: Collected Works, Vol. 11, Marx and Engels: 1853-55* (Lawrence & Wishart, 1987), 103.

structures. This requires the negation of the current status quo through perception and awareness gained through praxis.

Concluding remarks

Biopsychopolitics is based on the suggestion of the Marxian framework that theory itself should be revised on the basis of the ever-changing forms of society. We cannot deny that society, relations, and our perceptions are changing through geo-spatial and historical conditions, even if the antagonisms between capital and labor persist. Therefore, I believe it is necessary to adopt new critical frameworks. These frameworks consist of a critical and dialectical analysis of post-industrial society. And I propose that the psychoanalytical framework that is used for the level of the individual should be replaced by cognitive and biopsychological frameworks.

Today, interpretations of industrial society can no longer adequately analyze our one-dimensionality in the neoliberal framework. Our lives changed dramatically because of technological advances which pushed the service industry to its limits. Today, the service sector is the dominant industry. Finance has the upper hand over industrial production. Therefore, to evaluate all these changes, new approaches in philosophy and social sciences are inevitable. Biopsychopolitics, at both the societal and individual levels, could provide a framework for such analyses and critiques in philosophy.

Critical theory in philosophy is of fundamental importance. A major component of critical theory is to reflect on its own position and attitude. This requires an immanent and dialectical critique of the theoretical framework. Critical theory can provide adequate and progressive philosophical interpretations only through this self-reflective approach.

This essay inaugurates this philosophical framework, on the basis of the biological-psychological dimension. It should also be noted that I did not attempt to criticize Byung-Chul Han's psychopolitics. This is because psychopolitics cannot be isolated from biopolitics. They need to be studied together, as belonging to the same structure and as being interconnected. Han's work appears as an alternative and antithesis to biopolitics, and I think that is not relevant. As for biopsychopolitics, which is not a synthesis of Foucault's biopolitics and Han's psychopolitics, I will continue to work on it by thoroughly analyzing society and the individual as they currently exist and have evolved over time. In doing

this, I am going to consider Marxian and Marcusean frameworks. Therefore, it is not a fully established framework as of today, and it will require eloquent elaborations to follow.

The Role of Dopamine in Lacan's Desire

Eleftherios Sarantis (University of Sofia)

Abstract: Psychoanalysis is still a dynamic branch of philosophy, but it has been marginalized by psychology and psychiatry due to arguably unfounded hypotheses, thin evidence or stereotypes that lack scientific backing and remain in the sphere of an outdated theory of psychopathology (Paris, 2017). The psychodynamic school has attempted to reinstate the academic rigour of applied psychoanalysis by presenting results from therapy with equivalently positive and lasting effects, when compared to other forms of psychotherapy (Shedler, 2010). Moreover, the interdisciplinary field of neuropsychanalysis has emerged with the aim to investigate which theories of psychoanalysis could be validated through contemporary neuroscience. It was Freud himself who had argued that the early 20th century physiology did not yet have the necessary tools to provide an organic neurological basis for psychoanalysis (Solms & Turnbull, 2011). Almost a century later, Ariane Bazan proposed numerous physiological frameworks that support psychoanalytic definitions, contributing considerably to the development of neuropsychanalysis. Most notably, Bazan and Detandt presented evidence of a striking connection between the Lacanian concept of *jouissance* and the physiology of the mesolimbic dopaminergic pathway (Bazan & Detandt, 2013). This paper sets forth to identify definitive elements of Lacanian psychoanalysis on desire. Lacan had presented coherent definitions for the concepts of desire, *lack in the Other* and *objet petit a* that can be instrumentalized for comparison with the neurobiological findings. The scope of the comparison remains philosophical hence the neurobiological input will only be comprised of significant literature results on brain activity and the connection of social rewards and dopamine with drive, without delving into experimental methodology. The primary goal is to present the resemblance of the *objet petit a* as the object cause of Lacanian desire with the role of the neurotransmitter dopamine in the human brain.

Lacan's Philosophy of Desire

"Desire is always the desire of the Other. Which basically means that we are always asking the Other what he desires."

Jacques Lacan

Lacan presented his desire formula in 1958 with the aim to distinguish desire from the related notions of need and demand. He defines desire as the result of the subtraction of need from demand (Lacan & Fink, 2007, pp. 575-584). Need in this philosophical equation regards the basic biological needs, such as hunger, while demand is the expression of need to some other person. This process begins with infants demanding the presence of the mother and the satisfaction of their needs through non-verbal communication. In later stages of development, the demand to satisfy a need is conveyed through language, subject to the acquisition of societal influences and to the acquisition of language itself. This demand is the request from the Other to acknowledge a basic need and prioritize its satisfaction; it is essentially a demand for attention or love. Desire, however, according to Lacan, "is neither the demand for love nor the appetite to satisfy a need, but the difference that results from their subtraction, the very phenomenon of their splitting (Spaltung)" (Lacan & Fink, 2007, pp. 580). The process of delegating someone as the sole potential satisfier of a need is transcendental, as it transforms the appetite to satisfy a need into wanting the presence of the satisfier to the extent that evades the satisfaction of the need itself. Desire is that wanting for the other's presence, attention and action, when not considering the satisfaction of a need; either because the need is met and the demand for attention persists or because the need is negligible compared to the magnitude of the now much more significant demand for love. In other words, desire is produced when demand goes beyond the request to satisfy a basic need.

For Lacan, desire is always connected with the Other⁹⁰, which means that all drives beyond the satisfaction of basic needs are always

⁹⁰ The capital O is used to stress the very element of otherness in Lacanian discourse. The "other" ranges from simply other people to significant others, such as a parent or a teacher and from there to an even less tangible otherness, in the form of morals, values and significations derived from society, culture, religion etc.

connected with seeking the Other. When not acting to satisfy a need, we act with the intention to connect with or satisfy the Other. "Man's desire is the desire of the Other." (Lacan, 1978/1998). It should be stressed that Lacan's insistence on desire being mediated always through the Other stems from the influence of the Hegelian Master-Slave dialectic. Lacan was exposed to Hegel's philosophy extensively by attending in Paris the popular Alexandre Kojève seminars (1933-1939) on Hegel.

Man's very desire is constituted, he tells us [meaning Hegel], under the sign of mediation: it is the desire to have one's desire recognized. Its object is a desire, that of other people, in the sense that man has no object that is constituted for his desire without some mediation. (Lacan & Fink, 2007, pp. 148)

In Hegelian terms, Lacan's surplus demand for love, beyond basic need, is a demand for the recognition of one's desire, which transcends the importance of satisfying the need. The subject primarily strives for the recognition of the Other; there is no desire derived exclusively from the self. Lacan praises Hegel for conceiving that "each human being is in the being of the other" (Lacan & Jacques Alain Miller, 1991, p. 72). No motivation to act is exclusively sourced from oneself, instead the aim is to act in such a way that the subject's presence is recognized by another person. Incentives and actions are formed as such to comprehend what action would lead the Other to recognize one's desire. Desire is directed towards another Desire (the Other's Desire) which is finally a desire for recognition, Kojève says, when analysing Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Consciousness, the idea of oneself, is the result of interaction with others and is mediated by the obtained recognition from those others. (Alexandre Kojève & Queneau, 1980). Motivation to act, and eventually motivation to be in a certain way, is always mediated by the Other's expectation. The subject acts in such ways to meet external expectations and achieve recognition. No act, beyond those that target satisfying basic needs, has a purely internal source and eventually one's desire is fully alienated in the Other. Lacan says this clearly, in a way reminiscent of Kojève and, of course, Hegel: "Desire is always the *desire of the Other*. Which basically means that we are always asking the Other what he desires." (Lacan, 2008, p. 38).

When we do not precisely know what is expected from us to be recognized, we try to guess what the Other desires and we try to act ac-

cordingly. What could be perceived as a self-desire is always in some form an effort to interpret the *desire of the Other* and internalize it by making it our own desire before acting upon it. There is no pure self-sourced social desire, even though one might perceive feeling motivated by internal drives. A potential feeling of desire coming from within is the result of a process of unconsciously asking the Other what he desires [from us] to recognize us. The subject first asks a question and then it internalizes it by forming desire. The answer to the question “What do you want?” is the cause of desire, what Lacan calls *objet petit a* (or *objet a*) (Neill, 2011). The *a* stands for *autre* (other); the concept has been developed out of the Freudian *object* (*objet*) and Lacan's reference to otherness. Lacan insisted that *objet petit a* remains untranslatable, acquiring the status of an algebraic sign (Lacan & Sheridan, 2010). The use of the term object is metaphorical and symbolic. *Objet petit a* is the object cause of desire, a fantasy that provides the subject with a sense of wholeness, as if it were attained it would allow the fulfilment of the *desire of the Other* and resolve the sense of lacking formed by the separation from the Other. This process begins in childhood, when the child wants to be the mother's sole point of attention, but the mother's desire always goes beyond the child; some part of her desire is not related to the child, as she herself is a subject lacking, which feels separated from the Other (Fink, 1997). By pursuing the *objet a*, the child behaves in ways that reinstate the mother's recognition and full attention. It addresses the separation and division from the mother and fantasizes of a state of completeness, after having fulfilled her desire. The *objet a* is an action or a condition that would ideally allow for a complete unity with the Other; it is a fantasy that forms the expectation of recognition, it is the incentive to act upon Other's desire.

Building on Freud's drive theory, the *objet petit a* is one of Lacan's most significant contributions to psychoanalysis, distinctively focusing on the significance of the external stimulus coming from otherness. Lacan's breakthrough was to suggest that the expectation of others on how one should be unconsciously pushes the subject towards conformity which, in turn, is instrumental for motivating any action beyond the urge to satisfy basic needs. As we cannot always be the others' centre of desire, we are constantly experiencing a sense of lacking, which is triggering the need to feel complete and hence it forms desire. If the subject was not lacking, there would be no force to change anything, no

motive to be. Lacking and the need to feel connected with others is what stimulates behaviour. The *objet petit a* is the fantasy action or behaviour that would suffice to fulfil the others' desire, the expectation that the void of lacking would be filled.

The Neuroscience of Lacan's Desire

*"Once you understand the power and peril of dopamine,
you will better understand the human condition itself."*

Daniel H. Pink

Inspired by primatology studies from 1969 to 1990, the now widely accepted "social brain hypothesis" suggests that primates developed unusually large brains for body size, compared to other vertebrates, due to the social complexities of living in groups (Dunbar, 2016). Various studies confirmed a strong correlation of the brain neocortex size with group size in primates, while strategies of deception and coalition formation in those groups have temporarily termed the theory as "Machiavellian intelligence hypothesis" (Dunbar, 1998). Still, neither coalition formation and tactical deception, nor the number of social interactions per se, have been fully sufficient predictors of human brain size. In fact, it was pairbonded relationships that have been the most critical factor of brain evolution for anthropoid primates compared to the smaller relative brain size of other vertebrates (Shultz & Dunbar, 2007). By pairbonding, the literature refers mainly to reproductive relationships between males and females that are monogamous for a lasting period, but not necessarily for a lifetime. The reason pairbonded relationships contributed significantly to brain evolution is likely related to the need to develop mentalizing abilities to coordinate with one's mate on issues of nutrition and caretaking of offspring. Thus, primates were exposed to a process of developing a theory of mind through perspective-taking. It should be noted that simple non-reproductive bonded relationships have also likely contributed to that process. Still, pairbonded monogamy is now seen as the most significant growth factor for brain size and social cognition in humans (Dunbar, 2009). To sum up, even though the cognitive evolution likely began with basic ecological challenges, i.e. the need to satisfy basic needs such as finding food (Shultz & Dunbar, 2007), the large relative size of the human brain is the result of survival and reproduction mentalizing processes, where a critical factor is peer-coordination.

Bonded relationships have affected not only brain size but also incentives and reward mechanisms. The social brain hypothesis suggests that the brain grew in size as a result of and relative to the number and complexity of social relationships. Group size and particularly bonded relationships have been the most significant factors for brain size increase, which in turn unleashed significant computational power for humans. The disproportionate amount of executive brain power that became available with evolution allowed for highly sophisticated social behaviour to develop (Dunbar & Shultz, 2007). The neural basis of decision-making behind such social behaviour has been in increasing focus for neuroscience. Recent significant results suggest that social and monetary rewards share the same neural basis, a “common neural currency” that guides incentives, decisions and eventually behaviour (Izuma et al., 2008). In other words, the human brain and particularly the striatum area processes social reputation equivalently to basic material rewards. In Lacanian terms, the *desire of the Other* or the desire for the recognition by the Other triggers the same reward-related brain area as the fulfilment of a material basic need. Moreover, the same brain area was not triggered when the positive social feedback regarded a third party, but only when it was directed to the subject of the experiment (Bhanji & Delgado, 2013). This establishes that eliciting positive feedback from others has a positive effect similar to that of basic material rewards.

A complementary finding of major significance comes from a similar experiment which recorded the effect of being liked by peers and suggested that the magnitude of the positive brain effect is correlated with how important the person providing the feedback is (Davey et al., 2009). In Lacanian terms, the benefit of achieving the Other’s recognition depends on how highly we regard that given Other. Striatum activity does not only increase when we are liked or achieve good reputation, but also when we see that public opinion agrees with our own, or when our preference agrees with that of an expert, which constitutes another salient indirect form of recognition by others (Bhanji & Delgado, 2013), (Klucharev et al., 2009), (Campbell-Meiklejohn et al., 2010). This suggests the existence of a physiological basis for the Lacanian desire of the Other, that recognition is sufficient to activate the brain’s reward circuit and hence the prospect of recognition would motivate behaviour accordingly. However, it should be stressed that,

even though Lacan proposes the superior significance of desire over basic needs, neuroscience cannot yet confirm this. As mentioned above, the literature does confirm that social recognition in the form of good reputation, being liked and conforming with others is a sufficient reward trigger for the same brain area triggered by the fulfilment of basic needs. It also confirms that the reaction to recognition is directly proportional to the significance of the person providing the positive feedback. But there is no clear indication on the issue of which type of reward, social or material, has a significance priority.

A remarkable finding is that the striatum activity increases even at the mere presence of others which creates an expectation for a positive outcome, subject to a specific observed behaviour. We tend to alter our behaviour in the presence of others, likely trying to create a positive image and eventually elicit a social reward as described above. For example, adolescents tend to make riskier decisions when their friends are watching, while charitable donations are more generous when seen by others, as opposed to charity in anonymity (Bhanji & Delgado, 2013). This phenomenon is very significant for our understanding of incentives related to social reward. Recent neuroscientific findings allowed us to understand that drive is formed at the conception of a potential benefit, i.e. when we form the expectation that a specific preference or behaviour will lead to a reward, and not necessarily when an expected reward is in fact delivered.

The crucial neurotransmitter for regulating motivation related to future rewards is dopamine, with dopamine neuronal axons extending in the striatum area (Schultz, 1998). Dopamine activity and, in general, motives with respect to rewards (social or material) are governed by a prediction error mechanism; more reward than expected generates a positive dopamine response, as much reward as expected comes with no response and less reward than expected leads to a negative response. Most importantly, dopamine neurons show a strong positive response when exposed to a predictive stimulus and the conception of a potential reward, prior to its expected delivery (Figure 1), (Schultz, 2016). The latter is aligned with the finding that the simple presence of others encourages behaviour that would yield a social reward.

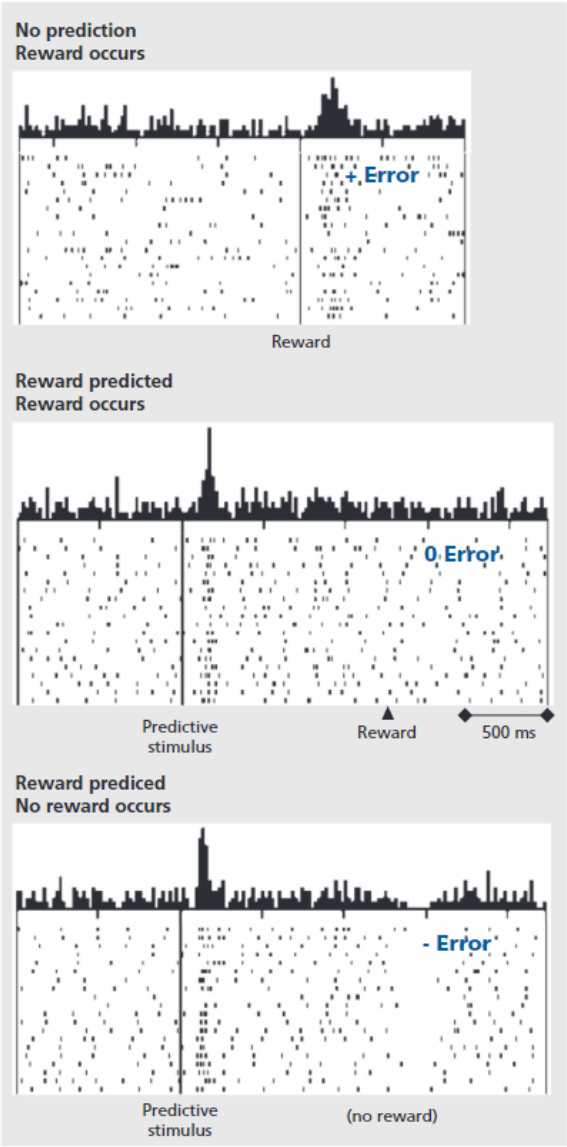


Figure 1, (Schultz, 2016)

Dopamine is essential for regulating wanting, while the expectation of the delivery of a social reward is what generates motivation to act in a way to achieve the perceived reward. As we have already seen, social rewards are sufficient cues to trigger wanting. In Lacanian terms, the wanted social reward is the *desire of the Other* and the *objet petit a* is what needs to be attained to achieve that goal. Comprehending what the Other wants from us serves as the neurobiological cue that allows the conception of the *objet petit a*. The motivation of the subject to seek the recognition of the Other is generated when it occurs to the subject what the *objet petit a* is; what is that act or behaviour that, if pursued, would fulfil the *desire of the Other* and thereby provide the subject with a sense of completeness. However, dopamine neurons will not respond if a reward is delivered as expected, or depression will result if the reward is lesser than expected (or if not delivered); this is consistent with the prediction error mechanism described above and showed in Figure 1. Even if the social reward is better-than-expected (a positive prediction error), the positive dopamine reaction fades very fast and only a fresh motive for a novel social reward, greater in magnitude or different in nature, would generate drive.

A striking and very relevant neurobiological finding was that the large and robust dopamine midbrain systems mediate only the “wanting”, the desire, and that the feeling of “liking”, the pleasure, is instead mediated by more fragile and anatomically tiny hotspots in the brain (Berridge & Robinson, 2016). Those hotspots are stimulated by a different set of neurotransmitters (such as opioid and endocannabinoid neurotransmitters) and are restricted from the much larger dopamine system that generate intense “wanting”. For example, the pleasure hotspot of the nucleus accumbens is only one cubic centimetre and comprises only 10% of the nucleus accumbens’ volume. The remaining 90% is disconnected from enhancing pleasure, but can still cause intense “wanting”. The two systems are complementary and a mere stimulus (cue) is sufficient to disrupt the brittle “liking” network and send the subject into a reward-seeking loop⁹¹.

The latter may justify why desire is more intense and frequent,

⁹¹ Dopamine’s “wanting” functionality is now understood to be the primary brain system underlying addiction.

compared to fewer moments of pleasure, and possibly explains why Lacan suggests that the subject's *lack* and desire for the *objet petit a* is the prevalent human condition. Dopamine controls an intense continuous reward "wanting" loop, disconnected from experienced pleasure, while even the effects of dopamine positive prediction errors are comprised of short-lived excitement spikes. For psychoanalysis, this means that the conception and pursuit of the *objet petit a* causes a positive, sometimes even ecstatic, dopamine reaction, but a longer-term completeness with the Other is never achieved. Similarly, the sense of Lacanian *lack in the Other* lies in the fact that "wanting", the desire for the *objet petit a*, is never-ending and separate from pleasure (the "liking"). For dopamine neurons, any act that will lead to a social reward which needs to be updated continuously to generate fresh drive, irrespective of any brief effect on "liking" and feelings of pleasure. The *objet petit a*, mediated by dopamine, needs to be reviewed perpetually, while the completeness with the Other, a pleasure feeling of having fulfilled the *desire of the Other*, can never be achieved steadily with a lasting effect. Desire and pleasure are neurobiologically separate!

Objet petit a is then that unattainable (non-)object which is simultaneously impossible and necessary in order for the subject to come to, and to continue to, be constituted as a subject. The movement of desire can then be understood to take the form of a perpetual slippage from one object, thing or aspect of a thing, to the next; a perpetual search for that which caused the desire in the first place but which, as it does not exist as such, can never be (re)found. (Neill, 2011, pp. 58)

The feeling of *lack* in Lacanian psychoanalysis is reflected in the unattainability of the *objet petit a*, which in turn is a potential reflection of the continuous dopamine "wanting" and its separation from "liking". Dopamine leads to a search for ever greater (or different) rewards irrespective of pleasure. The dopamine reward prediction error is a reinforcement learning mechanism that facilitated survival and the desire to continue being, but pleasure is determined by a different brain network; dopamine is a blessing of motivation for more life, but also a curse of continuous lacking at the same time; lacking the next reward, lacking the next instance of recognition by the Other.

Conclusion

This paper presented Lacan's theory of desire by defining *desire of the Other* and the related concept of the *objet petit a* as the object cause of desire that addresses the subject's *lack in the Other*. It further introduced the "social brain hypothesis" according to which human brain evolution has been driven by group and pairbonded relationships. The hypothesis suggests that coordination with peers (others) led humans to develop the disproportionate brain size they exhibit compared to other animals. Peer feedback has been instrumental for the current anatomy of the human brain, which likely impacted the processing of the interaction with others and the resulting behaviour formation. In fact, the brain striatum activity increases with social rewards, demonstrating similar response to the delivery of material rewards, which provides a fitting physiological basis for Lacan's theory of desire. After establishing that acknowledgement from others constitutes a sufficient motivation trigger, this paper presented the dopaminergic reward prediction error mechanism that mediates human behaviour with respect to reward triggers. Finally, I suggested that the conception of the *objet petit a* resembles the role of dopamine in processing cues that generate continuous "wanting". The major finding of neurobiology is that "wanting" is a dopamine-mediated, reward-seeking process that is disconnected from the brain systems that determine pleasure, "liking". This dominant role of "wanting" in brain neurochemistry and its separation from "liking" likely justifies the feeling of *lack* and the unattainability of the *objet petit a*; the feeling of the subject's incompleteness and the continuous desire for recognition, the *desire of the Other*.

Looking forward to future research, Lacan had suggested that anxiety is generated when we do not know what the Other wants from us (Lacan, 2016), which suggests that the subject cannot formulate a comprehensive *objet petit a*. Neurobiologically, this would mean an inability to form realistic predictions or to conceive reward stimuli, which could subdue dopaminergic activity for long periods. Moreover, the incentive salience of the Other may lead to pathological dopamine-mediated "wanting" to seek the *desire of the Other*, resembling addictive behaviour, which could also lead to elevated anxiety (Bazan & Detandt, 2013). A recent study in fact suggests that a dopamine prediction error perspective in psychotherapy may have a positive effect when treating fear and anxiety (Papalini et al., 2020). Future studies should further investigate the role of dopamine in anxiety and a potential connection of the incentive sensitization theory of addiction with Lacanian *desire*.

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The Ring of Gyges and New York Hot Dog: A Kantian Constructivist Analysis of Moral Motivation

Jacopo Morelli (University of Modena-Reggio)

Abstract: The myth of Gyges' ring described in Plato's Republic is a thought experiment that raises ethical questions about the nature of morality and what is just. The dilemma arises from the question of whether or not someone who had the power of the ring, invisibility, would be able to resist using it for immoral purposes. What I will argue in this article is that it is possible to defend the concept of justice, and the validity of ethics in general, even in a hypothetical case like that of the ring of Gyges, if we understand the real essence of practical reason. I will reconstruct a brief history of the philosophical debate on the myth of Gyges' ring, showing the different positions and answers to it, arguing that the Kantian approach may offer the best reply to Glaucon's challenge, rejecting the underlying account that we only have reason to do what promotes our happiness. I will then present the proposal of Kantian constructivism more specifically, explaining why the concept of the constitutive reasons makes it possible to provide an answer to Glaucon without having to fall into forms of metaphysical foundationalism, while at the same time providing a coherent account that can explain moral motivation.

Keywords: Metaethics, Kantian constructivism, intersubjectivity, practical reasoning, moral motivation, integrity of the agent.

Introduction

The ring of Gyges is a mythical magical artifact mentioned by Glaucon in Plato's book "Republic", to argue against justice in itself. Since the ring makes its bearer invisible, it is easy for him to behave by ignoring the consequences of his actions, simply trying to maximize his interests⁹². Glaucon describes the story of Gyges, a Lydian shepherd that use

⁹² Plato, Republic (360b-c).

this powerful ring in morally repugnant ways to gain whatever he wishes until he even eventually become the king of Lydia; the aim of Glaucon is to argue that in these circumstances every agent with the ring should act for his own benefit, and that it would be foolish not to do so. To assert this implies embracing a concept of ethics based solely on prudential reasons. But moral reasons are not prudential reasons, because even assuming that the shepherd with Gyges' ring can always get away with no consequences, his actions would still remain morally wrong. This is an intuition⁹³ that we all seem to have, even a fictionalist like James Joyce, although he adds two specifications: 1) that the feeling of injustice surrounding the action of Gyges is due to evolutionary reasons and 2) that this feeling, despite being found in most agents, it is not rationally justifiable albeit pragmatically useful⁹⁴. What I will argue in this article is instead that it is possible to rationally justify action, even in a hypothetical case like that of the ring of Gyges, that is to say that it is possible to explain why the shepherd's work is not only morally condemnable but rationally wrong.

Firstly, I will try to reconstruct a brief history of the philosophical debate on the myth of Gyge's ring, showing the different positions and answers to it, arguing that the Kantian approach may offer the best reply to Glaucon's challenge, rejecting the underlying account that we only have reason to do what promotes our happiness. I will then present the proposal of Kantian constructivism, explaining why the concept of the constitutive principle of reason makes it possible to provide an answer to Glaucon without having to fall into forms of metaphysical foundationalism. I will expand this theme through the analysis of a simple everyday case (a walk in the streets of New York) in order to provide an analysis of the relationship between moral motivation and normativity for Kantian constructivists. Since the ontological conception of normativity as 'external' seems to be at odds with the internal authority and the motivational power of practical judgments, it is difficult to understand why an ontology of previous and independent normative facts must generate reasons that are authoritative and effective from the practical point

⁹³ There is a general agreement that ethical theory bears precisely the burden of proof of explaining the objective-seeming features of our moral experience.

⁹⁴ Joyce, R., *The Myth of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

of view for those who are about to take action. Precisely because of this difficulty, Kantian constructivism retrieves the interpretation of autonomy as a form of self-regulation: we are subject only to those laws on which we legislated, that is, those laws that were constructed by ourselves. Only by independently reflecting on why a given principle is right (therefore rational) can the subject really be motivated to act according to it⁹⁵.

Ring of Gyges: the myth and some possible solutions

In Book II of Plato's *Republic*, Socrates' main interlocutor, Glaucon, raises a vivid and powerful challenge to justice and morality in general. Glaucon challenges Socrates' claim that justice is desirable for its own sake and for the sake of its consequences. He argues instead that most people consider justice burdensome and onerous but practice it for the good consequences that are a result of having a reputation for justice. He presents the case of Gyges to expound the thesis that injustice is superior to justice, which he wants Socrates to refute. "Now if there were two such rings, and the just man would put one on, and the unjust man the other, no one, as it would seem, would be so adamant as to stick by justice and bring himself to keep away from what belongs to others and not lay hold of it, although he had license to take what he wanted from the market without fear, and to go into houses and have intercourse with whomever he wanted, and to slay or release from bonds whomever wanted, and to do other things as an equal to a god among humans. And in so doing, one would act no differently from the other, but both would go the same way?"⁹⁶.

Glaucon's contention is that Gyges does not have reason to be just in this circumstance, since being just will not promote his happiness: in this type of circumstance would be right, for every agent, to pursue injustice, "for someone who did not want to do injustice, given this sort of

⁹⁵ This deliberation, this selection of what is right and what is not, is not merely arbitrary, since, as rational agents, we must submit to the intrinsic rules of practical reasoning itself. This does not mean to reduce the autonomy of reason to a deterministic application of rules already provided, but to circumscribe its area of legitimacy.

⁹⁶ Plato, *Republic* (359c-360b).

opportunity, and who did not touch other people's property, would be thought most wretched and most foolish by everyone aware of the situation"⁹⁷. The ring puts its wearer outside the circumstances of justice, showing that justice is not something that has value per se, but only a social imposition on nature. Glaucon portrays the natural man as pre-social and pre-moral, and from this standpoint morality seems to be a "necessary evil": the idea that morality reflects only human weakness and the inability to take net advantage of others. It is possible to decompose this thesis into three distinct but intertwined assumptions: (1) the adoption of a contractualist or conventionalist theory of justice; (2) the anthropological postulate that we are essentially acquisitive and competitive beings, and that human happiness consequently implies the possession of material goods and power; (3) the assertion that we are only justified in doing what promotes our happiness.

For the most part, philosophers have responded to the dilemma posed by Glaucon by rejecting one or more of these key assumptions. The creator of the dilemma himself, Plato, attempted to respond to Glaucon's challenge by simultaneously rejecting (1), the contractarian account of justice, and (2), the account of human happiness, and several philosophers have since followed this approach, expanding the analysis and showing the various contradictions inherent in Glaucon's assumptions. For many, if morality is represented in this Sophist way, as a conventional constraint on the natural mode of human behavior rather than as integral to human good, then any genuine adherence to morality is undermined. But as Alasdair MacIntyre noted, the Sophist conception of the natural man is not so purified from civilization and "nomos" as the Sophists taught, but merely based on the previous system of values. "What he [the natural man as understood by the sophists] express is not nature, but the social attitudes of the Homeric hero"⁹⁸, with power and pleasure being their exclusive interest.

However, these lines of thought often limit themselves to the simple *pars destruens*, criticizing the foundation and reduction of morality to the mere sphere of the social contract, but failing to provide equally solid foundations for explaining why the shepherd's action with the ring

⁹⁷ Ibid. 360d

⁹⁸ MacIntyre, A., *A Short History of Ethics* (Croydon: Routledge, 1967), p.17.

is wrong. Often these proposals follow Plato in a foundationalist, realist approach to ethics, which identify and locate the good in a certain area of the ontological realm (tending to be metaphysical) and then base moral practice on a process of recognizing these entities. The problem with realist conceptions of morality and justice, in addition to general foundationalist difficulties, is that the normativity they enact is disengaged from the autonomous deliberative capacity of rational agents.

Other philosophers maintained a broadly conventional or contractarian account of justice, but challenged (2), the account of human nature and human happiness. Glaucon claims that we are by nature acquisitive and competitive and thus take material goods and power to be the main components of happiness. But surely this is a limited and one-dimensional account of human nature. We are also social creatures: we require companionship and cooperation and cannot flourish in solitude. Thus, if we understand the goods that are scarce in the circumstances of justice to include those that we acquire through the companionship and cooperation of others, then even equipped with Gyges' ring we would still need justice. In his *Morals by Agreement*, David Gauthier argues that Glaucon is mistaken in representing "justice as a necessary evil because he supposes that it affords us only a second-best means to our ends".⁹⁹ He argues that the cooperation made possible by justice is not a second-best way of realizing ends that might sometimes be achieved in other ways, for "in cooperating we make the most effective use of our powers to attain ends that would otherwise lie beyond our individual capacities. And we find value in ways that no solitary being could experience".¹⁰⁰ Glaucon is wrong, then, to think that Gyges would have no need for justice, since humans "are neither all-powerful nor all-sufficient".¹⁰¹

The problem with this type of approach, however, is the absence of a justification as to why always be just and, more specifically, it may not show that we have reason to be just to everyone. Glaucon may concede that people are not affectively and socially self-sufficient and so need to be just to some people in order to be happy, without conceding that we need to be just to everyone, particularly those with whom we do not care

⁹⁹ Gauthier, D., *Morals by Agreement* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986), p. 345.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

to have cooperative relationships. David Gauthier's idea that rational agents, aiming to maximize their expected utility, would in suitable conditions choose to become "constrained maximizers", does not provide solutions to not-suitable situations such as the one in which the Lydian shepherd find himself. In Gauthier's view there are no requirements to constrain our maximizing activity, neither to enable us to cooperate nor to show respect for each other, unless it is rational to constrain our maximizing activity. Therefore, Gauthier argues that it is rational for Glaucon to constrain his maximizing activity, while failing to provide him with genuine self-motivating and truly normative reasons, since for Gauthier too the reasons for action are solely prudential¹⁰². The crucial point is that people who are harmed by invisibility are wronged, they are victims of injustice, not only because of the deliberation of the subject (who is only interested in its maximization), but especially because of the factual conditions of injustice that any impartial subject can ascertain, and it is from these conditions of injustice that the deliberation starts.

At last, many philosophers respond to Glaucon's challenge by rejecting (3), the view that we only have reason to do what promotes our happiness. The core idea is that we have reason to do what is just or right, regardless of the impact on our happiness, indeed, regardless of the impact on any of our ends, whether those ends are narrowly self-interested or altruistic. Among the various philosophers¹⁰³ that subscribe

¹⁰² Constructivists and Gauthier have more in common than differences. Both share the idea that moral and normative facts are mind-dependent and that they depend specifically on the "deliberative" intentional states that people would have under certain hypothetical circumstances. By "deliberative" intentional state, we can refer to an intentional state such as a wanting, choosing, or evaluating that has a direction of adaptation similar to desire and is normally subject to deliberative control (regarding what would be rational to have under certain circumstances). However, the disagreement is precisely about the criteria of this deliberative control: while for Gauthier they boil down to a cost-benefit calculation, relying on an economic and individualist conception of rationality, Kantian-minded constructivists insist more on the public nature of deliberation and rationality, emphasizing its dialogical character.

¹⁰³ To cite just a few others, from very different background: Hegel, Nietzsche and Parfit. Specifically Parfit in his critique of utilitarianism, tried to show that the view that we only have reason to do what promotes our happiness is based on a perspectival deception, that is, a deception where the propositions 'maximizing

to this thesis, there are Kantian thinkers, according to whom all rational beings owe just treatment to other human beings (which are considered as ends in themselves) and have reason to act accordingly. To better understand these questions about practical rationality we need to comprehend the central difference between the two main types of reasons that we have already mentioned several times during this discussion: motivational and normative reasons. By the term "reasons" we seem to use a single concept that is used to answer different questions: the question of whether there is a reason for someone to do something (normative) and the question of what someone's reason for acting is (motivating)¹⁰⁴. Normative reasons were conceived of as facts, and so were regarded as mind-independent: the facts are what they are independently of whether anyone knows them or thinks about them. By contrast, motivating rea-

happiness is what has to be done' or 'good coincides with maximizing happiness' are thought to be informative propositions, but in fact they are not: they are as informative as propositions like 'being round is the same as being blue.' What the utilitarian does is simply to say that 'maximize' and 'ought to do' coincide, without trying to bridge the manifest gap between the two facts.

¹⁰⁴ Maria Alvarez provides an enlightening example in her entry in the *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* ("Reasons for Action: Justification, Motivation, Explanation") in which is completely sound to ask whether there is a reason for the government of a country to tax sugary drinks (normative) while at the same time asking for the government's reason for actually taxing the drinks (motivating). The same reason may answer both questions: the reason that favours taxing the drink may be that the tax will help reduce child obesity; and that may also be the government's reason for taxing the drinks. In that case, the government is motivated to tax drinks by a normative reason, a reason that may justify its doing so. But we don't always act for the reasons that favour our actions. For instance, the government may tax sugary drinks because (or in part because) some of its members own shares in a company that sells low-sugar drinks. In that case, the reason for which the government decides to tax sugary drinks is not, or not solely, the reason that favours its doing so. The distinction between normative and motivating reasons, therefore, enables us to separate the question what reasons motivate agents to act (a psychological question) and the question whether those are good reasons: reasons that favour and justify their acting thus (a normative question). My suggestion is that we should use the term **reason** only for normative reason, while simply using the term **motive** for the motivating reason: therefore, there can be different motives why the government tax sugary drinks, but there will be only some reasons to do that, namely the normative reasons, reasons that will be justifiable to citizenry.

sons were conceived of as mental states of agents and, as such, as entities that depend on someone's thinking or believing certain things.

In recent years, however, this assumption has been challenged, giving rise to several disputes about the ontology of reasons¹⁰⁵. Whichever source we seek to trace in normative reasons (whether rationality, desires, or values¹⁰⁶), the practical function they must serve is still to motivate ac-

¹⁰⁵ Constructivists hold precisely that normative reasons are mind-dependent, that is, they do not exist prior to our deliberation, and that, at the same time, they are objective and non-arbitrary, since they are based on principles that are constitutive of reason itself. By constitutive principles of reason they mean those principles that are ineliminable from reasoning itself, since they constitute it and are its foundation. Constructivism, in this sense, is delineated as a conception of practical reason that is based on the agent's reflexive skills, in which the moral principles identified refer back to the reason for which that action was chosen and undertaken. The 'not being able to avoid' reference to the constitutive principles of reason itself expresses a practical, rather than logical and ontological, necessity with which the agent must necessarily come to terms when asking "what should I do?", putting his or her integrity as a responsible and reflexive if fallible agent at stake. We will delve into this issue in details in the next page.

¹⁰⁶ While Kant and Kantian constructivists such as Korsgaard, O'Neil, and Bag-noli (but also other contemporary non-Kantian thinkers such as Smith, Scanlon, and Millgram) ground the normativity of reasons on the concept of rationality, there are approaches that ground the normativity of reasons on the concept of good or value (from Aristotle to modern thinkers such as Anscombe, Raz, and Dancy) and approaches that ground the normativity of reasons on the concept of desire or motivation (from Hume to modern thinkers such as Williams, Goldman, and Harris). Some authors (such as Warren Quinn) reject this tripartition, arguing that all meta-ethical positions on normativity are nonetheless based on a concept of rationality, distinguishing precisely between subjectivists, who hold moral principles to be rational albeit non-cognitive (and thus e.g. preferences and desires), and objectivists, who hold moral principles to be rational and endowed with cognitive content and thus capable of genuine truth (based on objective, foundational elements of the world, such as values and the good). Quinn who bases normativity on an Aristotelian concept of good views rationality precisely as the excellence of the use of the faculty of reason, the "good" condition of rational practical thought. "The pursuit [of an action] is rationalized not by the attitude, but by the apparent value that attaches to its object". Quinn, W., *Morality and Action* (Cambridge University Press, 2012) p. 247.

tion as well as justify it. Therefore, any account of normative reasons must offer a plausible explanation of the relationship between the normativity of reasons and the capacity that reasons have to motivate agents to act. It is necessary to provide a coherent account that can explain how thinking that there is a reason for me to do something can motivate me to act, and to act *for* that reason. Desire-based accounts of reasons might seem to have an advantage in this respect, compared to constructivists: if normative reasons depend on my antecedent motivations, desires, and plans, then it is plausible that I am motivated to do what I believe will help satisfy or grow those motivations. But desire-based accounts seem to fail to account for another central feature concerning normative reasons, namely the normativity that influences agents independently of their motivations. Why should we act rightly if we do not seem motivated to do so? This continues to be at the heart of Glaucon's challenge.

The solution of Kantian constructivists lies in bringing normativity back inside the agent itself, rather than outside. In this reading, Kant himself was committed to the “constitutivist view” that the source of the categorical force of moral obligations lies in the constitutive features of rational agency. The normativity of reasons in this conception is provided not by desires or conceptions of the good, but by the rationality and deliberation of autonomous agents. The distinctiveness of this conception lies in the idea that reason must be examined by reason itself in order for its verdicts to be justified, bringing normativity back into the agents, but still making it public. Reasoning is public not in the sense that it is a form of social negotiation, but in the Kantian sense that it has a reflexive and dialogical structure, and, for this reason, capable of producing reasons that are addressed to other rational beings: it is precisely reasons that are among the most valuable tools for building cooperative practical interactions.

Why should we then think that we always have a reason for being just, even when justice has no relation to our ends? Because we are rational agents and can only judge it unjust and wrong if someone takes advantage of others by using a power such as Gyge's ring. It is inherent in our nature as rational agents to detect this injustice; if we nevertheless decide to ignore it for our own personal gain, because in the condition we are in it benefits us to ignore what seems rational to us, we can do so, because we are free agents, but we would remain conscious that we are acting irrationally, namely, in the sense we have specified so far, unjust-

tifiably (if another agent had discovered us we would have no normative reason to give him to justify our action). Even in a hypothetical scenario such as Gyge's ring, in which I do not have to provide any justification to other agents, my nature as an autonomous rational agent remains active, continuously and passively, and therefore I know that I am acting immorally because I critically self-judge my actions and cannot inter-subjectively justify them. But why should knowing this motivate me to act morally, if I believe that I will not be found out and therefore do not have to give any reason (that I could not give) for my actions? And what specifically is the deliberative process by which I arrive at reasons that I could provide to publicly justify my actions? In the second chapter we will answer these questions, starting with the second one first and then, by analyzing a concrete case (that of the New York Hot Dogs) seeking the way we judge and discern normative reasons, to understand how these reasons actually succeed in motivating our actions.

The New York Hot Dog: can moral motivation be rationally justified?

You're in New York City, walking down 5th Avenue; you've just picked up a hot dog along the way and find a shriveled child at the curbside holding out his hand and pointing with his other trembling hand to the hot dog. You can judge from his appearance that he is literally starving. What is the right choice to make? The answer seems obvious and uncontroversial: give food to the child so he can feed himself. But we know that with philosophers it is often not so easy. Bernard Williams for example, argued that no one has reasons for doing something unless he himself is motivated to do it. An agent has a reason for doing F only if it is possible to identify a "sound deliberative route" that allows us to trace the reason in question back to the subjective motivational complex¹⁰⁷. Someone who deliberates past the hungry child might say that he was simply hungry, and this was the reason that led him to ignore any other reason. The deliberative path, which led him to the practical reason for ignoring the child would be, for Williams, valid, even though selfish.

Williams believes that it is utterly foolish to accuse someone who does not recognize certain reasons of being irrational: the claim to identify

¹⁰⁷ Williams, B., *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

definitive practical reasons that apply indifferently to all is, in his view, impossible. He who should respond to the appeal of certain reasons may be accused of being, from time to time, cruel or selfish or thoughtless, but not of acting irrationally; Williams does not deny that those who are indifferent to reasons can be blamed, which is probably what everyone would do in the case taken as an example, but the point he wants to emphasize is that these criticisms cannot be made by asserting that there is a valid rational procedure irrespective of the agents' subjective motivational complex, let alone by saying that the reasons in question were true prior to their being recognized as such by the agents themselves¹⁰⁸. Deliberating rightly, for Williams, is thus a process that takes place from the actual subjective motivational complex of the agents, depends entirely on it, and cannot be regulated from criteria outside the set itself that would guarantee its correctness.

But if reasoning is a public¹⁰⁹ human faculty, it is possible to sanction its correctness, that is, to check whether the criteria for good reasoning are met, just as it is possible to check whether or not someone is literate by checking whether or not they are correctly applying various gram-

¹⁰⁸ For Williams, one cannot argue with those who reject the moral point of view because they feel no commitment to others. The starting point of moral experience is sympathetic involvement with the fate of others, and this can only be produced by education if it can awaken appropriate emotions (not reasoning). One can argue against immoralism only with an interlocutor who has manifested involvement with something. It is precisely in this sense that I try to distance myself from Williams' approach, since I believe it is possible to argue in favor of the 'moral point of view,' because ethics need not be based necessarily and solely on emotions; reason-based ethical systems are possible, in the sense that even those who feel no commitment to others can be persuaded toward it by reasoning correctly. Kantian constructivism is one such ethical system.

¹⁰⁹ The term public underline the contrast with Williams' conception of rationality, which is almost solipsistic, disconnected from verification mechanisms external to the subject itself. The reasons end up being merely motivating reasons or at best explanatory reasons. But justifying the action is very different from simply explaining it. If I explain the reasons why I walked away in front of the starving child, I am simply showing what was the reasoning I followed, regardless of whether it was correct or not. That is why we have to talk about justificatory (or normative) reasons and not explanatory reasons. The latter are reasons to which we appeal to try to explain actions and attitudes; the former are reasons to which we appeal to try to justify them.

mathematical rules¹¹⁰. The intuition of constructivism, and that of constitutivism in general, is, as mentioned, that we have reasons common to all, which are constitutive precisely of the fact that we are rational beings, and to act against them is to act irrationally, that is, to act against what practical reason itself suggests. If we base ethical acting on practical reason, we can then check whether an agent is acting morally simply by checking whether he or she is complying with the constitutive reasons. What we want to show with the example of the starving child is precisely that the one who has no reason to act in feeding him is committing an error that prescind from his motivation, not because there is a specific constitutive reason for this individual case, but because by deliberating and weighing the various reasons correctly we can see which are the constitutive ones and which are contingent, clarifying what needs to be done.

Let us then try to make the arguments transpire and clarify the situation. First of all, we can start by checking the strength of the argument adduced by Williams' egoist, his "being hungry" as a reason for eating the hot dog. Isn't judging one's momentary hunger more important than the life of someone something that can be judged lacking in the most basic reasons? Even if feeding yourself is a basic reason, the *conatus sese conservandi*¹¹¹, there are times when it should not be indulged if there are other reasons to act otherwise. If you are bleeding out, and you are supposed to heal your

¹¹⁰ In theoretical reasoning this is evident, but there are good reasons to argue that this is also applicable to practical reasoning. Millgram for example points out that: "One important aspect of theoretical reasoning (that is, reasoning directed toward belief) is resolving contradictions in one's system of beliefs, and freedom from contradiction is an important contributor to theoretical coherence. How we revise our beliefs in the face of contradiction is not well understood, but we can expect that practical rationality will also require freedom from practical contradiction, that freedom from practical contradiction will be an important contributor to practical coherence, and that practical reasoning will be directed at, among other things, resolving practical contradictions". Millgram, E., *Varieties of Practical Reasoning* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2001), p.15.

¹¹¹ I used the term basic and not constitutive voluntarily. While the principle of self-preservation is a common feature of all cultures (as shown by various anthropologists, psychologists and biologists since the time of Freud and Darwin), this does not mean that it is a constitutive principle of practical reason. It may simply be an abstraction of a survival instinct common to most animals and not a formalization obtained from the faculty of reason peculiar only to human beings.

wound, but you start eating because you are also hungry, are you irrational? Here even Williams would answer yes, precisely because, between the two actions, both afferent to the principle of self-preservation, there is one that is a priority: before I feed myself, I must consider it more important to avoid bleeding out (otherwise I will act irrational).

For Kantian constructivism, however, it is equally possible that the reason to feed oneself¹¹² can be overshadowed by other kinds of reasons (not just prudential ones), on pain of the same irrationality. In this case, the failure to recognize that we have a reason for feeding that child that is more important than our reason for being hungry, because the two conditions of hunger are simply different and with opposite consequences (dramatic for the child, indifferent for the adult), involves a practical irrationality, an error of deliberation due to the inability to correctly apply the constitutive principles of reason; the principle in question here might simply be the second formulation of the Kantian categorical imperative, namely, "act in such a way as to treat humanity both in your own person and in the person of every other person always as an end and never simply as a means." Respecting others as end in themselves is something we understand as right simply by reflecting on it, although it is sometimes possible to ignore the evidence. This is due to the fact that we, as human agents are autonomous and therefore fallible.

Indeed, anyone who addresses the topic of moral motivation knows that he needs to address and try to explain the issue of *akrasia*¹¹³, that is,

¹¹² Which, again, in this case will have no major repercussions on the passerby, who is simply going home where he can have more to eat. However, it could be reiterated that my wanting to eat the hot dog is not due to the simple function of feeding myself, but precisely because of the pleasure given by the taste, the pleasurable sensation of eating. What follows in the discussion applies perfectly to this answer as well: the reason for my temporary pleasure is not sufficient to balance the condition and fate that lies ahead for the child.

¹¹³ The Greek word '*akrasia*' is usually said to translate literally as 'lack of self-control', but it has come to be used as a general term for the phenomenon known as weakness of will. It is also interesting to note, since the pretext of this article is a Platonic myth, that Socrates (as portrayed by Plato in the *Protagoras*) argues that it is impossible for an agent to choose a course of action which one knows to be certainly less good than some alternative known to be available. Anyone who chooses to do something which is in fact worse than something they know they could have done instead, must, according to Socrates, have wrongly judged the relative values of the actions.

weakness of will, the disposition to act contrary to one's considered judgment about what is best to do. This is a broad topic that deserves a longer space of discussion than I can devote to it here. I will only highlight two important points salient to the present discussion. First of all, it is an empirical fact that akrasia is more unnatural than natural, that is, people are more motivated to do what they judge to be right than not to do it. Indeed, it is precisely this motivation that often prompts us to do things that we would not want to do just because we feel they are right (one of the most everyday examples in this regard may be recycling). The second point is to try precisely to provide an answer to this unnaturalness of akrasia. Kantian constructivists have provided different answers on this issue, some of them very distant from each other. Compare, for example, the opposing solutions of Korsgaard and O'Neill, who insisted, respectively, on the theme of unity and fragility of the agent.

Korsgaard bases his conception of practical reasoning on the idea that the reflective agent makes a reasoned choice on the basis of a criterion that identifies him with a certain practical identity¹¹⁴. It is therefore not necessary, in this korsgaardian perspective, to externally justify motivation, because it is already internally presupposed in the concept of practical identity (or personal identity if we use Williams' vocabulary). Acting on the basis of what our identity requires already provides the motivational drive necessary to justify action: we are interested and involved because what is at stake is our life, and what we consider significant and important in it, namely our attachments and projects. And it is precisely the unity of these elements that characterizes the identity of the agent.

O'Neill would share with Korsgaard the claim that agents cannot fail to act, and that whenever they engage in practical activity and engage in reasoning, they are also committed to the conditions of acting and reasoning, but she locates these conditions in the plurality, connectedness, and finiteness of human beings, and in the plural and collective dimension of acting¹¹⁵. This abstract approach of constructivism departs, according to O'Neill, from Kantian ethics, which is designed directly for imperfect non-angelical rational agents; moreover, if human beings were not finite and interdependent on one

¹¹⁴ Korsgaard C., *The source of normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹¹⁵ O'Neill O., *Construction of reasons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

another, there would be no need to bind them through the institution of moral obligation. For O'Neill, the standpoint of practical reason is external to the individual perspective and can be vindicated precisely because it does not rely on the determinations and attachments that come from a sense of belonging to a particular identity or community. In this respect, according to O'Neill, there is no guarantee that reason and motivation proceed together. We can find, by reasoning, justified solutions for everyone, but these are not always matched by adequate motivations to act.¹¹⁶

So, while Korsgaard prefers looking from within the deliberative process, from the point of view of the agent who personally decides what to do (similarly to Williams) O'Neill suggests that in order to avoid arbitrariness and inaccessibility practical reasoning must be vindicated from the outside, from the plural point of view of all who participate (even hypothetically¹¹⁷), but in doing so she seems to renounce the possibility of rational justification for moral motivation. In the proposal I am outlining, my intention is to recover the positive aspects of both of these constructivist paradigms, uniting and overcoming the concepts of unity and fragility of the agent, in that of agent integrity. In my view, the concept of integrity retains

¹¹⁶ O'Neill, O., *Bounds of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 27

¹¹⁷ O'Neill is, however, very critical of those abstract settings of constructivism that, in her view, depart from true Kantian ethics, which is designed directly for imperfect non-angelical rational agents; after all, if human beings were not limited and interdependent on one another, there would be no need to bind them through the institution of moral obligation. O'Neill's construction is not, therefore, based on a hypothetical consensus among idealized agents as in the various contractualist theories, including Rawls' original position: the question is not how we would act if we were perfect, but what we can accept as a reason for action, given that we are imperfect and limited agents. Certainly, however, it seems possible to abstract from the concrete context in order to deliberate, and it is not always necessary to have the direct, physical presence of all the agents concerned with the problem being posed (think of the various everyday moments when we deliberate precisely in favor of an outside agent, for example, hoping to do him or her a favor: we must necessarily try to idealize what other agents would do in that context). The original proposal I am trying to outline seeks precisely to combine Korsgaard's transcendental advantages with a conception of public reason that is, as noted by O'Neill, closer to the original heart of Kantian philosophy.

both the internal motivational character (regarding precisely the psychological health of the agent) and the public character, in a form of intersubjective transcendentalism. Our integrity as agents is given not only by the way we respect and act in accordance with the narrative unity we have about ourselves, but also and indeed above all through the intersubjective relationship we have with others: coherence with respect to our identity as agent finds its full realization precisely because I act with others in mind, reflecting on whether the way I behave can be justified to an external agent.

Conclusions

What I wanted to do in this article, using the myth of Gyge's ring as a starting point of discussion, was provide original answers to two of the oldest questions about morality, which I re-illustrate here again: "How do we determine what is right to do?" And "why should knowing what is right to do motivate me to do it?" To the first question we have replied "by weighing the various reasons given in support of or against that course of action". The procedure of rational deliberation (checking the consistency of reasoning that leads to any argument and verifying whether we are violating reasons constitutive of our reasoning) is precisely to vindicate and discern good and bad reasons. The self-authenticating nature of reason as a self-legislative non-arbitrary activity is the true source of normative authority in practical agency: since there are constitutive principles of reason, we can recognize whether or not an agent is acting in accordance with practical reason. Gyges is capable, as a rational agent, of understanding why it is wrong what he is doing, and in the event that he is not, it would simply mean that he has made some error in the deliberation process in applying the constitutive reasons, or he has blundered in a more general and fundamental form of reasoning, in failing to recognize certain constitutive reasons.

Failure to convince a possible possessor of Gyge's ring from avoiding behaving unjustly does not invalidate any moral framework that is not an error or a relativist theory. Joyce, while approaching the issue from his functionalist perspective, is also aware of this when he admits that "from the fact that we could not reasonably exhort them to adopt the fictive stance toward morality it does not follow that we must calmly accept any mischief or violence they perpetrate".¹¹⁸ We cannot provide a principle to

¹¹⁸ Joyce, R., *The Myth of Morality*, p. 222.

the possessor of the ring that will surely persuade him to use it without harming others, however, after clarifying the reasons, he will necessarily be aware of the "wrongness" of behaving in such a way. He is already endowed with a constitutive sense of justice, therefore what we should do is clarify why he has this feeling (that he is behaving inappropriately by exploiting invisibility for his own gains). Clarifying means in this case both making manifest how we arrive at such a feeling and showing why it is well-founded to have it and to act in accordance with it. If at the end of this the possessor of the ring still wants to act for his own personal gain, he may do so, but he will know that he is acting contrary not only to his natural sense of justice but also against his own reason.

As Gauthier writes: "Glaucón thinks of the just man merely as someone who recognizes the need to accept certain constraints, but whose emotions are in no way engaged by them. The just man thus lacks any sense of justice as capacity to be moved by considerations of justice as such. It is then not surprising that, given the ring of Gyges, he would behave as did the Lydian shepherd. But this shows only that he is not truly the just man. Properly understood, the just man is the person who recognizing a certain course of action to be just, finds her feelings engaged by that recognition and so finds herself moved to adhere to that course of action because of its justice. To be sure, she may be moved in other ways as well, but for the just person, this motivation is essential".¹¹⁹ The close link between a constitutive sense of justice and the agent's first-person motivation once again reaffirms the continuous intertwining of reason and will: an action is moral if the motive for which it is undertaken is a normative reason¹²⁰.

Moral motivation is fundamental to acting morally but acting mor-

¹¹⁹ Gauthier, D., *Morals by Agreement*, p. 328. With respect to this specific passage, the only point I would emphasize more than Gauthier's concerns the rarity of the just man: in my view it is more anomalous to find people lacking any sense of justice (and thus completely blind and unable to grasp the very constitutive principles of his nature as a rational being) rather than normality.

¹²⁰ This is why a burglar who breaks the window to rob an old lady, but in doing so saves her life, since she forgot to turn off the gas, has not performed a moral action, despite the fact that the net-rate of the aggregate good has improved thanks to him (a classic case of moral luck). Kantian ethics differs from consequentialist theories also and above all in the way it articulates the relationship between reason, motivation, and morality.

ally is not fundamental to action. The second question is, therefore, why act morally? Why Gyge should act just? The answer we have provided is: because he has reasons (normative, not prudential) for doing so, on pain of the integrity of his very identity as an agent, both individually (unity and psychological health) and socially (intersubjective relations with others)¹²¹. So, if we adopt a Kantian conception of public reasoning (not of simple social negotiation, but, inherently, both reflexive and dialogic) Glaucon's argument that the Lydian shepherd is perfectly rational, since he acts following the prudential reason of pursuing his own gain, is false, for the simple fact that this is not a good reason to justify actions to others (and to ourselves). And in the context described by Plato, in which it would come naturally to us to question whether what we are doing is right, we will be forced to switch from a prudential reason to a public reason, to justify this demand. And I believe it is only by recovering such a framework of public rationality that we can truly give importance to reasons as essential elements for cooperative action.

¹²¹ And these reasons, although they may seem prudential thus stated (I act morally to safeguard my psychological health and social reputation), are in fact properly normative, in the sense that no conditions are given in which they are not valid for all rational agents (even if someone were not interested in his social reputation, it would be his fault not to see that he actually has a good reason for doing so).

Improvisation, Dialectics, and One-dimensional Thinking

Furkan Yazıcı (University of Waikato)

Abstract: Different forms of thinking lay out their own principles and rules to guide the thinkers, but if there is an overreliance on those rules and principles, thinking becomes one-dimensional. One-dimensional thinking restricts the thinker to its own standards by trying to impose predetermined principles on the thinking itself. However, dialectics take its object within its interrelations, interdependence, and its relation to the whole. The movement of improvisation in thought, which shows us the antithesis of the shortcomings of one-dimensional thinking, will enliven creativity, emotions, and spontaneous thought processes. It can also establish a relationship between critical and creative thinking.

Key Words: One Dimensional Thinking • Creative Thinking • Improvisation • Dialectics • Theodor W. Adorno

1. Introduction

The act of questioning is generally understood as asking questions about what we think. This can be a case, a subject, or an event. But we can also ask questions about the way we question, the way we think. The importance of questioning how we think can be understood if we consider how influential it is within human life. The way we think is the method that we use everyday to make decisions, to do something, and believe in something. Think about the importance of the method in scientific research, and how a change in the method can impact results. Within this perspective, questioning the way we think becomes a must. The task of being critical of the styles of our thinking becomes tricky because the way we think is conditioned by cultural, philosophical, educational, historical, and psychological conditions. Since this is a short and philosophical work, I will focus on philosophical conditions.

How we think may help us to generate creative ideas, but at the same time, it may exclude other ways of thinking, thus rendering one limited. Limits are necessary for thinking. Limit means defining a closure in

our perspective or thinking which gives us a framework in which we can perceive or make a judgment. But in some cases, those limits can be dominating, that is, a way of thinking may dominate and exclude other ways of thinking, so that it necessarily influences outcomes, ideas, and possibilities. In that sense, we must ask how thinking can go beyond itself. How can it realize its limits and transform itself? When I say limit in a reducing way, I refer to people who adopt a certain way of thinking and constrain themselves in it so that it makes their thinking one-dimensional. It is like sticking to one way of thinking which extends its influence over every decision or judgment one makes. One may be stuck in a scientific or artistic way of thinking, and this will cause one to interpret everything to the conclusion that best fits the method of one's thinking.

Below, I explain what one-dimensional thinking is and discuss its consequences. Then, I discuss how dialectics and the concept of improvisation may help us to go beyond one-dimensionality. The significance of this paper stems from the influence of our thinking methods on academic disciplines, politics, and overall, our lives. Every decision we make goes through a process of thinking determined by how we think. It is fundamental for thinking to critique itself in order not to fall into the trap of one-dimensionality.

I first discuss the limits of one-dimensional thinking. After that, I will argue that dialectical thinking with reflective features paves the way for a more emancipated way of thinking. Lastly, I will discuss how the phenomena of improvisation can contribute to our capacity to think critically and the possible connections between creativity and criticality.

2. One-dimensional Thinking

There are standards, rules, and principles for every different way of thinking. These standards are important and beneficial to think critically. But in the case of overreliance on them, we may see that standards constrain thinking. In other words, having standards is not the problem. The problem is to prioritize standards over the thought itself. How you do it becomes more important than what you are doing. Thus, the authority of rules overrules the autonomy of the thinker. In that way of thinking—let's call it *one-dimensional thinking*—every criticism or creative thought that can overreach those standards is condemned as uncritical. The prescriptive character is followed by procedural thinking. It is assumed that the thinking process gradually develops step-by-step in a

linear fashion. This is followed by the idea of a complete, closed system of thinking. We can see projections of this kind of thinking in philosophy, politics, and business models of capitalism. In philosophy, schools or ideas that adopt fundamentalist epistemologies which try to ground every possibility of knowledge on one, absolute, and solid ground advocate this way of thinking. Think of the divide between analytic and continental philosophy. If a philosopher limits herself to one tradition and reads the other tradition from its supposedly solid ground, she falls into the trap of one-dimensionality. We may even see a pseudo-recognition of other ways of thinking by pointing out some other ways of features, but if there is no self-reflection of a thinker towards her adopted way of thinking, she can still be counted as one-dimensional.¹ In politics, we can observe that a fascist political ideology rests on this way of thinking, too. Lastly, any managerial institution, whether public or private, utilizes and promotes a complete, closed, hierarchical, and linear way of thinking whose sole duty is to bring the most plausible result.

The one dimension that is adopted is generally seen as the perfect one. The perfectness of the adopted dimension lets thinkers have only that perspective and evaluate cases, events or arguments only from that perspective. We can see examples of this in our everyday life. Extremists generally adopt a one-dimensional way of thinking. Think of political extremists who support one party blindly. This one-dimensional thinker is incapable of self-criticism, and hence criticizes other ways from the absolute pre-supposed ground. One-dimensional thinking is not only about form, because we know that form influences the content of our thinking.¹²²

Another example could be a moral extremist. By deducing universal moral principles from one absolute ground, that person advocates the universality of that morality. And that person wishes to impose that morality on everyone by excluding other moral systems. Of course, these cases are extremes and differ in content, but the form of thinking behind them is common. One of the other examples is logical positivists. What makes them one-dimensional is the over-reliance on rules of formal logic when philosophizing. They claim that a meta-language of philosophy must be established through mathematics. This meta-language must be the only way of philosophizing because they claim that only then can we objectively make argu-

¹²² Form refers to how we think, and content refers to what we think.

ments and assess their truth values accordingly. When it comes to critical thinking, we may see the same situation of one-dimensionality, too.

3. Dialectics and Adorno

First, Adorno warns us that dialectics is neither a method nor a recipe for how to think. What must be done then? How are we going to think regarding dialectics? In the *Introduction to Dialectics*, Adorno repeatedly points out the close relation that must be preserved between experience and thought, to remind us of the lively process of experience. According to Adorno, thought must go hand-in-hand with experience itself to understand its complexities. Adorno suggests that we must not impose abstract rules on experience as in the one-dimensional way of thinking, but rather method must be inferred from the particular experience itself.

For example, if we are going through an ecological crisis, we must focus on this particular case. We must investigate the changing dynamics of the experience that could lead us to think of different definitions of nature that would help us deal with the issue. In other words, if the existing definition of nature does not fit with the current case at hand, we must reconsider our definition of nature. According to Adorno, definitions must not exclude other meanings but must comprehend them. The definition must not exclude anything about the case but instead magnetically bind other meanings into one definition. It must open a field of force in which the movement of experience and thought are not arrested, and definition is recognized as a process. Static definitions necessarily try to freeze the concept so that it can be used according to the context of utilization. Adorno gives Walter Benjamin's definition of fate as an example of a dynamic definition. Benjamin says that '*fate is the nexus of guilt among the living*.'¹²³ The definition covers general information about fate such that it is construed as random moments, that there are hazardous events in it, and that there are interconnections between those events. But it does not close the concept to those aspects only. On the contrary, it magnetically binds together those meanings and creates a force field in which we can add or subtract something from it. It does not exclude but comprehend. Thus, the concept is not frozen and

¹²³ Benjamin, 1978 as cited in Adorno, *An Introduction to Dialectics*, Translated by Nicholas Walker (Malden: Polity Press, 2017), Lecture 19.

can participate in the dynamic reality as a process.

Of course, while focusing on particular cases, we must not forget their relation to the whole. The reciprocal and dialectic relation between whole and particular is important since it prevents concepts from petrifying. And, it has the potential to diffuse what is petrified. In other words, one of the tasks of dialectics is to diffuse the concepts that are petrified and make them move again with the flux of experience.

Another fallacy that one-dimensional thinking causes is the problem of contradiction. In one dimensional thinking, it is a must to think in a dichotomic fashion. Suppose that there are A and -A. And we know that something cannot be both A and -A because it would be a contradiction. However, when you consider the processual characteristic of experience, we may encounter situations where both A and -A do exist. Think of a person who is born and raised to the age of 20. And let's say that she had an angry character at the age of 10 and now, at the age of 20, she is very calm. But from time to time, she gets angry and acts like she was 10. Now, we see that this person has a calm character, but also, she is angry too. So, she contains both characters of 10 and 20 even though those two characters are contradictory. In this case, angry and calm characteristics do not destroy each other, rather they coexist in one person. In our short example, we see that contradictory factors do exist in experience. So instead of categorizing the world in a dichotomic fashion, interconnectedness and reciprocity of experience must be counted and the way we think should not make the fallacy of reduction to solve the problem of contradiction. Every time we are faced with two opposites, two contradictory propositions, we must not immediately try to eliminate one and pick the other. This would reduce the case into the belief that oppositions are exclusive. What we must try to focus on is the relation between opposites that could show us that two opposing factors can co-exist. In Adorno's words:

One might say that the priority of contradiction which prevails in the dialectic is actually nothing but an attempt to break the primacy of logic, understood as the realm of pure non-contradiction.... to point out, that is, that the world is not simply mere thought, is not the mere operation of logical thinking as the world is presented to us in accordance with logical rules¹²⁴.

¹²⁴ Ibid., Lecture 8 and 17.

4. Improvisation

The phenomenon of improvisation is generally attributed to the artistic fields. It is believed that it has a random, spontaneous, and disorganized nature. Hence, only artistic geniuses can use it without any explanation. And it is believed that there is no role of reason within the process of improvisatory creation and that it is purely irrational. When we accept these assumptions about improvisation, it becomes close to mystic power. To cleanse the term from its misunderstandings, and show its true potential, I will try to investigate the term from the perspective of dialectics.

While trying to place improvisation within philosophical discourse, we must be careful how it exists in thought—how within our process of thinking we are already using it. The act of giving meaning to a symbol contains a very complex thought process. There are numerous factors such as the social and historical set of meanings and categories, psychologically adopted perspectives, past experiences, emotions that are developed through those experiences, the style, and ability of interpretation, degree of understanding and comprehension, etc. All these factors are interconnected and dialectically move in our minds when we try to give meaning to a symbol. If we set out to explain how all factors engage with each other, we would have to stop its movement and try to induce a rule or principle to explain the mind's functioning.

What I suggest here, however, is that there is an improvisatory movement going on in our minds. Within the process of giving meaning, all factors in our mind move according to *what?* According to the moment, the particularity of the case in which we find ourselves with every different case. So, the relations of these factors are re-determined every time we set out to give meaning. That is why human thinking should not be fixed in regard to prediction. The combination of all factors is improvisatory in the process of giving meaning.

One can inquire here into the difference between randomness and improvisation. This question must be answered to further understand the term at hand. It must be understood that the act of improvisation is not random, and requires a great deal of mastery. No one can improvise and end up with something beautiful without prior practice, experience, and knowledge. We know that behind great live performances lie years of practice. There is also an intention, not an aimless and purposeless act. Although it is prone to change, there is an intended way in which the artwork goes.

There are also significant roles of imagination and emotions which lead to creativity: triggered and incited emotions to motivate our imagination to engage in the process of creation. Imagination helps reason to establish connections that are not thought of before. Thus, novelty is created out of what we have, and what we encounter within that particular case. At this point, we must consider dialectics, because encountering something new with what we have requires a dialectical process to create novelty. By “what we have” I mean our current state, including past experiences, practices, knowledge, emotions, etc. What we encounter is the situation, case, symbol, artwork, or anything which requires us to create novelty either by interpretation or judgment. Through this encounter of the self and the foreign object, new creations arise on both sides.

First, the self has been disclosed to the object. and all its complexities are prone to transformation by the new experience of the object. The old self is negated—and from this negation, a new self is forged. But this new self is not completely disassociated from the old self, since the concept of negation refers to transformation with preservation. In other words, the old self and experience do form the new self. Second, the object must be interpreted. On that side, what is already recognized about the object is negated again from the encounter between the object and the self. And new interpretation or meaning is born out of the encounter. In that process of thinking, we can sense the improvisatory character. Improvisation in thinking is itself inherent to these processes of negation and creation.

Unfortunately, we cannot even mention improvisation when it comes to one-dimensional thinking. Because the process and development of thinking are ignored; instead, rules and principles are imposed to get the most accurate and efficient outcome. In that sense, further investigation on the nature of improvisation, and its connection with thinking, must be made to get rid of one-dimensional thinking and improve how we think.

Improvisation is an act of overstepping. It oversteps the conventional rules and principles, because it operates without any determined rules. It extracts it from both the subject and the object according to the singularity of the case. Engaging with objects without a fixed state of mind paves the way for the undetermined process of interpretation. This starts a dynamic process of thinking in which creation and re-creation of the case in hand are possible. Improvisational thinking may sound chaotic and as if it has no boundaries, but this is not so. It is not an uncon-

strained process, since we are all subject to social, historical, and psychological contexts. Hence, constraints and pressures coming from our context are generative for improvisation. We are not able to create something *ex nihilo*. It is necessary for the movement of thinking to have constraint and contradictions. We must be confronted with reality so that we can transform it.¹²⁵ The response to the confrontation is the beginning of the critical ideas.

In other words, improvisation is not boundless and contextless. It functions within the old framework to create something novel from it. We need the old framework to understand the novelty of our ideas, because it is novel according to the existing paradigm. It might not be novel within a different framework, because novelty is recognized as discontinuity of the old framework. Improvisation is a radical departure from the existing framework but not in a destructive fashion. On the contrary, it is generative. Its productivity comes from its relation to dialectics. This is about being both traditional and revolutionary, both productive and destructive. Dialectics let us go beyond these dichotomies by dissolving the one-dimensionality of picking one over the other. And improvisation is the form of doing this.

Lastly, to show how fundamental improvisation is, I will give an example that Nelson Goodman discusses in his remarkable book *Ways of Worldmaking*.¹²⁶ He mentions a set of experiments on the motion of human perceptions done by Paul A. Kolars. In the first instance, some dots are successively flashed, and the subjects who are seeing them say that the flash moves from one direction to another. So, successive flashing dots are perceived as moving from one point to another. In a more complex instance, there are 8 shapes rather than dots. Kolars broadens the experiment to see what results will come. Shapes are shown like this in the *Ways of Worldmaking* as the figure 1¹²⁷:

¹²⁵ It can be noted here that a critical act is what reflects and transforms reality according to Freire. See Freire, Paulo, *Pedagogy of The Oppressed* (Continuum International Publishing, 2000), p. 131.

¹²⁶ Goodman, Nelson, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Harvard University Press), 1978.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 77.

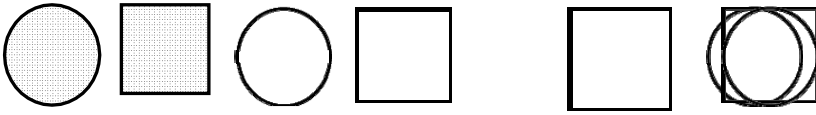


Figure 1

The test is simple: the group on the left flashes, and then the right group flashes. It is expected that circles and squares will transform into each other, and each circle will become a square while squares become circles. However, this was not the case. The right three shapes of the left group moved as a unit to become the left three shapes of the right group. And the leftmost circle of the left group moved around to the rightmost shape of the right group.

In another experiment with the same setup, the rightmost shape of the right group changed with square and as the successive flashes went on, the leftmost shape of the left group became square too. Goodman's comment on this instance is '*I suspect that the visual system, while having fun making a world to suit itself, takes incidental glee in frustrating our search for a theory*'.¹²⁸⁷ There are different attempts to find a good theory for the movement of perception but, according to Kolers and Goodman, no theory is fit to do that since, in every experiment, perception improvises its movement.¹²⁹⁸ And it lets no generalization get in.

We can see now that, in every way, human perception, understanding, and thinking benefit from improvisation that inherently strives for novelty. The process of dialectical thinking is creative, in that it cannot move without generating new connections, new meanings, and new perspectives. The improvisatory character of the human mind is enough to show us the interconnection between critical and creative thinking. To create, one must first negate, and upon that negation, one can create novelty. To be able to make a good criticism, one must be able to understand the situation or state one is in. And to understand, one needs to establish new connections between different pieces of information. This requires creativity. To put it simply, to understand, one needs creativity, and to create novelty, one needs criticality.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 79.

¹²⁹ For full discussion see Ibid., Chapter V.

5. Conclusion

Form is as important as content, and vice versa. Because there is a dialectical relation between form and content, how we think and what we think affect each other. In that sense, if we are to improve our way of thinking, both aspects are equally important and must be investigated. In this paper, I have argued that every way of thinking carries the risk of being one-dimensional. Two key concepts, dialectics and improvisation, may help us to dissolve this one-dimensionality. Although further investigation is needed, this paper has tried to show fundamental problems of one-dimensional thinking and confront them with their anti-thesis through an inquiry into dialectics. Dialectics in that sense is neither a method nor a tool to solve problems. It is a way of thinking in which experience and dynamism of life are respected. It lets no dogmatism stay intact and, within the flow of time, recognizes that concepts and ideas change. It calls itself to self-criticism by reflection. If one takes the self as a dialectic entity, one must also perpetually call oneself to criticism. Self-reflection is so important that we could argue that it is the prerequisite of being critical. Being able to open one's ossified thoughts to the dialectical movement of thinking requires self-reflection. This can be best depicted with a circle in which thought always returns to itself and thus perpetually criticizes itself. On the other hand, a linear depiction of thinking misses the critical movement and always tries to go forward without questioning itself. In other words, it values quantity over quality in thought.

Improvisation is one of the phenomena that resist the mechanical understanding of one-dimensional thinking. Its restless and dynamic character stands against fixed rules and principles and paves the way for novelty. Its dynamism and circular movement always try to create new perspectives. That is why we witness it best in arts and sciences. These are the best places we can recognize an intentional discontinuity in trends and paradigms. Improvisation also indicates to us that critical thinking and creative thinking are interconnected. To create, one must negate. Confrontation with prevailing ideas generates the necessary motivation for the movement of thinking. That is what we call critique. By the dissolution of the old, novelties are born in the creative act. In other words, both creativity and criticality depend upon each other. My aim in this paper is to criticize one-dimensional thinking and dissolve it via dialectics and improvisation.

Self-Denial As a Spiritual Practice to Increase Faith and Knowledge

Anthony McCool (University of Sofia)

Abstract: The Christian and Jewish religious traditions are embedded in asceticism practices including self-limitation, seclusion, fasting, vigils, and abstinence, among others. The practice of asceticism is influenced by the need to promote divinity and high levels of spiritual piety. Individuals and groups of people who subscribe to asceticism are committed to religious beliefs, fasting, and overall seclusion from the world. In the Christian religion, God is the ultimate drive for ascetic practices in which believers acquire comfort and solace. Asceticism is also uniquely practiced among different people, religions, and even organizations. Traditional practices of asceticism are still prevalent in monasteries and include fasting, chastity, and sleeping.

Keywords: celibacy, Judaism, Christianity, modernity, spiritual piety, God, and fasting

1.

Asceticism refers to the voluntary choice of living an abstention form of life that involves self-denial, rather than living a life where there are eternal forces that push and influence one to perform unforeseen practices¹³⁰. Ascetics actively participate in the voluntary renunciation of secular activities and sensual pleasures associated with materialism. Self-denial is conceptualized as the preference of exploring the religion through salvation, increasing faith and knowledge of the creator, and finding atonement in replacement of worldly delights¹³¹. The origin of asceticism is traced back to early theology where the concept was prac-

¹³⁰Clements, Niki Kasumi, "The Asceticism of Interpretation: John Cassian, Hermeneutical Askēsis, and Religious Ethics," *Scripture, Tradition, and Reason in Christian Ethics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 67.

¹³¹Douglas, Kelly Brown, *What's Faith Got to Do with It? Black bodies/Christian souls* (Orbis books, 2018), 123.

ticed to achieve religious piety through self-limitation, and denial of sexual delights as commonly practiced by Catholic believers. In the catholic domains, the nuns and priests maintained their religious beliefs by foregoing worldly desires such as marrying and creating a family¹³². Even though the Christian and Jewish religions have a similar notion of asceticism, their faiths and beliefs are distinct; therefore the form of asceticism followed by one religion may be completely different from that of the other religion. The only similarity, in this case, is in the motivation and the underlying philosophy¹³³. For example, whereas late-antiquity Christian authors promoted the spread of Christianity through beliefs contained in the Biblical scriptures, the Christian Catholic promoted spiritual devotion through celibacy practices. In the Bible, people like John the Baptist separated themselves from the people and went to the desert to wait on the Messiah as a form of asceticism¹³⁴. The Jewish Essenes practiced asceticism through making vows of abstinence when they were being coached and prepared for what was referred to as a journey of ‘Holy War’¹³⁵. This report provides an in-depth analysis of the different forms of religious and spiritual asceticism in the Christian and Jewish religions.

2. Concept of Asceticism Analysis

Asceticism broadly refers to individuals or a group of individuals in a religious setting who forgo worldly pleasures and interests to dedicate their lives and time to exploring and attaining spiritual growth. According to Podmore et al 2018¹³⁶, asceticism involves a lifestyle in which

¹³² Alam, Sarwar, editor, *Cultural Fusion of Sufi Islam: Alternative Paths to Mystical Faith* (Routledge, 2019), 140.

¹³³ Taliaferro, Charles, and Elsa J. Marty, eds., *A Dictionary of Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 40.

¹³⁴ Momen, Moojan. *Understanding Religion: A Thematic Approach* (Simon and Schuster, 2019), 55.

¹³⁵ Ebrey, David, “The Asceticism of the Phaedo: Pleasure, Purification, and the Soul’s Proper Activity,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 99, no. 1, 2017, 22.

¹³⁶ Podmore, Simon D., “Book review: The Religion of Existence: Asceticism in Philosophy from Kierkegaard to Sartre,” *Religious Studies*, vol. 54, no. 3, 2018, 440.

people denounce any form of material possession, social titles, and bodily pleasures to gain spiritual growth and development¹³⁷. Individuals and groups of people who subscribe to the concept of asceticism are committed to religious beliefs, fasting, and overall seclusion from the world¹³⁸. With this in mind, asceticism is therefore a voluntary choice of personal preservation by foregoing the satisfaction of human desires and necessities such as creating a family, sexual satisfaction, food and beverages among other tangible possessions¹³⁹. However, there has been evidence suggesting individuals and groups of individuals have been practicing the concept of asceticism for malicious gains attributed to ritual purity or cultism including black magic¹⁴⁰. The Jewish religion provides a unique form of asceticism including the aspect of avoiding meals and foods which were regarded as being impure in the Mosaic Commandments¹⁴¹. In the Christian religion, God is the ultimate drive for the ascetic practices in which its believers acquire comfort and solace. In some cases, some people may opt to commit their whole lives to asceticism like the monks who make the ultimate decision to avoid any sexual engagements as a way of cleansing themselves and counting themselves as lucky human beings in the realm of heaven¹⁴².

Asceticism can be done partly or wholly committed to the practice like the Jewish 'Day of Atonement where the Jewish fast for a couple of days to demonstrate their holiness to their creator¹⁴³. Asceticism is also uniquely practiced among different people, religions, and even organizations. For example, the Nazarites often avoided and abstained from

¹³⁷ Ebrey, David, "The Asceticism of the Phaedo: Pleasure, Purification, and the Soul's Proper Activity," 26.

¹³⁸ Nadler, Allan, *The faith of Mithnagdim: Rabbinic Responses to Hasidic Rapture* (London: JHU Press, 1999), 89.

¹³⁹ Khawaja, Noreen, *The Religion of Existence: Asceticism in Philosophy from Kierkegaard to Sartre* (University of Chicago Press, 2016), 45.

¹⁴⁰ Vuolanto, Ville, *Children and Asceticism in Late Antiquity: Continuity, Family Dynamics and the Rise of Christianity* (Routledge, 2016), 66.

¹⁴¹ Conrad, Jeffrey, "Egyptian and Syrian Asceticism in Late Antiquity," *Syriac Studies*, 2015, 12.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Zaleski, John, *Christianity, Islam, and the Religious Culture of Late Antiquity: A Study of Asceticism in Iraq and Northern Mesopotamia*, dissertation, 2019, 409.

drinking and fasted as they approached Easter¹⁴⁴. It is worth mentioning that the asceticism of avoiding beverages and food could be practiced partly or wholly throughout the fasting period depending on the group and the religion in question. For example, abstinence from material possessions was different among different people, groups, and religions¹⁴⁵. The attitudes and behaviors of the Jewish were highly defined based on their levels of food and beverage abstinence. The Judaic and the Christian religions, therefore, demonstrate a transitive dynamism in their ascetic practices which demonstrate humility and respect for a higher deity and adoration to their creator.

3. Types of religious asceticism

Spiritual growth and development are greatly influenced by aspects of asceticism towards the acquisition of virtues and values that promote adoration of a higher deity¹⁴⁶. The religious aspects of asceticism are diverse and include fasting or renunciation, celibacy or sexual abstinence, renunciation of belongings, self-flagellation, and self-mutilation¹⁴⁷. Contemporary asceticism is set against societal and worldly demands involving clothing, food, air, shelter, friendship, conversation, and pleasure, among other things¹⁴⁸. For this to be adhered to diligently, followers and subscribers of different forms of asceticism need to be disciplined in vigilance, being tolerant of pain, silence, solitude, self-limitation, and self-transcendence¹⁴⁹.

¹⁴⁴ Streib, Heinz, and Ralph W. Hood, "Modeling the Religious Field: Religion, Spirituality, Mysticism and Related World Views," *Implicit Religion*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2013, 60.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Zaleski, John, *Christianity, Islam, and the Religious Culture of Late Antiquity: A Study of Asceticism in Iraq and Northern Mesopotamia*, 409.

¹⁴⁷ Hunt, Hannah, *Clothed in the Body: Asceticism, the Body and the Spiritual in the Late Antique Era* (Routledge, 2016), 70.

¹⁴⁸ MacDonald, Margaret Y., *Children and Asceticism in Late Antiquity: Continuity, Family Dynamics, and the Rise of Christianity* by Ville Vuolanto (review), *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, vol. 26, no.2, 2018, 330-332.

¹⁴⁹ Nathan, Geoffrey, *Children And Asceticism In Late Antiquity: Continuity, Family Dynamics And The Rise Of Christianity* (review), *The Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. 107, 2017, 457-458.

3.1 Celibacy

Celibacy involves complete avoidance and abstinence from sexual activities to promote one's spiritual and religious growth¹⁵⁰. Celibacy can be further practiced to diffuse the need for sexual engagement by disengaging oneself from an environment that may lead to such activities that are termed unclean in the eyes of the specific religion. Celibacy is a practice that assists in the development of spiritual connection and divinity through the development of self-discipline, self-control, and the development of ethical and moral principles¹⁵¹. Celibacy is closely related to renunciation geared towards living a purified life. Celibates are referred to as 'eunuchs' in the Christian religion. According to Matthew 9:12, eunuchs are regarded as celibate individuals who are pure and hence promised the kingdom of heaven. The Christian Biblical scripture explains that people who practice celibacy practice the ideal way in which believers should lead their lives and avoid worldly desires including sex¹⁵². Therefore, the concept of celibacy goes beyond bodily desires to fulfill freedom in achieving understanding.

3.2 Solitude

Solitude involves the process of withdrawal from society for purposes of religious fulfillment¹⁵³. People or groups of individuals may opt to withdraw mentally and physically to different kinds of areas like mountains, deserts, or areas that are secluded from distractions and interruptions. This means that when people seclude themselves physically and mentally from people and worldly operations, they are likely to minimize their chances of committing sins¹⁵⁴. Solitude, therefore, provides a distinct way of life

¹⁵⁰ Sahner, Christian C., "'The Monasticism of My Community is Jihad': A Debate on Asceticism, Sex, and Warfare in Early Islam," *Arabica*, vol. 64, no. 2, 2017, 149-183.

¹⁵¹ Meawad, Stephen M., "Sexuality, Angelification, and Divine Indwelling: A Contemporary Ethic of Early Christian Asceticism," *Modern Theology*, 2019, 67.

¹⁵² Loosley-Leeming, Emma, *Architecture and Asceticism: Cultural Interaction between Syria and Georgia in Late Antiquity* (Brill, 2018), 50.

¹⁵³ Deezia, Burabari Sunday, "Asceticism: A Match towards the Absolute," *IAFOR Journal of Ethics, Religion & Philosophy*, vol. 3, 2017, 85-98.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

from the ordinary form of life that most people are used to.

3.3 Fasting

Fasting involves abstaining, restricting, and avoiding any form of drinking or eating for a given period¹⁵⁵. The process of fasting is quite different among different people and their religious beliefs in terms of its purposes, length, and its degree¹⁵⁶. For example, in the Christian religion, fasting can last for forty days. Believers abstain from some kinds of foods and forego some meals whereas, in Judaism, the practice of fasting is regarded as a total cessation of drinks and foods. However, the basic concept of fasting in the Christian religion requires sacrificing drinks and foods during the passion of Christ commemoration¹⁵⁷.

3.4 Nocturnal vigils

Nocturnal vigils or memorial services refer to self-denial of sleep which is essentially deliberate for a specific time in the night or the entire night¹⁵⁸. The individual or a group of people essentially stay up in the night for purposes of prayer, contemplation, or offering sacrifices to achieve a set goal or objective¹⁵⁹. The practice of nocturnal vigils is significant as it symbolizes a deep sense of fulfillment of a religious desire by renouncing the fulfillment of bodily desires like resting.

3.5 Ascetic suffering

Ascetic suffering may be in form of self-flagellation, self-laceration, castration and other forms which produce some kind of pain in the body¹⁶⁰. According to Salminen¹⁶¹, pain from ascetism provided the

¹⁵⁵ Bradley, Kyle R., *Children and Asceticism in Late Antiquity: Continuity, Family Dynamics and the Rise of Christianity* by Ville Vuolanto (review), *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2016, 325-326.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Salminen, Joona, *Asceticism and Early Christian Lifestyle* (Helsinki: Helsingin yliopisto, 2017), 15-21.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 15.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 16.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 17.

freedom of becoming self-transcendent and developing feelings of self-surrender, ecstasy, and a high level of consciousness. According to Teresa¹⁶², Christian Monasteries including monks often engaged in self-torturous activities like scourging and whipping themselves.

4. The Importance of the Concept of Asceticism

The goal of asceticism is to develop high levels of religious piety, religious moral practices, and higher spiritual divinity. All the goals are achieved through abstinence and avoidance of worldly and bodily pleasures and desires. According to Rapp et al¹⁶³, ascetic practices assist individuals in developing magical and supernatural abilities that are sometimes beyond human understanding. In some cultures, ascetics performed the role of intermediaries between human beings and their religious creator, hence the practice is held in high regard in such societies. Additionally, the concept of asceticism promotes the growth and nurturing of religious beliefs through the cultivation of moral principles like respect, trust, and responsibility¹⁶⁴.

According to Ramelli¹⁶⁵, asceticism serves as a component of cultural preservation and production by encouraging individuals or the community to be aware of and understand their cultural environment and its underlying factors that promotes its sustainability. Through the practice of asceticism, people can envision the process of human existence and the needed perceptual modification and reconditioning¹⁶⁶. Moreover, ascetics have a distinct way of envisioning and interpreting the world, hence novices must understand the ways through which different beliefs relate to ascetic practices. Additionally, the concept of asceticism has promoted the understanding of different religious practices

¹⁶² Teresa M. Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998), 5-6.

¹⁶³ Rapp, Claudia, review of Ilaria Ramelli's *Social Justice and The Legitimacy of Slavery: The Role of Philosophical Asceticism from Ancient Judaism to Christianity*, *The Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. 108, 2018, 313-314.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ramelli, Ilaria. *Social Justice and the Legitimacy of Slavery: The Role of Philosophical Asceticism from Ancient Judaism to Late Antiquity* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 34-45.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

transferred from one generation to another, hence assisting people, especially in the modern era, in understanding the intended meaning and value of certain beliefs and practices in society¹⁶⁷.

5. Asceticism in the Modernity Context

Asceticism in religious practices has been largely abandoned in contemporary religious environment and society¹⁶⁸. In modernity, asceticism has gradually evolved into the adoption of intellectual elements which focus on the flesh. According to Wimbush et al¹⁶⁹, modern spiritual practices and individuals like the monks often integrate the concept of intellectual austerity into their asceticism practices.

Ascetic practices have also evolved into new behaviours and habits which are driven by desires and pleasures¹⁷⁰ considered immoral. For example, catholic priests and nuns have been criticized for practices that go against their ascetic practice with traces of unfaithfulness and immorality being practiced within the church. Monks who were traditionally not allowed to work have been forced into the workforce to support themselves, and monasteries have been forced into the workforce to fulfil their tax obligations due to the few donations received in the contemporary modern world¹⁷¹. Despite these changes, the traditional practices of asceticism are still prevalent in the current monasteries including fasting and chastity.

6. Further Analysis of the Asceticism Concept

Human beings have always striven to avoid suffering by deferring any norm or value that may promote suffering. Therefore, self-inflicted suffering has not resonated well with many people in society¹⁷². This self-infliction is promoted to demonstrate one's devotion and adherence to

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Wimbush, Vincent L., and Richard Valantasis, eds., *Asceticism* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 40.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Cf. von Stuckrad, Kocku, et al., eds., *The Brill Dictionary of Religion*, vol. 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

¹⁷² Ibid.

the principles of God as per Christian beliefs. However, what remains controversial and overly confusing is the magnitude and level of pain or suffering that should be inflicted on someone to demonstrate their devotion to God¹⁷³. For religious purposes including the ability to grow closer to God, demonstrate devotion, perform penance and even obtain sexual arousal. However, according to Brown¹⁷⁴, the extreme infliction of pain and suffering does not resonate with the divine dictum of love from God as per Judaism and Christianity. Additionally, extreme practices such as self-limitation, seclusion, and extreme fasting are criticized for being self-centred practices within the Christian and Jewish religions. Asceticism can also be understood from the cross-cultural perspective in which a distinction is made between ascetic practice by the monks and renunciants and asceticism practiced by Protestants. According to Emile Durkheim¹⁷⁵, religion is a holistic concept from which individuals cannot easily detach themselves without the infliction of some pain, especially in cultic religions.

7. Asceticism in Christianity and Judaism

The Jewish and Christian religions have diverse and distinct religious practices based on their varied doctrines. These religions also integrate some ascetic practices which provide some similarities and differences.

7.1 Christian asceticism

In Christianity, asceticism allows believers to be driven by the need to develop and improve their spiritual lives by de-emphasizing worldly and bodily pleasures. The Christian form of asceticism involves high levels of renunciation of worldly and bodily interests and desires to gain spiritual nourishment and fulfilment¹⁷⁶. Christian believers integrate the concept of self-

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Brown, George Hardin, review of Michael D. Cherniss *Ingeld and Christ: Heroic Concepts and Values in Old English Poetry*, *Speculum*, vol. 50, no. 3 (1975): 482-485.

¹⁷⁵ **Durkheim, Emile**, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life. A Study in Religious Sociology* (George Allen & Unwin, 1915), 25.

¹⁷⁶ Glücklich, Ariel, "Sacred pain: The use of Self-Inflicted Pain in Religion," *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Pain* (Routledge, 2017), 277-287.

limitation to promote self-discipline and morality which contribute to the acquisition of religious piety. Asceticism has some similarities with monasteries in seclusion from society to promote the fulfilment of religious desires and obligations. Even though ascetic practices have been attributed to monks and Christian religious leaders, not all Christian religious leaders and monks are ascetics¹⁷⁷. According to Christian beliefs, not all flesh is considered sinister requiring ascetic practices.

Biblical sources such as Corinthians 9:27 and 1st Peter 2: 11 demonstrate the asceticism practices of fasting, holding night vigils, and offering sacrifices as being practiced in the Christian religion¹⁷⁸.

7.2 Judaism and asceticism

Judaism and its practices of asceticism are influenced by the understanding that denial of the flesh and its desires through self-mortification can promote spiritual piety¹⁷⁹. Judaism has been comprised of many ascetic groups, including the Rechabites who only drank water and never indulged in wine. Generally, however, the ascetic practices in the ancient Jewish religion were syncretistic, narrow, and brief. Genesis 1:28 explains how the Jews abstained from eating meat, but the practice was later allowed in Genesis 9:3¹⁸⁰. Ascetic practices gained momentum again after the Jerusalem temple was destroyed and people were advised to abstain from meat as a sign of mourning. Later the practice was again dropped even though the Nazarites continued the practice of abstaining from eating meat and drinking wine. They also cut off their hair as a form of expressing their holiness.

Jews practiced asceticism through fasting when they were distressed and wanted to directly communicate with God. Believers fasted for four days as a way of mourning the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. This is how the communal fast commonly known as Easter was developed into its form practiced in the present day¹⁸¹.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Conrad, Jeffrey, "Egyptian and Syrian Asceticism in Late Antiquity," 12.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Zaleski, John, *Christianity, Islam, and the Religious Culture of Late Antiquity: A Study of Asceticism in Iraq and Northern Mesopotamia*, 409.

8. Asceticism in a Philosophical Point of View

Philosophers such as St. Maximus Confessor records early forms of asceticism in his works like *The Ascetic Life: the Four Centuries of Charity*. Confessor's writing provides a useful theological and historical understanding of the concept of asceticism, especially on the elements of compassion, divinity, well-being, and spirituality¹⁸². Maximus's philosophy addressed individual desire and inclinations in regard to religious beliefs and activities¹⁸³. His early philosophies addressed the relationship between the church, man, and God, to establish ascetic principles and morals. The desire to develop ascetic morals and principles within the Jewish and Christian religions is influenced by the self-determination of individuals and the desire for spiritual fulfillment and revelation obtained from abstinence and ascetic practices¹⁸⁴.

According to Maximus, the function of ascetic practice is to provide a connection and bridge between God's spiritual realm through divine worship and the self-limiting practices¹⁸⁵. St Maximus asks how self-determination and human nature can be fully integrated to promote understanding and minimize contradictory practices in ascetic life. According to Maximus, the will of man is a natural process exercised by the prevailing desires and conditions. Self-determination is influenced by human modes of incarnation¹⁸⁶. For example, in the Bible, Adam is demonstrated as being self-determinative by being virtuous and moral despite eating the forbidden fruit.

Plato is another philosopher who provides significant insights that promote an understanding of ascetic practices. Plato, who foresees many of Maximus' concepts, illustrates that Jewish and Christian beliefs and values can be achieved through moral discipline and self-mastery by being self-determinative and developing reason¹⁸⁷. Principles of asceticism

¹⁸² Conrad, Jeffrey, "Egyptian and Syrian Asceticism in Late Antiquity," 12.

¹⁸³ Zaleski, John. *Christianity, Islam, and the Religious Culture of Late Antiquity: A Study of Asceticism in Iraq and Northern Mesopotamia*, 409.

¹⁸⁴ Douglas, Kelly Brown, *What's Faith Got to Do with It? Black bodies/Christian souls* (Orbis books, 2018), 123.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Taliaferro, Charles, and Elsa J. Marty, eds., *A Dictionary of Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2018), 40.

¹⁸⁷ Momen, Moojan, *Understanding Religion: A Thematic Approach* (Simon and Schuster, 2019), 55.

are based on self-restraining certain worldly needs and desires which are subconscious. Plato further explains that the human brain is provided with two options, either pleasure or pain, and naturally the brain will choose the positive feeling of pleasure. When an individual accepts and internalizes ascetic practices, he or she is able to suppress some desires by increasing moral development. Man is then able to prevent himself from falling into temptations and committing mistakes. Man thereby develops into a resilient and persistent individual motivated to overcome life's challenges through subconscious interaction promoting transformation of selfishness and wilful egoism. According to Plato, man is then able to become self-sufficient by having a sound mind to distinguish right from wrong and be healthy physically and cognitively¹⁸⁸.

To attain the highest level of satisfaction and unity, man is obligated to act according to ascetic morals and principles¹⁸⁹. Man's character is the determinant of the process of self-realization¹⁹⁰. When a man wants to truly change and transform, he must make the necessary sacrifice willingly and thereby condition his brain structure towards compromising and reconciliation.

9. Philosophical Arguments and Review of Religious Asceticism

Self-limiting activities, renunciation, and abstinences are characteristics of religious asceticism. Religious asceticism is also attributed to tendencies of long fasting periods, seclusion from the world, and self-inflicted pain. Bentham¹⁹¹ argues against asceticism based on these attributes. First, Bentham argues that the principles and moral guidelines of asceticism are not reliable. Secondly, Bentham critically questions how a large number of people and even groups of people can commit to fulfilling their spiritual desires, especially through pain-inflicting practices¹⁹². According to Bentham, these practices are obnoxious and do not make sense at all¹⁹³.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Khawaja, Noreen, *The Religion of Existence: Asceticism in Philosophy from Kierkegaard to Sartre* (University of Chicago Press, 2016), 45.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Nadler, Allan, *The faith of Mithnagdim: Rabbinic Responses to Hasidic Rapture* (London: JHU Press, 1999), 89.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

Based on understanding the natural constitution of the human frame, human beings are naturally and holistically required to embrace and integrate the utility principle in regard to any activity to be performed¹⁹⁴. Relevant to this is the extent to which actions at issue promote or diminish happiness. This means that the material consumption and engagement of people in ascetic practices are influenced and maintained by the utility principle. Additionally, ascetic principles influence people to seek satisfaction and fulfilment of their intrinsic needs based on their actions even though there is no limit and effective understanding of the boundaries and limitations of these actions.

However, the moral principles of asceticism provide a complete contrast to the utility principle. This is because the process of disapproving of ascetic tendencies is likely to increase the outcomes related to pleasure, hence the criticism. According to Bentham, both common people and educated people can still be influenced by religion or morality. However, it becomes more complicated to understand what kind of moral principles or even religion can influence man's actions, activities, and overall nature¹⁹⁵. Bentham explains that the religious practices and their beliefs in asceticism deny people necessary logic, thus preventing them from being critical and pursuing desires and interests that fully satisfy them and makes their lives fulfilling. Therefore, asceticism denies people pleasure by providing practices that create barriers to seeking and fulfilling one's happiness¹⁹⁶.

10. Limitations of Asceticism

Philosophers such as Maximus and Plato argue that the limitations inherent in the ascetic practices end up affecting the capacity of believers to be able to effectively commit and uphold those practices¹⁹⁷. As people try to seek spiritual divinity and piety through ascetic practices, they end up losing the essential value and meaning of feelings and common activities for the pursuit of religious nourishment. The lack of rationalism

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Vuolanto, Ville, *Children and Asceticism in Late Antiquity: Continuity, Family Dynamics and the Rise of Christianity* (Routledge, 2016), 66.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

ends up affecting the development and achievement of moral requirements in the broader society¹⁹⁸. The Jewish and Christian religions integrate cosmology in seeking higher traditional and spiritual deities. Ascetic practices end up limiting man by restricting inclinations in promoting morality because personal fulfilment remains a natural and important need for human beings.

11. Conclusion

Self-denial is conceptualized as the preference for exploring religion through salvation, increasing faith and knowledge of the creator, and finding atonement in the absence of worldly delights. People who subscribe to asceticism are committed to religious beliefs, fasting, and overall withdrawal from the world. In the Christian religion, God is the ultimate drive for the ascetic practices in which believers acquire comfort and solace. Asceticism is also uniquely practiced among different people, religions, and even organizations. For example, the Nazarites often avoided and abstained from drinking and fasted as they approached Easter. Asceticism promotes the growth and nurturing of religious beliefs through the cultivation of moral principles like respect, trust, and responsibility. The traditional practices of asceticism are still prevalent in the current monasteries and include fasting and chastity.

¹⁹⁸ Streib, Heinz, and Ralph W. Hood, "Modeling the Religious Field: Religion, Spirituality, Mysticism and Related World Views," *Implicit Religion*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2013, 60.

Beyond Dilthey: The Parallelization of Natural and Social Scientific Methods and the Emergence of Complex Thinking

Marco Crosa (University of Sofia)

Abstract: After two centuries, the Diltheyan idea of the incommensurability of the natural and social sciences remains hegemonic. Alternative visions have since been overlooked; in this regard, the Baden neo-Kantian school showed that any divergence concerns implied method and not the phenomenal object of studies. Windelband coined the terms “nomological” and “idiographic” to underline how each discipline can be explained as a science of both law and events. To begin, I will show how complex thinking can expand and institute a general integrative frame that overcomes the assumed incommensurability.

By “complex,” I mean an anti-reductionist approach to understanding and a consequent ability to reveal the phenomenal world in terms of nesting self-organized systems. Social and natural systems are persistent coalescences of individual entities showing series of inter-duality such as unicity and multiplicity, top-down conservation and bottom-up innovation, constraint of law and freedom of agencies. The two instances are maintained together by the rejection of abstracted and isolated concepts and the embrace of a general principle of indeterminacy resolving the apparent contradiction within the parallelization of the extremes as two different moments of analyses rooted in the social and natural classical methods.

This paper considers both a) the Positivist attempt in the XIX century to approach the study of social phenomena in terms of law and b) the emergence of a general social science embracing the principle of *acasuality*, adapted from the study of the subatomic phenomenal world in quantum theory. Finally, this paper sketches how complex methodology can address historical and social studies with system theory to overcome classical dualities such as determinism vs. freedom, social vs. individual, and top down conservation vs. bottom up innovation in integrative parallelization.

Keywords: natural science, social science, history, nomological, idio-graphic, ant-reductionism, complex thinking, system theory, principle of indeterminacy, positivism, determinism, acasuality.

The complex method

Complexity can be handled in different ways. E. Morin spoke of a general and restricted approach¹⁹⁹, as an integrative methodology and the understanding of the universe as an emergent nesting of organized systems. Each of these paths leads theoretically to the other. The effort of integration is based on an anti-reductionist approach which opposes the tendency to explain and understand a plexus of sets of affairs, ideas, disciplines, concepts or phenomena. Western thought is fundamentally based on disjunction, abstraction, separation and conceptualization of pure ideas as a coping strategy to deal with the complexity of the phenomenal world. The presocratics exemplified the archetypal method while searching for *physis*, but we have to wait until the nineteenth century to witness an astounding level of specialization, when an extremely parcelized knowledge eventually lost any shared horizon and diverged into self-justificatory discourses hermetically closed to each other. Far from rejecting the importance of specialization, this paper calls for the recovery of the possibility of a shared horizon and a consequent communicability within the scientific discourses.

I refer to three main different levels of disjunction within the theoretical enterprise:

1. among schools within the same discipline;
2. among disciplines related to a common phenomenal object of reference (for example the biological, the social and the psychological stances in regard to *man* as the object of enquiry) ;
3. among sciences with the divergence between social and natural discourses at the center.

I will focus on the third level of disjunction by analyzing theoretical developments following the positivist breakthrough.

¹⁹⁹ Morin, E. "Restricted Complexity, General Complexity", *ArXiv abs/cs/0610049* (2006), <https://goo.gl/t9Gy4t>.

The scientific drifting

During the nineteenth century, “the intellectual life of the whole of western society [was] increasingly being split into two polar groups,”²⁰⁰ as a result of which *humanities* and *sciences* have emerged as two separate and hermetic discourses in the most foucauldian sense. This shift does not relate only to the objects of study and their linked epistemologies but also to something more attitudinal, psychological, emotional and moral. Over time, this separation has become more crystallized, and the two separate traditions have established their own departments, rituals, journals, authors, international organizations, libraries and publishers. The description given by C. P. Snow in his 1959 lecture is, however, a simplified picture of a more complex process of diversification that affected the entire spectrum of knowledge during the 19th and 20th centuries.

The cultural overlapping within the new world-system²⁰¹ and the complexification of the spectrum of human phenomena triggered a demand for new methodologies of research alongside the collapse of the positivist hegemony of the natural sciences. Ethnography and cultural anthropology, including the work of B. Malinovski and F. Boas, stressed cultural immersion and fieldwork with attentive to the role of the observer and her supposed objectivity. Social sciences called for a more conscious definition of universality and relativity of knowledge; this became particularly pronounced in postcolonial studies in the 20th and 21st centuries: “Postcolonial scholarship is committed, almost by definition, to engaging the universals - such as the abstract figure of the human or that of Reason - that were forged in eighteenth-century Europe and that underlie the human sciences.”²⁰²

The edges of the centuries were thus profoundly and dramatically connected with the restructuring of knowledge. The emergence of cultural and social studies alongside the decentering of the lifeworld in respect to causal determinism called for revising the Comtian foundations

²⁰⁰ Snow, C. P. *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 4.

²⁰¹ Wallerstein, I. M. *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Duke University Press, 2004).

²⁰² Chakrabarty, D. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 5.

of reasoning. The rejection of methods restricted by the laws of mechanics and causality, together with reflection on the role of researchers' societal bias, led to Diltheyan philosophical hegemony that emphasized the notion of incommensurability. Physical and cultural realities have since tended to be regarded as two different phenomenal systems with correlated dichotomies such as rationality vs. irrationality, determinism vs. freedom and certainty vs. indeterminacy.

The compatibility of methods

A different trend sprouted out of the Methodenstreit controversy which lasted about 10 years starting in 1880. Born within the field of economics, it developed into a debate between two different methods, one founded on laws and the other on history. W. Windelband coined two fortunate neologisms to conceptualize the emerging difference. He named them respectively *nomothetic* and *idiographic* by which "the one comprises sciences of law, the other sciences of events; the former teaches what always is, the latter what once was."²⁰³ He connected these sciences with a long tradition from Plato and Aristotle of searching for the eternal elements of reality by the analysis of the concrete phenomena.

One of the main concerns in continental thinking - following a tradition coming from G. B. Vico and G. W. F. Hegel - is to treat history as a science by a nomothetic method or, as Rickert put it, the idea that "if history is to become a genuine science, it too will ultimately have to employ the method that has been proved in the natural sciences."²⁰⁴ W. Windelband and H. Rickert started a trend opposed to the Diltheyan narrative of incommensurability regarding the two branches of science by asserting a difference based not on objects of study but on applied methods. Following W. Windelband, any phenomenon can be discussed both nomologically (understanding of law) and idiographically (description of events). This approach remains overlooked.

H. Rickert deepened the analyses by asserting that the nomological

²⁰³ Windelband, W. and Oakes, G. "History and Natural Science", *History and Theory* 19, no. 2 (1980): 165–68, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2504797>.

²⁰⁴ Rickert, H. *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science: A Logical Introduction to the Historical Sciences (Abridged Edition)* (CUP Archive, 1986): p.15.

method finds its limits in individualism; the unicity shows itself as irrelevant in reference to the general conceptualization. When we speak of *leaves*, *snowflakes*, *men*, *women* or *atoms* we are making use of generalizing labels which do not take into account the differences in single instances; they only consider what is common and relevant in regard to specific cognitive interests. This limitation is transferred to higher degrees of conceptualization when from single denotations we move to laws, theories and systems.

In this sense, the scientific method makes constant use of Occam's razor to maintain a sense of constancy in conceptualization. The Western tradition elaborated systems of self-correction and historical dynamics in science with the remarkable work by D. Diderot²⁰⁵ and T. S. Kuhn²⁰⁶. Through these systems, individual elements left outside of the conceptualization break in and force a revision of theoretical constructions and scientific paradigms. This correction confirms the problem of the western scientific enterprise as a top-down approach suspended midway toward the phenomenal world and lost in the hiatus between that world and its conceptualization. Far from abandoning the cognitive role of the latter, it is worth mentioning the risk of the theoretical fallacy inherent in forgetting its one-sidedness. For example, we can consider essentialism in particular as the misinterpretation of the top-down intellectual conceptualization as the bottom-up phenomenal world.

The integration of the two methods is not to be seen as the construction of a new all-embracing theory but rather a parallelization of the nomological and the idiographic, that is, as two different analytical moments pointing to the same phenomenal world. Their slipping into each other must not be seen as an incommensurability but as the inescapability of a general principle of indeterminacy. Taking the concept of *indivuality* from those two perspectives, in a top-down point of view, it is the basic elements of an indivisible system of knowledge in respect to its general laws. In a bottom-up approach, individuality emerges as an ag-

²⁰⁵ Diderot, D. *Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature and Other Philosophical Works*, trans. Lorna Sandler (Manchester England: Clinamen Press Ltd., 2000).

²⁰⁶ Kuhn, T. S. and Hacking, I. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions: 50th Anniversary Edition*, Fourth Edition (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

gregation of a multitude of sub-elements and as an aggregating element in itself toward a higher-level multiplicity. The former perspective reveals the constraints of a specific law and its context, and the latter reveals the irreducibility of self-organizing agencies.

The social scientisation of natural knowledge

The distress over the nineteenth-century approach toward the scientification of the humanities has at its core a contrast between freedom and determinism. A pure nomological approach and the central role of deterministic causality seems to annihilate any possible space for human agencies. It is only with overcoming classical science through quantum theory that the natural world itself showed up both as events and recurrences.

As P. Forman showed²⁰⁷, the cultural environment is capable of influencing and directing the scientific enterprise in terms of an adaptation to the spirit of the time. When it comes to the German academic debate between the two world wars, the hostility toward causality and determinism seems to have pushed natural scientists toward the possibility of an *acausal* explanation leading to the acceptance of indeterminacy in the atomic realm as expressed by quantum theory. Atoms are no longer the indivisible basic element of classical physics subjected to chemical laws; they are also the result of bottom-up processes. More recently, the Nobel prize-winner I. Prigogine explained those processes in terms of dissipative structures, far from equilibrium systems and the irreversibility of time.

Such scientific evolution of the subatomic world shows the inverse of the positivization of science, namely a peculiar *social scientisation of knowledge*²⁰⁸. If positivism introduced the possibility of understanding social phenomena through scientific law, the new physics opened up the entire spectrum of knowledge to be represented in terms of temporal events. The elements of both the natural and the social are thus dualistic, as they are both integrated systems showing specific recurrences and the

²⁰⁷ Forman, P. *Weimar Culture, Causality, and Quantum Theory, 1918-1927: Adaptation by German Physicists and Mathematicians to a Hostile Intellectual Environment*, *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences* 3 (1971): 1–115, <https://doi.org/10.2307/27757315>.

²⁰⁸ Wallerstein, I. *European Universalism: The Rhetoric of Power* (New York: New Press, The, 2006).

results of an aggregation - or transformation - of a multitude of unique individualities. A natural discipline like atomic physics is then confirmed both as a science of laws and a science of events. An integration in this sense means the rejection of the concepts of nomological determinism and idiographic freedom as absolute and independent terms. Both are understood dialogically: 1) the nomological moments ought to ponder any attempt to force or reject elements based on a specific system of laws while 2) the recovery of the historical individuality must not call for a chaotic multitude deprived of any commonality and contextual constraints.

Complex thinking and social theory

The recovery of the bottom-up agencies within the top-down nomological understanding can be well expressed by a theory of self-organization and system analyses. "System" is a general label referring to the resultant stable organization of integrated individual elements, and can also be described as an arrangement of a multitude of agencies into a common network showing both an external consistency and an internal liveliness.

Generally two different kinds of individuality stand out from the multitude: catalysts and anomalies. The former are forces of aggregation and the latter are the possibilities of introducing a novelty or a critical point into the system. With system theory, the Kuhnian anomalies are not left in the waiting room but integrated as positive elements of the dynamics. They contribute to the creation, maintenance and transformation of a system which is the platform for the possibility of their own freedom.

Conservation and innovation are the two main forces which keep a system consistent and adaptive at the same time. Without the first, we have disaggregation; without the second, we have the impossibility of coping with the environment or the collapse of the entire system for lack of adaptability. As a consequence of the general principle of indeterminacy, the dichotomy between the group and the individual appears to present a false dilemma.

From the point of view of a complex approach, everything in the phenomenal world - from subatomic to astronomical levels - can be described as both a system and an infinite nesting of systems. Within these two systems, the socio-biological structures are not forgotten. We can refer to social sciences as those peculiar cognitive interests which focus on a specific range of that system-nesting which goes under the name of

human organizations. A nation, tribe or social class are all admissible forms of organization; all of them concur as basic elements within historical development. History itself can be described as a relentless flocking of social structuring from which individualities stand out for their capacity to aggregate or produce novelties. Their structure and organization thus maintain the typical dynamic of physical systems, although showing a noosphere (the system of the cultural) as a further emergent level of complexity. The noological is nonetheless the ability to filter and hack the plexus of the material and interindividual relations through the construction of symbolic systems.

The concept of *identity* and the process of *identification* standing at the very center of the connection between the individual and the social should be mentioned. The gathering of an individuality within material borders or around material needs and circumstances is a reference to a commonality, the sharing of a noosphere and the construction of a tradition.

Conclusion

A common framework and mutual recognition can be re-established as a consequence of the emergent philosophy of instability, uncertainty and nonlinearity. As E. T. Hall stated, “*if uncertainty were taken seriously, the effect on research methods used in the investigation of complex life forms would be unmistakable.*”²⁰⁹ Complexity can be conceived of as a post-postmodern frame reconnecting a relation broken up by hyper-relativism. Complexity is a superseding approach focusing on integration without falling into a holistic point of view. The innermost needs that led to the relativistic standpoint are not canceled but move in a more *kinesthetic* fashion (taken in its Husserlian meaning) which shows recurrences and events as two moments of analysis.

²⁰⁹ Hall, E. T. *Beyond Culture* (Anchor Books, 1989), 126.

Co-Participation of Students in Knowledge Building

Vincenzo Filetti (University of Sofia)

Abstract: In this article I try to explain the role of 21st century students in co-participating in knowledge building. I refer to the forms of collaborative exchange of formal or informal information based on social networking. The pervasive diffusion of new multimedia technologies among young people can no longer be ignored by the education system, nor can it be considered a disruptive element of traditional teaching but an opportunity to transform and integrate teaching and learning processes.

The so-called digital natives have grown up immersed in new technologies that they use almost as an extension of their self to socialize and to express their being. At the same time, thanks to the massive availability of tools and environments, Web 2.0 is a valuable resource that schools can use to design targeted educational proposals, in line with the technological evolution of the 21st century. In this regard, the European Commission proposes the enhancement of digital skills not only for a better integration of young people into the world of work but also to allow them to acquire the right to digital citizenship, which is essential for effective democratic participation in contemporary society. Therefore, it would be necessary to rethink the organization of the entire school and university system in a perspective oriented towards the integration of digital technology in daily teaching practices. This means, for example, investing in infrastructures (structuring of networks, efficient connectivity, adequate hardware equipment), promoting teacher training on new methodologies and strategies, redefining the paths as well as the possibilities and methods of evaluation.

Among the most significant pedagogical methodologies, we include cooperative learning and problem posing and solving. The other pedagogical foundation of digital interactivity of the so-called millenni-

als is the George Simmens theory of Connectivism.²¹⁰ In particular, the connectivist approach towards the use of Information Computer Technology allows the development on the cognitive level of the ability to identify connections between various sectors and concepts, a skill considered by connectivism to be a core skill, not only for one's own cultural background but also for the development of an active and aware citizenship in the digital world. In fact, the meaning of competence in the use of technologies has undergone a significant transformation over time, also depending on the diffusion of the Web.

We have moved from the European Computer Driving License (ECDL) to the e-Citizenship based on an Information literacy path that indicates the technical skills necessary to access information and services through the Internet in order to be able to exercise one's digital citizenship rights. The concept of digital literacy implies that IT and telematic skills are accompanied by those of participation in the construction and sharing of knowledge; already in 2006 the European Parliament, with regard to the concept of active and conscious citizenship, listed a series of eight key competences for lifelong learning among which learning to learn and digital competence stand out. This is defined as the confident and critical use of information society technology (IST) and thus basic skills in information and communication technology (ICT). Therefore, the new forms of online teaching require a conscious use of social media to learn how to experiment at school and university with original forms of learning and collaboration, capable of creating correlations between school life, virtual life and real life.

Formal and informal learning

Thinking about learning and student participation in the construction of knowledge implies considering the actions taken by the younger generations. We will refer to the forms of collaborative exchange of information. For several years, young people have tended to aggregate socially through digital technology or generate active interactions that tend to build a new culture with their own meanings through formal and informal learning opportunities. Therefore, educators using online teaching

²¹⁰ Siemens, George, "Connectivism," *Foundations of Learning and Instructional Design Technology* (2017).

methodologies should know how to reconcile formal learning strategies with informal learning practices, based on the approach that the so-called digital natives have towards computerized technologies and social software. As previously mentioned, the glossary published by the European Community (Terminology of education and training policy: a multilingual glossary), clearly states that learning "is a process by which an individual assimilates information, ideas and values and acquires knowledge, applied knowledge, skills, attitudes and / or skills that can take place in non-formal, informal and formal contexts".²¹¹

By non-formal learning we mean learning connected to activities that are planned but not explicitly designed as learning. An example could be learning which is not delivered by an educational institution. Informal learning arises from the multiple forms of learning through the experience resulting from the activities of daily life related to work, family, leisure and is not organized or structured and does not lead to certification. A formal learning environment, on the other hand, implies a physical or virtual place intentionally equipped to respond to training needs through pedagogical strategies and didactic devices aimed at promoting, directing and developing learning processes. The new digital technologies allow, in addition to formal learning, training and organizational practices conducted in the workplace (non-formal context), the activation of learning or practice communities built freely by the students and often transmigrated in the Social Software.

In a document entitled "Creating a European area of lifelong learning" of 21 November 2001, the European Commission presents some priorities and strategies including the recognition of qualifications throughout Europe, orientated towards quality, solutions, and innovative pedagogies, as well as the expansion of basic skills and the enhancement of formal, informal, non-formal learning.²¹² In 2009, the Commission and Cedefop published European guidelines for the validation of non-

²¹¹ Galliani, L. "Apprendimento in età adulta, contesti e reti," *Lectio magistralis presentata alla Conferenza ICT and Adult learning. European Agenda on Adult Learning. Torino, IT: Isfol*. 2013.

²¹² European Commission, "Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: A Strategic Framework for the External Relations of the European Union." Europa, eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2001:0678:FIN:EN:PDF. 2001.

formal and informal learning which provide policy makers and practitioners with technical tools on validation.²¹³ The guidelines address validation from different perspectives (individual, organizational, national, European) and constitute a practical tool to be applied on a voluntary basis. Together with other tools, credit systems based on learning outcomes facilitate the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

In 2012, in a further document of the European Commission, the "Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning", we read:

We are presented with opportunities to learn every day. Beyond the formal classroom setting, we can acquire the most valuable of knowledge, skills and competences in our daily lives, be it at work, at home or during leisure time. Learning throughout life is a key route to personal development and acknowledging such learning can give greater value to citizen's achievements and their potential contributions to society. Despite this, the influence of traditional forms of education remains strong, with non-formal and informal learning often ignored and undervalued. The 2012 Council recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning recognizes this conflict and seeks to promote a more systematic approach to 'validation', to increase the visibility and value of learning taking place outside formal education and training systems.²¹⁴

Among digital natives these informal practices are the result of attitudes originating from the intrinsic characteristics of the new technologies and virtual environments that the natives themselves frequent.²¹⁵ One theory that has conferred formative "dignity" on informal learning is connectivism. Behaviourism, cognitivism, and constructivism are the

²¹³ Cedefop, "Vocational Education and Training in Europe: Current Situation and Challenges," Cedefop, www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/3073_en.pdf. 2020

²¹⁴ European Union. "Directive 2012/22/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2012 amending Directive 2006/100/EC on the Minimum Safety and Health Requirements for Improved Medical Treatment on Board Vessels," Europa, [eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222\(01\) & from=ES](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222(01)&from=ES). 13 June 2012

²¹⁵ Rivoltella, Pier Cesare, *Neurodidattica: Insegnare al cervello che apprende*. Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2012, 8.

three broad learning theories most often utilized in the creation of instructional environments. These theories, however, were developed in a time when learning was not impacted by technology.

According to behavioral theory, learning is the acquisition of habits and associations between stimulus and response. It is studied as a "molecular" fact, that is, by analyzing the connections between inputs and outputs. Burrhus Frederic Skinner is considered the father of behaviorism and from his studies derived much of the experimental data underlying the behavioral theory of learning. The object of Skinner's research was to discover the functional relations which prevail between measurable aspects of behavior and various conditions and events in the life of the organism. The success of such a venture is gauged by the extent to which behavior can, as a result of the relationships discovered, actually be predicted and controlled.²¹⁶ Education and teaching systems that are based on a behavioral view of learning focus on conditioning the learner's behavior: the teacher manipulates changes in behavior using selective reinforcement. The teacher has the role of determining the skills or abilities that lead to the desired behavior and making sure that the students take it in gradually. It is quite obvious that such a teaching or learning system leaves little space and little initiative for students. They can only manage the timing but not the autonomous and creative construction of knowledge. In the mathematical field it may be fine but much less for artistic and humanistic disciplines in general.

According to Watson, behaviors are accepted to be a movement by various muscles. Human behaviors such as speaking, walking, thinking, feeling and such are all composed of movements of nerve system and muscles. Therefore, Watson maintains that concepts such as instinct, motive, conscious, subconscious presented by other theories in order to explain human behaviors are uncertain expressions trying to explain muscular movements and neural activities. Further, learning occurred relates to how an organism establishes a connection between his/her information and cognition about the environment and himself/herself. This idea does not comply with the ideas of Thorndike and Hull, who thought that learning as a strict connection of stimulus-response.

²¹⁶ Delprato, Dennis J., and Bryan D. Midgley, "Some Fundamentals of BF Skinner's Behaviorism," *American psychologist*, 47, no. 11 (1992): 1507.

Edward Chance Tolman made great contributions to the fields of learning and motivation and presented his theory of cognitive learning while working in California University. Tolman developed his own sense of behaviorism in a period when ideas related to learning psychology claimed by J.B. Watson were dominant.²¹⁷ Tolman claimed that learning was related to complex mental processes, not simple mechanic conditioning processes. He did a lot of classical experiments with mice in order to prove his idea. One of his most well-known studies involves maze running. Moreover, he also put emphasis on the role of reinforcer in mice's learning their routes in complex mazes. These experiments caused the birth of "The Theory of Latent Learning" which concerns learning occurring in situations where there is no certain reward.

The third paradigm is constructivism which, according to George A. Kelly, denotes a philosophical position according to which known reality does not precede knowledge but is constructed (or re-constructed) at some level.²¹⁸ The constructivist approach takes into consideration the point of view of the observer or examiner. It considers knowledge as something that cannot be received passively (as an affection of the external world) by the subject, but which results from the relationship between an active subject and reality. Reality, as the object of our knowledge, would therefore be created by our continuous "experiencing" it. We determine it by the way, by the means, by our disposition in observing it, knowing it and communicating it. It is formed in the processes of interaction and through the attribution of meanings to our experience. In these processes, language certainly plays a fundamental role. The "construction" is therefore based on cognitive maps that are used by individuals to orientate themselves and build their own interpretations. In simple terms, each individual constructs his own personal "map of meanings" which allow him to live in what each one experiences as his own world.²¹⁹

Over the last twenty years, technology has reorganized how we live, how we communicate, and how we learn. Learners as little as forty years ago would complete the required schooling and enter a career that

²¹⁷ Cf. Kaya, Zeki, and Akdemir, Ahmet Selçuk, *Learning and Teaching: Theories, Approaches and Models* (Ankara: Çözüm Publishing, 2016).

²¹⁸ Kelly, George A., "A Brief Introduction to Personal Construct Theory," *Perspectives in Personal Construct Theory*, 1 (1970): 29.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

would often last a lifetime. Information development was slow. The life of knowledge was measured in decades. Today, these foundational principles have been altered. Knowledge is growing exponentially. In many fields the life of knowledge is now measured in months and years. One of the most persuasive factors is the shrinking half-life of knowledge. The “half-life of knowledge” is the time span from when knowledge is gained to when it becomes obsolete. Half of what is known today was not known 10 years ago. The amount of knowledge in the world has doubled in the past 10 years and is doubling every 18 months according to the American Society of Training and Documentation.²²⁰ To combat the shrinking half-life of knowledge, organizations have been forced to develop new methods of deploying instruction. Here are some significant trends in learning during the 21st century:²²¹

- Many learners will move into a variety of different, possibly unrelated fields over the course of their lifetime.
- Informal learning is a significant aspect of our learning experience.
- Formal education no longer comprises most of our learning. Learning now occurs in a variety of ways – through communities of practice, personal networks, and through completion of work-related tasks.
- Learning is a continual process, lasting for a lifetime.
- Learning and work-related activities are no longer separate. In many situations, they are the same.
- Technology is altering (rewiring) our brains. The tools we use define and shape our thinking.
- The organization and the individual are both learning organisms.
- Increased attention to knowledge management highlights the need for a theory that attempts to explain the link between individual and organizational learning.
- Many of the processes previously handled by learning theories (especially in cognitive information processing) can now be off-loaded to, or supported by, technology.

²²⁰ Siemens, George, "Elearnspace. Connectivism: A learning Theory for the Digital Ege," *Elearnspace.org* (2004): 14-16.

²²¹ Ibid.

- Know-how and know-what is being supplemented with know-where (the understanding of where to find knowledge needed).
- Compared to behaviourism, cognitivism, and constructivism, connectivism proposes an innovative approach. Connectivism proposes the integration of principles explored by the theories of chaos, networks and complexity for understanding the learning processes of individuals and organizations. The starting point of connectivism is the concept that knowledge exists in itself and that the individual does not need to build it.

Siemens, consistent with the constructionist approach, emphasizes the social character of knowledge but argues further that this can also exist independently of the individual, outside of ourselves (within an organization or database). Personal knowledge, through the network, nourishes the organizations and institutions in which it resides, which in turn have to provide to the learning of the individuals who compose them. The university institution looks like it more could benefit from the connectivist architecture and that in turn could give the best contributions so that connectivism can establish itself as a reliable network of knowledge which develops alongside but above all in the substratum of the already consolidated learning paradigms of behaviourism, cognitivism, and constructivism. If we consider that today many university students are digital natives, we realize the effectiveness of the connectivist approach.

George Siemens's theory of Connectivism offers an interesting pedagogical explanation of the approach to knowledge conceived by digital natives. In particular, the principles of connectivism enunciated by Siemens are:²²²

- Learning and knowledge rests in diversity of opinions.
- Learning is a process of connecting specialized nodes or information sources.
- Learning may reside in non-human appliances.
- Capacity to know more is more critical than what is currently known
- Nurturing and maintaining connections is needed to facilitate continual learning.

²²² Ibid.

- Ability to see connections between fields, ideas, and concepts is a core skill.
- Accurate and up-to-date knowledge is the intent of all connectivist learning activities.
- Decision-making is itself a learning process.

Choosing what to learn and the meaning of incoming information is seen through the lens of a shifting reality. While there is a right answer now, it may be wrong tomorrow due to alterations in the information climate affecting the decision. Considering the principles just mentioned, teaching philosophy online (and any other discipline) implies knowing how to develop opportunities for connective learning. Such occasions should bring together the interests of the different members of a virtual community towards the shared construction of knowledge through dynamic and flexible virtual scenarios, in which the teaching methodology includes different activities:

- case study
- collaborative problem solving
- decision making
- reflection practices
- examination of multiple interpretations
- debates
- web quests
- collaborative work

The connectivist Web was born with the new generation of digital natives accustomed to downloading and shareware.²²³ We are referring to a generation that learns, works, has fun and expresses itself through open and collaborative tools such as YouTube, GoogleMeet, GoToMeeting, WhatsApp, Messenger, etc. The social context of connectivism promotes learning activities that develop under the banner of collaboration:

- Collect: store data, organize resources, select information, create contacts.

²²³ Pérez, María Esther Del Moral, Doina Ana Cernea, and Lourdes Villalustre Martínez. "Scenari connettivisti e progetto di learning object adattabili alla diversità cognitiva." *Italian Journal of Educational Technology* 19, no. 2 (2011): 102-111.

- Reflect: think critically, choose, review information, create paths.
- Connect: spontaneously form work groups, integrate into communities of practice, share goals, values and attitudes, connect information.
- Publishing: sharing experiences, editing documents in different multimedia formats, converting collaborative tools into cognitive tools. All this is enhanced by the collaborative tools that the connectivist web makes available, tools that allow different ways to explore information, contents, resources.

The opportunities provided by the connectivist Web applied to the online teaching-learning process led to a pedagogical reformulation based on which:²²⁴

- Learning is understood as an informal process, characterized by the dynamics of growth and development of the network, in which the contents come from multiple sources, are provided by users and are distributed in different formats and media.
- The key aspect for building knowledge is the possibility of exploiting the synergistic experiences of others, which provides new meaning to learning based on the exploration of information models.
- The concept of collaboration takes on a new dimension, going beyond the simple constitution of learning groups and giving priority instead to connections and fluid interactions in open networks.
- Communication and, therefore, the tools that facilitate it in the connectivist Web are essential for promoting learning.
- Learning takes place in contexts that constantly change and update themselves.

Connectivism, as a theory of learning in the digital age, the result of the analysis of the limits of behaviorist and constructivist theories, takes its cue from the principles of Network Theory to redefine the concepts of knowledge and learning process. Knowledge is distributed through a network of connections as a particular configuration of relations. Learning, consequently, consists in building new connections and new configurations starting from the initial ones, and implies the ability

²²⁴ Ibid.

to go beyond existing networks.²²⁵ In summary, the learning process is characterized by these elements:

- is distributed through a network
- is based on the recognition and interpretation of configurations
- is deeply mediated by the diversity of the network and the strength of its connections
- relies on the adaptability of the connection configurations
- favours the transfer of knowledge starting from connections
- takes ownership of the speed of change of the domains of knowledge.

Learning in connectivist scenarios takes as its starting points the key aspects of constructivist learning theory, underlining that knowledge is built from information networks generated by user communities. However, learning must not be reduced to the mere acquisition of knowledge starting from personal experiences, given that this is a limited view of constructivism, but also derive from the summation of the experiences of others. We acquire our skills when we create new connections. Siemens writes: “learning (defined as actionable knowledge) can reside outside of ourselves (within an organization or a database), is focused on connecting specialized information sets, and the connections that enable us to learn more are more important than our current state of knowing”.²²⁶ Based on the belief that chaos, produced by spontaneous connections between users and resources, contains meaning, learning is converted into the process of recognizing information configurations. These open information networks are characterized by their permanent transformation due to their uncontrolled development, within which the meaning seems to remain hidden. For this reason, the challenge of the learner centres on his ability to recognize configurations of relevant information.

The connectivist learning scenarios distance themselves from the principles of constructivism as they introduce aspects characterized by the informal conception of processes and an idea of knowledge generation based on spontaneous connections. These aspects shape interactive learning spaces geared towards problem solving and collaborative research, centred

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Siemens, George, "Elearnspace. Connectivism: A Learning Theory for the Digital Age," 14-16.

on the learner and aimed at enhancing meaningful learning by facilitating multiple applications and experiences. In these scenarios, users become active members of a learning community, establishing a specific social context and taking charge of their own learning. The scenarios provide feedback or learning guides that serve to orientate users by offering them different training paths. At the same time, they allow users to exploit the synergies of the learning community through the continuous exploration of contents, activating the ability of users to synthesize in recognizing information configurations and connections within the immense volume of resources that are offered. These frameworks also provide users with the ability to create their own content and decide on their learning strategies, giving them total control in making decisions in an ever-changing scenario.

These new scenarios host highly heterogeneous information and are organized through the spontaneous creation of structures and configurations, behaviour and use, within which learning is based on the exploration of new connections and new information configurations. In these scenarios, open to the inclusion of new users and new resources, users can both classify their interactions with the environment and create and modify structures. Not surprisingly, these scenarios facilitate access to shared information and the use of collaborative tools, enhancing group learning, creating knowledge based on the experience of other group members and acquiring skills starting from connections. The importance of the speed of decisions and the processing of new information is clearly underlined by Siemens in the following points:²²⁷

- connectivism is driven by the understanding that decisions are based on rapidly altering foundations
- new information is continually being acquired
- the ability to draw distinctions between important and unimportant information is vital.
- the ability to recognize when new information alters the landscape based on decisions made yesterday is also critical.

The connectivist Web allows for the creation an educational design idea on learning that can enhance the participation of students in the construction of knowledge. This project proposal is based on the following four learning pedagogical themes:

²²⁷ Cf. Siemens, George, "Connectivism".

- Active learning: learning takes place actively, continuously processing and recovering knowledge and generating connections with experiences. These recursive actions allow students, through their actions, to autonomously create new structures of personal knowledge. Therefore, adopting a metacognitive approach is of fundamental importance to keep learning active over time, even beyond school. Students must be led to use personal procedures to control their study actions and their production of knowledge.
- Social learning: effective learning is not an exclusively solitary activity, but essentially a distributed action. In fact, the individual construction of knowledge takes place through processes of interaction, negotiation and cooperation with others. Learning is therefore configured as a social fact since it takes place in a context of relationships, culturally connoted; thus, it emerges that the socio-cultural constructivist learning theory directs the organization of learning contexts in order to express profound cognitive processes in students.
- Collaborative and cooperative learning: the collaborative nature of learning is closely linked to the perspective that emphasizes its social character. Effective learning is not a purely individual activity, but essentially the result of factors "distributed" in the context. Each individual student is involved together with the others, with the resources, technologies and tools that are made available in the context.
- Learning as an experience: The organization of learning experiences is able to educate and train in the profound understanding of processes and dispositions of the mind. Learning experiences, in Dewey's perspective,²²⁸ can now count on the use of software that allows the construction of cross-media knowledge and capable of interpreting individual differences on virtual environments in which to co-build knowledge and operate to extend formal learning spaces.

²²⁸ Miettinen, Reijo, "The Concept of Experiential Learning and John Dewey's Theory of Reflective Thought and Action," *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 19.1 (2000): 54-72.

The context in which the learning will take place implies that:

- students will be assigned individual and social responsibilities;
- different types of positive interdependence will be activated;
- constant interactions must be produced;
- space will be given to moments of reflection, review and evaluation of the processes solicited during the activities;
- the class will be organized as a set of small groups - or couples - who will continually face problems to be solved;
- the resources available to the class, on which everyone can count, the constraints and the shared rules will be defined;
- an evaluation of the pre-established objectives will be carried out in a transparent way and based on shared and verifiable indicators. The previously mentioned learning takes place with the implementation of the open education of the "Four R" through the following phases:²²⁹

Reuse: use of resources "as they are". Reuse consists of the lowest basic level of open education, i.e. it is allowed to use all or part of a work for one's own purposes, such as downloading a training video to watch later.

Revision: modification, transformation, critical re-elaboration of the content-structure in order to achieve the required objectives. That is, you can adapt, modify, translate for example a book written in English and transform it into an audiobook in Spanish.

Remix: integration of the content with other information, external to the initial resources to increase the potential of the new product created. That is, you can extract two or more resources and combine them to create a new resource such as the extrapolation of audio lessons taken from a course and transform them into slides for PowerPoint thus creating a new training resource.

Redistribution: sharing of the work with other subjects via email or social networks, for example, as many students already post notes taken in class or scanned photocopies on Facebook.

²²⁹ Hilton III, John, David Wiley, Jared Stein, and Aaron Johnson, "The four 'R's of Openness and ALMS Analysis: Frameworks for Open Educational Resources." *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and E-learning* 25, no. 1 (2010): 37-44.

Conclusion

The digital revolution is changing the world more radically and faster than even the Copernican revolution, irreparably altering the understanding of the nature of man as a social and political animal. In the era of the information revolution, the human being becomes a fundamentally informational entity and, similarly, space-time becomes computational space-time as the ultimate fabric of reality. The hermeneutic horizon that opens up in the digital age is therefore inhabited by the concept of information which, like concepts such as being, knowledge, good and evil, is autonomous in its ontological and metaphysical dignity. Furthermore, the same hermeneutic horizon is characterized by the computational 'bit' which is the new archè: the ultimate foundation of language and reality. In other words, the hermeneutic horizon that opens up in the digital era is a horizon characterized by the one that Luciano Floridi²³⁰ calls infosphere, or universe (or already multiverse) of man-informative, or informant, bearer of information, capable of information and capable of changing the surrounding environment with information, just as man a millennia ago changed the environment with the use of the thumb. Such a universe is governed by intrinsic ethical laws which essentially tend to a moral imperative that Floridi summarizes in an informative well-being that must be promoted, extending (quantity of information), improving (information quality) and enriching (variety of information) the infosphere. Now, if it is true that in the digital age man is essentially an informational entity,²³¹ it is clear that the main condition of his essence, that is, Dasein, as Heidegger would say, cannot but coincide with his ability or possibility to give and to receive information and to be in the world (in the world of information, which in this case would coincide with the world, tout-court). In the information and in the possibility given to man to hand it out, one can therefore glimpse the essence of contemporary man, already identified by Bakhtin for whom the existence of man (both the exterior and the interior) is a very deep communication. To be means to communicate. Death (non-being) is the impos-

²³⁰ Floridi, Luciano, *Infosfera. Etica e filosofia nell'età dell'informazione* (Giappichelli, 2009), 40.

²³¹ Cf. Wiener, Norbert, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetic and Society* (Garden City, New York : Doubleday, 1954).

sibility of being heard, of being recognized, of being remembered.²³² And it can be clearly seen in today's culture, where consistency of the self is often linked to an image that is always managed and assured and amplified by social networks. Analyzing, therefore, the new posture of the human in the infosphere, we come to the awareness that contemporary existence is in fact an *onlife*²³³ existence, where online and offline are in fact overcome or perhaps canceled, because they are engulfed by the collective expectation that for individuals a single condition is reserved: either you are connected, capable of exchanging information (regardless of how you are online), or you are not. The digital dimension leads man towards forms of collective intelligence, which redesigns new social and political identities. They are based not on territorial, geographical, or institutional affiliations but on adherence to common interests and from collective intelligence towards forms of distributed intelligence that it is not by chance that De Kerckhove has baptized as connective intelligence.²³⁴ This connective intelligence is capable of producing a knowledge given by the multiplication of the single intelligences interconnected by a relational network and not by the mere sum and average of them. Connective intelligence reflects the way in which young people of the 21st century relate to each other on the web, beyond any religious, political, or ideological belief. The web allows not only a collective and connective construction of knowledge but above all the emergence of a new consciousness based on collaboration, interconnection and continuous exchange of information: a crucial aspect for an authentic democratic society.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Cf. Floridi, Luciano, *The Onlife Manifesto: Being Human in a Hyperconnected Era* (Springer Nature, 2015).

²³⁴ de Kerckhove, Derrick. "Connected Intelligence for the Civil Society: the Internet as a Social Limbic System," *Spanda Journal* 5 (2014): 2.

IV. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Master's Program in Philosophy Taught in English at the University of Sofia “St. Kliment Ohridski”

General Information

Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” was founded in 1888 following the best patterns of European higher education. Sofia is the capital city of the Republic of Bulgaria, which is a member of the European Union (EU). Sofia University is the highest-ranking university in Bulgaria. The MA Program in Philosophy taught in English at the University of Sofia provides instruction in all major areas of Western Philosophy, but the Master's thesis can also be written on a topic from Eastern Philosophy. The program consists of 10 mandatory courses and 2 electives, so it leaves enough leeway for the student's own preferences. The degree is recognized worldwide including in the EU/EEA and Switzerland, the USA, Canada, Russia, Turkey, China, the Indian Sub-Continent, Latin America, and the Middle East.

Courses Offered

Philosophical Method, Truth and Meaning, Philosophy of Intercultural Relations, Social Philosophy, Critical Phenomenology, Continental Philosophy, Philosophy of Culture, Logic in the Continental Tradition, Theories of Truth, Existential Dialectics, Philosophy of Subjective Action, Logic from a Phenomenological Perspective.

Faculty Members

They feature successful teaching experience in this country and abroad and are well published in Bulgarian and English.

Duration of Studies

Two semesters of course attendance plus a third semester for writing the Master's thesis. There are also opportunities for distance learning.

Requirements

Bachelor's degree in any field of the humanities, social science, science, or professional disciplines. No tests or application fee are required (for citizens of EU/EEA and Switzerland applying for a state scholarship €16 fee is charged and an interview is held). No previous degree in philosophy is needed.

Tuition Fee

- 1) For citizens of the EU/EEA and Switzerland: €850 per school year.
- 2) For international students: €3850 per school year.

Financial Aid

- 1) EU/EEA and Swiss citizens are eligible for state scholarships carrying a 60% tuition waiver plus a monthly stipend beginning from the second semester.
- 2) American citizens are eligible for Fulbright Graduate Grants. For more information, see www.fulbright.bg. It is possible for American citizens to use sources of governmental financial assistance (please contact the Program Director for details).
- 3) Canadian students are eligible for financial aid in the form of governmental student loans from the province where they are permanent residents.
- 4) Turkish students are eligible for financial aid within the Turkish-Bulgarian Bilateral Cultural Agreement. For more information, contact the Turkish Ministry of Education..
- 5) Chinese students are eligible for financial aid within the Chinese-Bulgarian Bilateral Cultural Agreement. For more information, contact the Chinese Ministry of Education.

Application Deadlines

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| To start in October: | July 31. |
| To start in February: | November 30 of the previous year. |

Student Visa Matters

Sofia University in cooperation with the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science provides the necessary documents for student visa application to all eligible candidates, except those from the EU/EEA and Switzerland.

Cultural Life and Recreation

The city of Sofia is the most ancient European capital after Athens. The cost of living there is one of the lowest in Europe. As the capital of Bulgaria, Sofia features a rich cultural life. There are a number of concert halls, museums, dozens of art galleries, and many national and international cultural centers. The streets of Sofia are populated by cozy cafés and high-quality inexpensive restaurants offering Bulgarian, European, and international cuisine. Sofia is a favorable place for summer and winter sports including skiing on the nearby mountain of Vitosha. More about Sofia can be found at <http://www.sofia-life.com/culture/culture.php>. You can also follow Sofianite and Bulgarian news at <http://www.novinite.com/lastx.php>.

Contact Person

Dr. Alexander L. Gungov, Program Director

E-mail: agungov@phls.uni-sofia.bg

Phone: (+3592) 9308-414 (Bulgaria is within the Eastern European Time Zone)

Mailing address: Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University, 15 Tsar Osoboditel Blvd., Sofia 1504, Bulgaria.

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Courses Offered

Modal Metaphysics, Mythologies of the Future: Ideology, Posthumanism, Anthropotechnics; Epistemology, Philosophy of Science, Social Philosophy, Philosophy of Projectivity, Art versus Market, Epistemology, Continental Philosophy, Language and Cultural Relativity, Philosophy of Culture, Time and History.

Requirements

Master’s degree in any field. No previous degree in philosophy is required.

Checklist

CV, two letters of recommendation, standardized tests scores are NOT required. No application fee (for citizens of EU/EEA and Switzerland a €51 fee is charged and an entrance exam is held).

Tuition Fee

- 1) For EU/EEA & Swiss students:

in residence:	one-time registration fee of €980
extramural:	€2,440 per school year.
- 2) For non- EU/EEA & Swiss students:

in residence:	€4,950 per school year.
extramural:	€3,300 per school year.

Other Fees

Dissertation Defense Fee (non- EU/EEA & Swiss students): €2,480.

Duration of Studies

In residence: 3 years. Extramural: 4 years. There are opportunities for online studies.

Financial Aid

- 1) EU/EEA and Swiss citizens are eligible for state scholarships carrying a monthly stipend of BGN 750.
- 2) American citizens are eligible for Fulbright Graduate Grants. For more information, see www.fulbright.bg.
- 3) Canadian students are eligible for financial aid in the form of governmental student loans from the province where they are permanent residents.
- 4) Turkish students are eligible for financial aid within the Turkish-Bulgarian Bilateral Cultural Agreement. For more information, contact the Turkish Ministry of Education..
- 5) Chinese students are eligible for financial aid within the Chinese-Bulgarian Bilateral Cultural Agreement. For more information, contact the Chinese Ministry of Education.

Application Deadlines

To start in October: April 3.

To start in February: October 31.

Student Visa Matters

Sofia University in cooperation with the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science provides the necessary documents for student visa application to all eligible candidates outside the EU/EEA and Switzerland.

Cultural Life and Recreation

The city of Sofia is the most ancient European capital after Athens. The cost of living there is one of the lowest in Europe. As the capital of Bulgaria, Sofia features a rich cultural life. There are a number of concert halls, museums, dozens of art galleries, and many national and international cultural centers. The streets of Sofia are populated by cozy cafés and high-quality inexpensive restaurants offering Bulgarian, European, and international cuisine. Sofia is a favorable place for summer and winter sports including skiing on the nearby mountain of Vitosha. More about Sofia can be found at <http://www.sofia-life.com/culture/culture.php>. You can also follow Sofianite and Bulgarian news at <http://www.novinite.com/lastx.php>.

Contact Person

Dr. Alexander L. Gungov, Program Director

E-mail: agungov@phls.uni-sofia.bg

Phone: (+3592) 9308-414 (Bulgaria is within the Eastern European Time Zone)

Mailing address: Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University, 15 Tsar Osoboditel Blvd., Sofia 1504, Bulgaria.

VI. INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Kamelia Spassova is Assoc. Prof. and Chair of the Department of Theory of Literature at University of Sofia, Bulgaria.

Dr. A. B. Denissova is Assoc. Prof. at the Department of Philosophy, Political Science and Sociology, named after G. S. Astaf'eva, National Research University "Moscow Power Energy Institute" (NRU "MPEI"), Russian Federation.

Dr. J. V. Sokolova is Assoc. Prof. and Chair of the Department of Philosophy, Political Science and Sociology, named after G. S. Astaf'eva, National Research University "Moscow Power Energy Institute" (NRU "MPEI"), Russian Federation.

Mr. Luka Matić is a PhD Student at the Department of Philosophy, University of Zagreb, Croatia.

Dr. David L. Tomasi is Asst. Prof. at Vermont Academy of Arts and Sciences, USA.

Dr. Evangelos Kalfopoulos holds a PhD in Philosophy from University of Sofia, Bulgaria.

Mr. Tomas Pewton is a PhD Student in Philosophy, University of Sofia, Bulgaria.

Ms. Seçil Özergan is a PhD Candiadate in Philosophy, University of Sofia, Bulgaria.

Mr. Cengizhan Kaptan is a PhD Candiadate in Philosophy, University of Sofia, Bulgaria.

Dr. Eleftherios Sarantis is a Post-Doctoral Fellow in Philosophy, University of Sofia, Bulgaria.

Dr. Jacopo Morelli is a PhD Research Fellow at the University of Modena-Reggio, Italy.

Mr. Furkan Yazıcı is a PhD Student at the Department of Philosophy, University of Waikato, New Zealand.

Dr. Anthony McCool holds a PhD in Philosophy from University of Sofia, Bulgaria.

Mr. Marco Crosa is a PhD Student in Philosophy, University of Sofia, Bulgaria.

Mr. Vincenzo Filetti is a PhD Candidate in Philosophy, University of Sofia, Bulgaria.