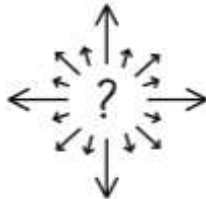


Sofia Philosophical Review

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I. SOME TIMELY REFLECTIONS ON PHILOSOPHY

Four Philosophical Essays

Donald Phillip Verene (Emory University)

Prefatory Note. The remarks herein are a tetralogy of thoughts written as they came to mind. They are not intended to prove anything. They may be regarded as a series of suggestions. I consider suggestions as thoughts that lie between descriptions and prescriptions. Suggestions are neither true nor false. They are only what they are—suitable or unsuitable to a given subject matter. The subject matter in this case is wide-ranging, from education to the poetic as the basis of thought, to prudence as the basis of moral activity, and to beauty as the key to what is ultimate in human experience. I have included a brief Afterword on the nature of politics.

On the Educated Person

In the technological society—our contemporary society—we have lost the idea and presence of the educated person that had a place in traditional society. The educated person is replaced by the technical person. The technical person pursues thought as an instrument for the accumulation of information to be employed in a series of indefinite length of addressing one problem after another. The technical person has no ability to pursue thought as contemplation. Devoid of contemplation, the technical person has no inside, no awareness of Socratic self-knowledge that is the basis of humane education. The hollowness of incessant technical problem-solving leaves the individual without any grasp of the ultimates of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. These ultimates have no existence for the technical person. In the ongoing stream of technical engagement the individual is always waiting for Godot.

There are two words that apply to the sense of education embodied in the idea of the educated person—the Greek word *paideia* and the German word *Bildung*. *Paideia* is used by Werner Jaeger, the German historian of Greek culture, as the title of his three-volume work *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*. Jaeger interprets *paideia* as bringing together the

meanings of modern expressions, such as civilization, culture, tradition, literature, and education. The unity of these expressions in the one word, *paideia*, is grasped by the reading of literature. *Bildung*, in its meaning since the eighteenth century, designates a conception of education as the inner, intellectual development of an individual. It involves the assimilation of the individual into society and culture. It is associated with Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, the founding work of the *Bildungsroman*, or novel depicting the self-formation of an individual.

To be educated is not simply to be able to solve problems. Such ability is useful but it is a matter of training. To be educated is to engage in a process of self-development that depends upon the distinct human ability to join language and thought. This union rests upon the individual's ability to engage in contemplation. Contemplation differs from meditation. Meditation is a state of mind that seeks to comprehend the meaning of a given set of ideas or principles. Contemplation has the purpose of posing questions, the pursuit of which takes the mind to a new perspective. The educated person thinks in terms of questions and the possibilities for thought that questions reveal. The educated person has four characteristics—to be well-read, well-mannered, well-spoken, and well-reasoned.

Being well-read is a lifetime occupation. It involves reading the writings of the ancients and the moderns in all the traditions of world literature, beginning with the first books of the various religions and intellectual traditions. It is a task to undertake, but one that can never be fully finished. The act of reading is a means of the suspension of time. Reading is an act of contemplation, allowing the self to look inward, into the process of thought. The technical self has no means to achieve relief from the constant, ongoing sense of time. The technical self is always spread out in time, in an unceasing process of change and revision. The self thus becomes an instrument of time—always facing the next task.

Manners are the basis of morals. They are moral activity, pursued at the level of one individual in relation to another and as proper conduct within any given society. Manners constitute the foundation of prudence, and prudence is the foundation of moral action. The French word *mœurs* carries this double meaning of manners and morals. It is possible to speak directly of manners (*manières*), referring to the way something is done, in the sense of acting in terms of custom. But the double meaning of *mœurs* suggests that a person who acts to others in terms of man-

ners is in possession of the concept of right conduct, that there is a right and proper way to live in society. Rousseau, in his discourse on the question: “Has the restoration of the sciences and arts tended to purify morals (*mœurs*)?” has shown the interconnection between the two senses of the word. Closely connected to the philosophical interpretation of *mœurs* is the concept of taste (*goût*). Taste, as the term is understood in the eighteenth century, is essential in order to make distinctions in human experience. Taste, like manners, is not a subjective preference; it is understood as an objective standard developed through custom.

Being well-spoken depends upon a knowledge of grammar and diction. To speak well it is necessary to acquire the principles of grammar and to express thought in the words proper to the subject considered. Polydore Vergil, in the first chapter of his work *On Discovery*, explains the importance of grammar: “Grammar is the most excellent of all the arts, for it provides a way of approaching the others.” One of the errors that I notice today with considerable frequency is the incorrect use of pronouns.

Grammar is the means whereby the self orders the world and places itself in the world. A common error in the use of pronouns is to use “me” when “I” is grammatically correct. Another pronoun error is to use “him” or “her” when “he” or “she” is correct. The ability to use language grammatically is crucial to the development of thought and the concept of the self. This is why elementary education was originally designated as “grammar school.” The inability to use the proper pronouns derives from the involvement in electronic communication. The technical person has no selfhood. The lack of contemplation turns the person into an agent, moving things forward in a project. There is no need to pursue thought that can engage the self with itself. There is no expectation of happiness for the technical person because, as Aristotle says, happiness requires the practice of contemplation.

Being well-reasoned depends upon the mastery of grammar, and logic sets the standard for reasoning. In his preface to the second edition of the *Science of Logic* Hegel says: “The forms of thought are first set out and stored in human *language*. . . . So much is logic natural to the human being, indeed it is the very *nature* of the human being.” Logic is the extension of grammar into the pure forms of thought. Aristotle regards the syllogism as a natural form of thought. We reason in terms of premises connected to a conclusion. To be well-reasoned is also to be

well-spoken. As Aristotle says at the beginning of the *Rhetoric*, “Rhetoric is a counterpart of Dialectic.” They correspond to each other as the antisrophe to the strophe in a choral ode.

When reasoning, thought passes back and forth between what is in language and what is in logic. This internal movement of the mind is possible only if the self possesses the power of contemplation in the sense of the Greek word *theōrein*, the ability to look upon something so as to comprehend it as having a meaning in itself. The act of contemplation can be carried on only after a long process of education, learning the arts of reading, comportment, speaking, and reasoning, that leads to asking the question that Socrates asks of himself in his conversation with Phaedrus: “Am I a beast more complicated and savage than Typhon, or am I a tamer, simpler animal with a share in a divine and gentle nature?” The Delphic inscription orders Socrates to know himself. Socrates does not claim to have fulfilled the instruction of the inscription. Thus Socrates passes it on to us. It is the oldest instruction in human consciousness, and it rests at the center of the being of the educated person.

On the Poetic Method

A poem begins by a metaphor suddenly appearing in the mind. It is the work of the Muses, and comes from outside of time. The metaphor that will become the poem has within it what was, is, and is to come. It is the result of what is in memory, perception, and anticipation. When expanded into the poem, the metaphor allows us to see through its words, with the mind’s eye, how there is similarity in the dissimilar. Opposites are always opposite through an underlying unity. It is to this sense of unity that the poem takes us.

Speculative philosophy is a form of poetic thinking. The poem has within it a narrative that moves from line to line. A poem is always a whole thought. Speculative philosophy takes the True to be the whole. This whole is reached by a conceptual narrative of one idea leading dialectically to another, until there is a rational sense of the whole, of all that there is. What the mind originally feels as a unity in the poetic image, the mind thinks in terms of what Hegel calls the “speculative sentence.”

The “reflective sentence” does no more than assert a connection statically, between subject and predicate. The speculative sentence contains an internal motion such that the meaning of the subject is to be found in its connection to the predicate. Once connected to the predicate, however,

the predicate requires the presence of the subject to be a predicate. When thought moves from the predicate back to the subject, the meaning of the subject is redefined. As the mind moves itself forward in this manner it progresses toward a grasp of the whole, which Hegel calls “absolute knowing.” What begins in the poetic image of the metaphor becomes a way to think the whole by joining the imagination with reason. Speculative philosophy is the poetry of the rational imagination.

What is reasonable must be poetic and what is poetic must be reasonable. The sudden appearance of the metaphor to the poet is matched by the sudden appearance of the rational idea to the philosopher. Dmitry Gawronsky, in his biographical essay on Ernst Cassirer, in the *Library of Living Philosophers* volume, relates that the conception of symbolic forms flashed across Cassirer’s mind as he was entering a streetcar in Berlin, in 1917. Three years later, this conception appeared as the title and theme of his philosophy. It allows Cassirer to conceive human knowledge and human culture as a whole. J. N. Findlay, in his Foreword to A. V. Miller’s translation of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, says of Hegel that “an afflatus seized him in the Jena lecture-rooms, an afflatus perhaps unique in philosophical history, which affected not only his ideas but his style.” Hegel writes in the manner of a philosophical poet, using images such as the “Unhappy Consciousness,” “The Law of the Heart and the Frenzy of Self-Conceit,” “Virtue and the Way of the World,” “The Spiritual Animal Kingdom or Zoo,” “Absolute Freedom and Terror.” Findlay compares Hegel to Shakespeare, to Rimbaud, and to Mallarmé.

The existence of speculative philosophy suggests that we may consider philosophy as a form of literature in which there are not only arguments but also images that situate arguments. Arguments never stand alone. They have meaning only within implicit or explicit narratives. Arguments are never final thoughts because, for any argument, it is not beyond human wit to devise a counter-argument, in a series that in principle has no end. Philosophy that is pursued simply as argument is scepticism. Scepticism is what philosophy must overcome. Sceptical mentality stands opposite to the poetic in experience. Scepticism thinks only in terms of one opposite after another. It is a dialectic of pro versus con, with each side of the opposition standing to the other as static. Once the speculative sentence is grasped scepticism is no longer possible as a philosophical position, because the two sides of its opposition are seen

to move in terms of each other in a progression. This progression eliminates scepticism as an intellectual position. Scepticism becomes no more than a prelude to the speculative sense of the whole.

The dialectic of the speculative sentence allows us to read the history of philosophy as a single tale, in which one philosophy stands as subject to a subsequent philosophy as predicate. This progression is not at all points a royal road because some philosophies fall by the wayside and remain cul-de-sac. The study of the history of philosophy is a source for the search for self-knowledge. In the opening sentence of *An Essay on Man*, Cassirer says: "That self-knowledge is the highest aim of philosophical inquiry appears to be generally acknowledged. In all the conflicts between the different philosophical schools this objective remained invariable and unshaken: it proved to be the Archimedean point, the fixed and immovable center of all thought." Cassirer's "Archimedean point" refers to Descartes's declaration of the *cogito*, by which Descartes begins modern philosophy with a new version of the inscription of the temple of Apollo at Delphi, from which Socrates begins ancient philosophy by bringing philosophy down from the heavens, as Cicero says. We read the history of philosophy to absorb the dialectic of the self with itself.

Poetry is always a way the self engages itself with itself. We read poetry, and literature generally, because of our inclination to grasp who we are as human beings. When we move our thought from poetry to speculative philosophy we find a second way to engage the self with itself, by joining feeling with thinking. This union is the basis of intelligence. There is no self-knowledge without intelligence. Intelligence fits with what Ovid, in *Ars Poetica*, says is the purpose of poetry—to instruct, delight, and move. It is through intelligence that we acquire knowledge, that we take pleasure in the nature of things, and that we come to direct our actions. What is said of the purpose of poetry can also rightly be said of the purpose of philosophy, especially when it is joined with the poetic. There is no philosophy that does not instruct and in such instruction does not also delight. What we acquire from a philosophical grasp of things gives us a rational basis on which to act. Through philosophy reason directs feeling, keeping us from acting blindly.

Without leaving the poetic sense of things behind, we may take up Hegel's dictum that what is rational is what is real, in the sense of what is actual. This dictum is the essence of philosophy but it requires a sense

of reason as dialectical, as a medium that can move through the oppositions of things in experience. Human experience takes place through opposition. Thought cannot confine itself to one side of an opposition as truth to error. Thought is self-moving through opposition, and in so doing it is the medium of reason. Through thought the poetic always takes us to the philosophic and the philosophic always takes us back to the poetic, in a process of the self attempting to know itself. It is a process that always comes back upon itself, bringing itself to a new standpoint. In this way thinking is teleological, but its purpose is itself. Its purpose is not to achieve a goal outside of itself.

The poetic sense of things also shows that beyond this internal dialectic there is always a *Jenseits*, a transcendent beyond, an opposition that is never fully included in the self's internal dialectic. This beyond is that of which the poetic always reminds us and which makes the poetic always the starting point for thought. The poetic inserts into memory that in one instance—what is transcendent—there is an opposition that remains beyond the reach of the dialectic within the self.

On the Ethics of Prudence

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle says that the prudent human being embodies the intellectual virtue of prudence (*phronēsis*). This intellectual virtue is necessary for the practice of the moral virtues because prudence is concerned with those things in human activity about which it is possible to deliberate. The purpose of such deliberation is to choose the right course of action. Prudence requires correct reason (*orthos logos*). To choose rightly in accordance with the good for human beings depends upon the power of contemplation to distinguish what is reasonable in regard to a particular action and what is not in accord with reason. To act prudently may be in the self-interest of the person who is making a choice but it must also be in the interest of what is noble.

We act on the basis of our character. Our character is who we are as a particular human being. Our character, when properly formed, inclines us to the good. We act in terms of the good but not simply in a general sense. A particular action requires the guidance of a particular virtue. The particular virtue is the sense of the good that applies in a particular choice of action. To act calls for correct reason to determine the virtue that applies to this choice. In Aristotle's terms, for example, if courage is the appropriate moral virtue, the intellectual virtue of prudence takes the indi-

vidual to a mean (*mesotēs*) between the two extremes of excessive fearlessness or reckless action (*thrasutēs*) and cowardice (*deilia*). We arrive at the mean because of the formation of our character.

How is good character acquired? Character is first formed in the child, by parents who train the child in proper behavior, in manners and custom. Once the individual has acquired a moral sense and the ability to act in terms of it, moral choice becomes a deliberate occupation. Moral choice is an art. Like any art, it develops through practice. Morality becomes what we tell ourselves after we have acted. Moral choice depends on memory. We remember how we have acted in past instances of choice that involved the exercise of prudence and the application of moral virtue, and we find ourselves in a better position to act in the present and in the future. In this way we continue to develop character as a thinking human being, seeking a good and proper life. Such a life opens to us the possibility to attain happiness, what Aristotle calls *eudaimonia*, literally, having a good daimon. We contact the good daimon that is within us. We achieve self-determination that is the basis of human freedom.

Once we are successful at the art of forming character from which to act we have no need of a decision procedure by which to direct our actions in a moral situation. We have no need for what Kant states, in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, as the “categorical imperative”: “Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.” There is no question but that such an imperative is a presupposition of anyone acting through true prudence. Prudence is not a means for acting in less than a wholly ethical manner. Anyone claiming to act as rightly as possible is also claiming that such an action is the one that should be taken by any rational human being in the same situation. True prudence is not a lesser form of ethical choice. The categorical imperative as such does not offer the individual instruction regarding how to act in a given situation. Instead, the individual always is naturally guided by character.

Mill, in his *Utilitarianism*, states another principle to guide moral action, that of “utility” or the “greatest happiness principle.” This principle is compatible with action in accord with virtue. But as a universal principle it offers no specific guidance for deciding how to act in terms of it. Mill acknowledges that this principle provides no such guidance, but holds that it is better to have such a principle than to have none. Mill says: “Though the application of the standard may be difficult, it is bet-

ter than none at all.” Granting this principle, we still require character and prudence, joined with the moral virtues, as an actual basis from which to practice the art of morality. We always act out of who we in fact are, out of how we have come to be ourselves as capable of correct reason. No one acts rightly who acts against what is truly a concern with the production of the greatest happiness.

The principles of Kant and Mill are absorbed within the Aristotelian doctrine of character and the virtues. Prudence is the basis of human dignity. In this regard, we can turn to the humanist doctrine of Pico della Mirandola’s oration, *De hominis dignitate*. Pico reminds us that what is human is wonderful. To explain this claim, Pico takes us back to the three surviving inscriptions on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi: “Know thyself” (*gnothi seauton*), “Nothing overmuch” (*mēden agan*), and “thou art” (*ei*). These show the three aspects of human existence: the self’s relation to itself, the self’s relation to other selves, and the self’s relation to the divine, to what is beyond itself (interpreting the epsilon as Plutarch does in his *Moralia*). Prudence must always take these into account—there is always the self and the other self and what is beyond the self. The formation of character is the pursuit of a center within this threefold. We are always acting in a manner that takes the self into itself, and that takes the self into relation with other selves, and that takes the self beyond itself.

Law is the repository of civil wisdom. What begins as custom that provides order in society can become codified into a body of law. Law presumes that individuals can act prudently and can develop character. In so doing individuals become law-abiding and society becomes a structure of laws. The presence of law as the basis of society is a means to human dignity. In turn the individual strives to engage in correct reason in human affairs. It is necessary for each person to recognize the interconnection of *sapientia*, *eloquentia*, and *prudentia*. Wisdom requires the thought of the whole. Eloquence puts the whole into words. Prudence allows the person to act in terms of the whole of any situation.

The fundamental problem of ethics is not how to make decisions in particular instances. The fundamental problem of ethics is how to identify and achieve the best life for any individual. I am in agreement with Aristotle, that the best life is based on contemplation. Contemplation gives the individual access to correct reason, without which there can be no prudence. The essential act of prudence is for the individual to find a

place within society in which to live and flourish. Once such is found, character can develop. It is a way for the individual to be human. Prudence becomes a way of using the past to be in the present and to prepare to confront the future in a complete manner. In so doing we find a way to live in time. Through the ethics of prudence we can come to accept our mortality and thus accept ourselves as human.

On the Sense of Beauty

One of Santayana's best books, and one of the best books to be found in the field of aesthetics, is *The Sense of Beauty*. Santayana begins his work by saying that: "We know on excellent authority that beauty is truth, that it is the expression of the ideal, the symbol of divine perfection, and the sensible manifestation of the good." To the reader of poetry it is evident that Santayana has in mind the line of Keats's *Ode on a Grecian Urn*: "'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,' —that is all/Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

Keats recalls for the reader the three ultimates given to us by the Greeks: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. Santayana recognizes that the good is the middle term that allows us to connect truth and beauty. It is an enthymematic statement, implying a loosely constructed categorical syllogism of the first figure, with its conclusion a loosely converted proposition. Keats's claim is not fully logical but it is poetic, showing that of the three terms beauty is the key, the major term. What is beautiful presents us with a truth that cannot be subjected to criticism. It is a good to be accepted. It is not Keats's opinion that he gives the reader; it is what the urn itself tells us to which Keats calls our attention. When we fail to have the sense of beauty, we lose access to the truth and the good that truth brings to us.

Beauty is something good. It is never what is negative. The experience of beauty allows us to overcome the negative. Beauty is objectified pleasure, but it is also more than this pleasure. Beauty belongs to the imagination. Consider the poem of William Carlos Williams, *The Red Wheelbarrow*.

so much depends
upon

a red wheel

barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

These are beautiful words and a beautiful image. The beauty of the words comes from their combination. The key to the poem is “depends.” There is no way to paraphrase what “depends” means. We accept it as a matter of fact and know that all is what should be. The poem fits what Archibald MacLeish says, in *Ars Poetica*: “A poem should not mean/But be.” The imagination lets us know we are, just as beauty lets us know we are. We arrive at truth by means of reason, by an act of the mind. We arrive at the good by an act of character, an act of the human spirit. We arrive at beauty by an act of the imagination.

Beauty is in the beholder, but beauty is not relative to the beholder. It is not likely that the reader has seen a red wheelbarrow, or one wet with rain, or one beside white chickens, but through the poem these have entered the reader’s imagination and, as present in imagination, this image is immediately stored in memory. From memory it can be recalled. It becomes part of the reader’s ongoing experience of beauty. When the wheelbarrow and chickens are recalled, they are there before the mind, like a perception. There is a truth to their presence, but it is not clear what it is. And there is a goodness to this presence. It is a self-contained good, not pointing to anything beyond itself.

Beauty, unlike Truth and Goodness, comes as a judgment of the mind, without qualification. We assert something to be beautiful as a single, self-contained affirmation. When we assert something to be true or good, the possibility is present that more can be said to affirm the way in which it is true or good. Of beauty, nothing more need be said. Beauty is affirmed but it need not be explained.

The poem brings to us what is already in memory. Imagination brings before the mind what is in memory, as if it were an immediate perception. Beauty holds the mind for a moment before what is. We come away from the apprehension of beauty with a sense of security, a sense that things are as they are; they are whatever they are. Beauty gives us peace of mind. From beauty nothing is expected beyond itself.

The labor of the negative that takes us dialectically toward truth is suspended. Action toward the good is not needed. Beauty takes us out of the confines of time.

In beauty we have before us the harmony of the nine Muses, whose mother is Memory. The moment in which our imagination responds to beauty passes, but the experience of beauty passes into memory. We then know we are the better for the experience. We do not cause beauty, even if we are the poet. Beauty simply comes forth from outside time and stands before us as something self-caused. In this sense beauty is an ultimate.

How, then, is Beauty co-extensive with Truth? As ultimate they have no opposite. Truth, as something in time, stands in opposition to error. Something is true given certain conditions. Beauty, as something relative to certain forms of preference and custom, to certain periods of history or types of culture, is opposite to what is considered not to be beautiful or desirable. In the trilogy of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty, each is an aspect of the Absolute. The Absolute is that to which there is no opposite in principle. The Absolute has nothing that qualifies it as such. Thought may approach the Absolute from various perspectives, but as Absolute it is itself and not in any sense subject to modification. Beauty is experienced as absolute. What is beautiful is just that. It is an idea that allows us to apprehend various embodiments of it, but it itself remains just what it is—that from which we can call something a thing of beauty.

In holding to this sense of the Absolute we find ourselves outside the ordinary sense of aesthetics. We find ourselves with the conclusion of Robert Frost, *The Road Not Taken*.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by;
And that has made all the difference.

The Absolute can be said but it cannot be fully thought. It is there in thought by necessity but it is not present in any form that can be spoken. The self-determination of Beauty as it is experienced takes us as close to the sense of the Absolute as we can come. Beauty is essential to the speculative sense of things. It causes us to speak beyond physics, and that makes all the difference.

Afterword: On the Understanding of Politics

There are two senses of politics: (1) the extension of moral judgment and practical reason and action to matters of public concern, and (2) the attempt to gain and hold power over the populace of a society.

The pursuit of politics in the first sense is based on ideas that can be put into practice for the good of the public in a manner analogous to the pursuit of moral action by the individual within society. Political thought of this type is practical in the sense that it is directed to the solution of problems present in social life. In this respect political action or legislation is like custom except that it arises and is undertaken with deliberation and it may be revised on the basis of an evaluation. Thought and action are continually adjusted to each other. Whatever may be arrived at theoretically is constantly modified by practice.

The pursuit of politics in the second sense has none of the above characteristics. Political thinking and acting is a matter of constant scheming to secure power. What is to be done with this power is determined by an ideology that is affirmed to be true, not subject to correction. If what the ideology dictates does not produce the results that are expected for it, all effort must be extended to make what occurs fit the claims of the ideology. The theoretical dominates the practical. When the ideology, which is wholly theoretical, fails in practice, it is not claimed that the ideology is in error. The conclusion that is drawn is that the principles of the ideology have not been adequately applied. The belief is firmly held that if such principles were so applied, they would be proven to be politically effective. In this way, those who hold power continue to hold power.

The politics of ideology cannot truly see the light of reason. Such politics are usually pursued as if they were a politics of some higher good, and thus at their base is a duplicity. This duplicity takes in those who support the ideology. They are the true believers, or they are those who are simply unable to think well. Once anyone has embraced an ideology and allowed it to command not only one's thoughts but also one's emotions, there is no exit. The ideology becomes what one is. Common sense is closed off from common sense and the ordinary powers of reason that accompany it. The Inferno now exists above ground.

Hans Lenk – An Olympic Philosopher of World Format. On the death of Hans Lenk (1935-2024)

Ulrich Arnswald, (University of Innsbruck, Austria and University of Kaiserslautern-Landau, Germany)

Hans Lenk, who was born in Berlin on March 23, 1935, was a philosopher and an Olympian of superlatives. The Olympic spirit embraced his whole life, especially his ceaselessly progressing and extremely extensive scientific work. Stagnation was not in his nature. The fuel that always propelled him forward was an old European virtue, classically known only as “curiosity”; whereby in Hans Lenk's case it would be more correct to speak of “unbridled curiosity”.

He was gripped by this irrepressible curiosity until his last breath. Four days before his death, he still wanted to know in the hospital what exactly the new work is about, which a mutual friend in Taiwan is writing during his sabbatical. And even after several operations, when his wife told him that the writer of this could only come to see him after a conference in Vienna, he knew not only the name of the conference organizer but even the topic of the lecture. It had only been said once, and that was almost eight months earlier, but Hans Lenk had an incredible, almost galactic memory, which always surprised and fascinated. In this respect, too, he moved in a circle of superlatives.

Even in hospital, he couldn't be without a daily newspaper. The world continued and he wanted to be part of it, always up to date, and he also kept an eye on the sport until the end, as a matter of course. It is somehow significant that he died during the ongoing – “his” – Olympic Games in Paris. In the hospital, he laconically asked his visitors to bring him new articles the next time they visited so that he would not be so bored. Reading, thinking, discussing, but also writing had become second nature to him throughout his life. The summary of one of his books once named this as “Interpreting, Interacting and Intervening in a Cogni-

tive and Active Engagement with the World” in a chapter title.¹

Anyone who visited him at home in the Black Forest town of Waldbronn usually found him reading. With the latest book lying on the table, conversations often began with him briefly reporting on what he had read. Thus, people were encouraged to tell him the latest news, but here the focus was always on the visitors' own work progress. He was truly always up to date, wanted to be informed about all significant developments, this applied to philosophy, but also far beyond, whether questions of war and peace, whether ecology or archaeology, whether literature or theater, whether other countries and cultures. The range of his interests and curiosity seemed endless.

But anyone who thinks that Hans Lenk was unable to pause and savor the moment is mistaken. He was not without rest, even if it was easy to get a different impression. A small remark was enough to let you know immediately how intensely he had perceived something. Whether in political contemporary history or in literature, whether on a museum visit or on a hike, even decades later he was able to recall in minute detail the astonishing facts and peculiarities that he had perceived and memorized.

When he did report such things, it was always in passing, as if it were the most normal thing in the world. He was never one to draw attention to himself, was very modest and cooperative, but undoubtedly very ambitious. He didn't know any different, because his rise to become an Olympic, World and European champion would have been just as difficult to master without his will to win and discipline as his educational rise, which he owed above all to his rowing trainer and school teacher Karl Adam, who convinced his mother that the boy had to go to high school and awakened his interest in logic, mathematics and physics.

Hans Lenk thanked his “fatherly friend” Adam and his mother throughout his life and was always drawn back to the picturesque, rural and remote Ratzeburg lake, where rowing and his education at the *Lauenburgische Gelehrtenschule* (grammar school) miraculously opened the door to the big wide world for him in the post-war period. He remained loyal to the place of his youth and his family, both in his autobiographical 2013 memoirs *Ratzeburger Goldwasser – vom Lago Albano bis Lambarene* [Ratzeburger Gold Water – From Lake Albano to Lam-

¹ Hans Lenk, *Einführung in die Erkenntnistheorie, Interpretation - Interaktion - Intervention* (Stuttgart: UTB Fink 2005), 291.

barene],² which he wrote about his time as a rower and about his coach Adam, his origins and his personal conquest of the wide world, and in his private life as a regular visitor who met with his old rowing buddies there for as long as he could. Hans Lenk has now also been buried there.

The early Ratzeburg influence remained decisive throughout his life. The boy from a modest background in post-war Germany, who grew up without a father, always remained people-oriented, open-minded and with the irrepressible curiosity. His generosity was characterized by two things: The devastating Second World War, which Germany instigated and was responsible for, whose nationalist ideology he countered with a great openness to the world; and his Christian faith, which confirmed to him that all people are equal and should be treated equally, which was possibly further confirmed to him by his intensive study of Kant.

The latter explains his decades-long fascination with Albert Schweitzer, on whom he published extensively until a few weeks before his death, including *Albert Schweitzer – Ethik als konkrete Humanität* [Albert Schweitzer – Ethics as Concrete Humanity] (2000),³ and who inspired him to develop his own concrete humanity in a philosophical way in his book *Konkrete Humanität. Vorlesungen über Verantwortung und Menschlichkeit* [Concrete Humanity: Lectures on Responsibility and Humanity] (1998).⁴ The polymath Schweitzer impressed the polymath Lenk, not only because of the quintessence of his writings, that people recognize themselves as brothers when they reflect on themselves, but especially because he combined his studies with concrete actions, which was reflected in his work as a “jungle doctor” in the hospital he founded in the Central African country of Gabon in Lambarene, which Lenk describes as a “symbol of humane aid for people” and visited himself.

This impetus led Hans Lenk to attach great importance to the field of applied philosophy at an early stage. It is no coincidence that he has

² Hans Lenk, *Ratzeburger Goldwasser – vom Lago Albano bis Lambarene*, Ein philosophierender Olympiasieger erinnert sich. (Bochum; Freiburg, Br.: Projekt Verlag 2. Aufl. 2015).

³ Hans Lenk: *Albert Schweitzer – Ethik als konkrete Humanität* (Münster: LIT Verlag 2000).

⁴ Hans Lenk: *Konkrete Humanität, Vorlesungen über Verantwortung und Menschlichkeit* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1998).

been a member of the International Advisory Board of the *International Journal of Applied Philosophy* almost since its foundation. He was extensively active in this field himself. A large number of works on the philosophy of technology, the philosophy of sport, the responsibility of science, but also, for example, at the interface between philosophy and economics, impressively demonstrate this. He had already recognized decades ago that humanity must not neglect the pressing ethical problems of technology and applied science.

Hans Lenk, who studied mathematics, philosophy, sociology, sports science and psychology in Freiburg (Breisgau) and Kiel, began his academic career in 1961 with his doctorate on the topic of *Wertsetzung und Wertverwirklichung der neuzeitlichen olympischen Bewegung* [The Setting and Realization of Values in the Modern Olympic Movement] in Kiel. He continued his studies philosophically inspired by his academic teacher Kurt Hübner with a habilitation thesis on logic in Berlin in 1966, which is still available from Walter de Gruyter today: *Kritik der Logischen Konstanten. Philosophische Begründungen der Urteilsformen vom Idealismus bis zur Gegenwart* [Critique of the Logical Constants. Philosophical Justifications of the Forms of Judgment from Idealism to the Present] (1969).⁵ In this work, he goes through the history of philosophy from Kant to the present day, looking at the attempts made to solve the problem of the *a priori* justification of the forms of judgment. He also habilitated in sociology. His remarkable career began as an assistant at the Technical University of Berlin until he accepted the call to the Chair of Philosophy at the University of Karlsruhe (now the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology) in 1969, where he remained for the next 55 years.

Hans Lenk's work and influence would certainly be inconceivable without the philosophy of sport, a field that he successfully established in Germany but also represented internationally as founding member and president of the International Association of Sport Philosophy. Therefore, he is regarded as the founder of German philosophy of sport. He understands sport in analogy to personal achievement, which is an expression of the individual freedom of people. It is no coincidence that Hans Lenk received the DOSB Ethics Award in 2010 for his outstanding

⁵ Hans Lenk, *Kritik der Logischen Konstanten, Philosophische Begründungen der Urteilsformen vom Idealismus bis zur Gegenwart* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1969).

contribution to promoting ethical values in sport and was inducted into the German Sports Hall of Fame in 2012. In addition, he received the Distinguished Scholar Award from the International Philosophical Society for the Study of Sport as early as 1995.

However, it would be a great mistake to reduce Hans Lenk to this field, as has been done based on his impressive career as a competitive athlete and Olympian. His opus is much more extensive: Logic, systems theory, epistemology, philosophy of mind, Kant, Wittgenstein, philosophy of language, philosophy of science, action theory, ethics, applied ethics, aesthetics, anthropology, cultural philosophy, pragmatism were among the areas of interest that he systematically worked on for decades.

His most important works chronologically include four Suhrkamp volumes published in quick succession: *Philosophie und Interpretation. Vorlesungen zur Entwicklung konstruktivistischer Interpretationsansätze* [Philosophy and Interpretation. Lectures on the Development of Constructivist Approaches to Interpretation] (1993),⁶ *Interpretationskonstrukte. Zur Kritik der interpretatorischen Vernunft* [Interpretation Constructs. On the Criticism of Interpretative Reason] (1993),⁷ *Interpretation und Realität. Vorlesungen über Realismus in der Philosophie der Interpretationskonstrukte* [Interpretation and Reality. Lectures on Realism in the Philosophy of Interpretation Constructs] (1995)⁸ and *Schemaspiele. Über Schemainterpretationen und Interpretationskonstrukte*⁹ [Schematic Games. On Schematic Interpretations and Interpretative Constructs] (1995).

Philosophy und Interpretation deals with the historical development of interpretationist approaches in philosophy and the social sciences and culminates in an advanced approach of Lenk's own, which aims to create a unified concept for empirical sciences, formal sciences and normative disciplines. In this way, a distinct methodological constructivism of interpretation is developed, which ties in with Kant's transcen-

⁶ Hans Lenk, *Philosophie und Interpretation, Vorlesungen zur Entwicklung konstruktivistischer Interpretationsansätze*, Überarbeitung unter der Mitwirkung von Ekaterini Kaleri (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1993).

⁷ Hans Lenk, *Interpretationskonstrukte, Zur Kritik der interpretatorischen Vernunft* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1993).

⁸ Hans Lenk, *Interpretation und Realität, Vorlesungen über Realismus in der Philosophie der Interpretationskonstrukte* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1995).

⁹ Hans Lenk, *Schemaspiele, Über Schemainterpretationen und Interpretationskonstrukte* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1995).

dental idealism and Nietzsche's perspectival philosophy of interpretation. This methodological constructivism of interpretation emphasizes the methodological problems and questions of constructivity and the schematic application of interpretations.

In *Interpretationskonstrukte* Lenk attempts to show that contrary to the first impression of an absoluteness and unbridgeability of the mentioned split between the humanities and the so-called understanding sciences, in that a gap seemed to open up between the objective natural sciences, on the one hand, describing the world and reality, and the understanding humanities, on the other hand, in the course of a differentiated examination of previous interpretation theories and interpretative approaches, with scientific-philosophical concepts of the natural and social sciences, as well as with epistemological considerations of everyday knowledge, shows that there is a more abstract, overarching epistemological level at which this seemingly unbridgeable gap can be overcome. The “bridge” is formed here by the concept of constructive interpretation or, rather, of scheme interpretations and interpretative-schematizing activities, as well as of action and cognition with symbols and symbol-analogous inner representations.

Interpretation and Reality is a continuation of the lectures on the development of constructivist interpretation sentences that appeared under the title *Philosophy and Interpretation* and is exclusively systematically oriented. It is devoted to the main question of how the methodology of interpretation, or rather the epistemology and philosophy of interpretative constructs, can be reconciled with a modified everyday realism and with variants of scientific realism.

Schemaspiele attempts to develop a constructive integration of the approach to the philosophy of interpretative constructs by incorporating philosophical, anthropological, neurophysiological and psychological aspects and applying them in an epistemological way. Lenk concludes that we humans do not have the option of postulating absolute facts as justifications for our practices of conceptualization, rule-following, or for the internal differentiations of the mental. Facts do not exist *in themselves*. Rather, they can only be understood and grasped in the light of interpretations and the relevant orientations, objectives, ways of life, perspectives, which are directly interwoven with our “being-in-the-world”.

It is fair to say that the theory of interpretive constructs forms the philosophical and theoretical focus of Lenk's work. Man can only access

the world through interpretation. Therefore, no non-interpretative description of the world can exist. All interpretation is always done through schemata, which represent the formative basis of our knowledge and our actions. Since people cannot evade interpretation, they cannot fall prey to relativism either but remain in a pragmatic realism.

Hans Lenk's well-founded and wide-ranging opus includes over 150 books and approximately 3,000 articles in over twenty languages. Doing justice to this huge body of writing is certainly impossible in the context of a short memoir. Nevertheless, some works are particularly noteworthy: *Kleine Philosophie des Gehirns* [A Brief Philosophy of the Brain] (2001),¹⁰ *Bewusstsein als Schemainterpretation. Ein methodologischer Integrationsansatz* [Consciousness as an Interpretation of Schemas: A Methodological Approach to Integration] (2004)¹¹ and *Human-soziale Verantwortung. Zur Sozialphilosophie der Verantwortlichkeiten* [Human and Social Responsibility. On the Social Philosophy of Responsibilities] (2015).¹²

Kleine Philosophie des Gehirns examines the question of whether humans have free will or whether thought processes are determined by physiological processes in the brain. The results and methods of recent brain research are used, as are the philosophy of mind and epistemology. In doing so, the book attempts to overcome the difficulties in understanding between scientific and philosophical knowledge.

Bewusstsein als Schemainterpretation applies the approach of methodological schema interpretivism developed by Lenk to the kinds and types of consciousness and the problems of the philosophy of mind. At the same time, the work provides an overview of the discussion of research approaches and interpretations from neurobiology, neuropsychology, and neurophilosophy, as well as the philosophy of mind.

Human-soziale Verantwortung is an investigation of the complex problems of responsibility from a philosophical and social science perspective. Theoretical results, methods and practical conclusions such as typologies, forms of conflict, priority rules and codes of professional

¹⁰ Hans Lenk, *Kleine Philosophie des Gehirns* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft / Primus Verlag 2001).

¹¹ Hans Lenk, *Bewusstsein als Schemainterpretation, Ein methodologischer Integrationsansatz* (Paderborn: Mentis 2004).

¹² Hans Lenk, *Human-soziale Verantwortung, Zur Sozialphilosophie der Verantwortlichkeiten* (Bochum; Freiburg i.Br.: Projekt Verlag 2015).

ethics on socio-philosophical questions of responsibility are presented. The presented findings are discussed under the guiding principle of a concrete humanity to be practiced.

Another indication of his awareness of problems was how Hans Lenk, long since emeritus, increasingly turned his attention to questions of environmental issues and ethics in books and essays, and this was long before the topic reached the political arena. From the 2000s onwards, three profound books can be found alongside essays: *Natur – Umwelt – Ethik* [Nature – Environment – Ethics] (2003),¹³ *Umweltverträglichkeit und Menschenzuträglichkeit. Die neue Verantwortung für unsere Umwelt und Zukunft* [Environmental Compatibility and Human Tolerability. The New Responsibility for Our Environment and Future] (2009),¹⁴ and *Human zwischen Öko-Ethik und Ökonomik* [Human Between Eco-Ethics and Economy] (2018).¹⁵

It was precisely because he had been dealing with environmental issues since the early 1980s that Lenk was able to see with great accuracy that the environmental question had now entered a new, even more critical phase in world history. The subtitle of *Umweltverträglichkeit und Menschenzuträglichkeit* was not by accident: The New Responsibility for Our Environment and Future.

And another field was becoming more and more important to Hans Lenk: He wrote several anthropological books about creativity, which increasingly fascinated him. He studied the philosophical, psychological and anthropological approaches to creativity theories that dealt with the creative processes in humans as meta-level beings.

The results of these studies include the book *Kreative Aufstiege. Zur Philosophie und Psychologie der Kreativität* [Creative Ascents. On the Philosophy and Psychology of Creativity] (2000),¹⁶ *Das flexible Vielfachwesen. Einführung in die moderne philosophische Anthropologie zwischen Bio-, Techno- und Kulturwissenschaften* [The

¹³ Hans Lenk and Matthias Maring, *Natur – Umwelt – Ethik* (Münster; Hamburg; London: LIT Verlag 2003).

¹⁴ Hans Lenk, *Umweltverträglichkeit und Menschenzuträglichkeit, Die neue Verantwortung für unsere Umwelt und Zukunft* (Karlsruhe: Universitätsverlag Karlsruhe 2009).

¹⁵ Hans Lenk, *Human zwischen Öko-Ethik und Ökonomik* (Bochum; Freiburg i.Br.: Projekt Verlag 2018).

¹⁶ Hans Lenk, *Kreative Aufstiege, Zur Philosophie und Psychologie der Kreativität* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 2000).

Flexible Multiple Being. Introduction to Modern Philosophical Anthropology between Bio-, Techno- and Cultural Studies] (2010),¹⁷ and the book *Kreative Pluralität. Anthropologische Perspektiven* [Creative Plurality. Anthropological Perspectives] (2013),¹⁸ dedicated to his mentor Kurt Hübner, and in the same year the 324-pages *Einführung in die moderne Anthropologie* [Introduction to Modern Anthropology].¹⁹

Anthropology thus clearly determined the last phase of his life. In *Kreative Aufstiege*, he wrote on 350 pages about the philosophers as a motto in their family register: “Real philosophy is creative, creative interpretation that crosses boundaries and conceptual design.”²⁰ [transl. by the author] In his 531-page book “*Creative Plurality*”, he also makes clear statements about how the human being of the future should be, who, as a natural social cultural being, is already called upon to be a fellow human being, companion, environmental partner and warning voice for others and for nature: “A pluralistic approach would also have to complement and emphasize the future-oriented nature of human beings and their actions, in short: the perspective of the future, which particularly emphasizes the responsibility of human beings for each other, for future generations, the environment, nature and creation.”²¹ [transl. by the author] In his *Einführung in die moderne Anthropologie*, considering the neurosciences, information sciences, social sciences, cultural studies and humanities, he emphasises that anthropology is always interdisciplinary and that humans must be understood as culturally diverse beings.

Of these four books, the 648-pages work *Das flexible Vielfachwesen* is certainly the most influential and has received a great deal of media attention. The subtitle “Introduction to Modern Philosophical Anthropology between the Bio-, Techno- and Cultural Sciences” is a deliberate understatement. Lenk was aware of the massive impact this book has had on the German-language philosophical landscape. A glance at the bibliography also gives an impression of the breadth of the

¹⁷ Hans Lenk, *Das flexible Vielfachwesen, Einführung in die moderne philosophische Anthropologie zwischen Bio-, Techno- und Kulturwissenschaften* (Weilerswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft 2010).

¹⁸ Hans Lenk, *Kreative Pluralität, Anthropologische Perspektiven* (Bochum; Freiburg i.Br.: Projekt Verlag 2013).

¹⁹ Hans Lenk, *Einführung in die moderne Anthropologie* (Münster: LIT Verlag 2013).

²⁰ Lenk, *Kreative Aufstiege*, Cover.

²¹ Lenk, *Kreative Pluralität*, 21.

author's reading. In the field of anthropology, this work sets the tone in German-speaking countries. His quintessence amounts to a clear-cut mission statement for the next generation of anthropologists: "An anthropology (philosophical as well as scientific) must be interdisciplinary and include the results of the sciences, insofar as they are important for this topic of man and the comprehensive treatment and integration of all aspects in this context."²² [transl. by the author]

In this work, Lenk once again emphasizes the special nature of humans, but at the same time highlights the major challenges facing humanity, which, in his view, can only be solved through an interdisciplinary approach, because every form of anthropological specialization inevitably reaches its limits here. It anticipates the theme of the Anthropocene without using the term coined by Paul Crutzen in 2000. In retrospect, Hans Lenk regretted this and saw the necessity of metaphorically introducing the concept of the Anthropocene into anthropology, since the man-made age – independently of the question of the geological age – represents a turning point in modern anthropology that we cannot negate.

The author can testify to how urgent and important this topic was for Lenk in his later years. In preparation for my Landau lecture "Introduction to Anthropology" for the summer semester of 2024, he strongly encouraged me to rethink modern anthropology and expand it to include the Anthropocene, because this incursion into human history was still largely missing from the subject and anthropology should not stop here. He himself had done some preliminary work on this, but it did not go nearly far enough for him. As a result, I renamed my lecture "Anthropology in the Age of the Anthropocene. On the Crisis and Reorientation of the Image of Humanity and Nature" and entered uncharted territory, which he welcomed and did his best to support with input in the form of articles and books. The lecture, which was aligned with the current climate crisis, was very well received by the environmentally conscious student audience in Landau, as I was able to tell him in the hospital, with warm thanks for his support.

In addition to all his works, Hans Lenk taught after his retirement in 2003 until well into old age. That kept him mentally young. Discussions with students and contact with younger people were important to him. He wanted to know what motivated students and what they

²² Lenk, *Das flexible Vielfachwesen*, 14.

thought. For him, teaching was not an obligation, but rather the free-skating program in the work of a philosopher. He also used lectures in the Humboldtian sense, to test his own theses and ideas and put them up for discussion. This is particularly evident in the Suhrkamp books of the 1990s on the theory of interpretation constructs, because these are directly derived from his lectures.

As if all this were not enough, Hans Lenk was also active in another capacity. He was a kind of diplomat among German philosophers, as his numerous honorary positions at both the national and international level show. This world of international philosophy, of exchange across cultures and countries, was also close to Hans Lenk's heart. He traveled extensively and enjoyed receiving foreign visitors. Among his former employees were colleagues who came to Germany from other countries. He also made sure that a Russian colleague taught philosophy of technology at the institute. For Hans Lenk, all of this was a matter of course and not worth mentioning.

But he was horrified when, at the institute, younger staff were asked whether they would be willing to participate in exchange programs with universities in Eastern and Central Europe and in North African countries. All the younger colleagues surveyed back then, except for the author, rejected this, with one employee's reason standing out: "You can learn something from the philosophy in the United States and in England, but what can you learn philosophically in these countries?" The author contradicted his younger colleague *coram publico*: "The distribution of intelligence is the same worldwide. The people in these states are no more stupid than we are." The answer came promptly, something like this: "Maybe so, but philosophically they have nothing to say. They don't appear in the relevant literature." To this I replied again to my colleague: "In which literature? In English or German, or in their native language? And who is to say that, even if they were unable to engage directly with the Western world for decades, say, because of the Iron Curtain, that they did not create their own philosophy during this time, one that differs from our own and is perhaps worth discovering?" But this attempt was also not very fruitful, as the reply came again by return of post: "Yes, all well and good, but it doesn't help my career."

Afterwards, Hans Lenk, who was grateful to me for my intervention, was greatly dismayed that someone could be so uncurious and unopen-minded. He could not and would not believe it. For Hans Lenk, in particu-

lar, who, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, saw his task as reaching out to colleagues in Eastern Europe, engaging with them on an equal footing and helping them to find their way in and to integrate them into the academic world of Western Europe, which was also manifested, for example, in his presidencies of the bilateral philosophical societies with Hungary and Romania – in addition to Argentina and Chile – as well as the German-Russian Society of Philosophy and Technology, this new ignorance and disinterest of younger people in Germany was a deep shock.

For him, who had experienced war and the post-war suffering as a child, scientific exchange of peoples was always peace work. His curriculum vitae shows this: During his career, he has held guest professorships at universities in Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Chile, Hungary, India, Japan, Norway, Russia, Switzerland, Venezuela and the United States of America, at the University of Illinois (1973), the University of Massachusetts (1976) and Texas Central University (1987).

The fundamental disappointment of the lack of interest and participation of Germans in international exchange and in the work of international committees continued in the following years. He regretted that hardly any young Germans were present at the international congresses and was irritated and a little concerned about this new German isolationism, as he was keen to see Germany as a good neighbor and partner in the world.

Repeatedly he tried to persuade me to go to world congresses in Tokyo, Seoul, Beijing, etc., which I would have liked to do, but he understood very well that this was not possible without financial support. He was disappointed by the lack of funding for international exchange activities at German universities. He was always very keen for a nation like Germany to take part in international exchanges and in the committees of international associations with representatives, and to listen carefully to philosophers from other nations. International exchange was a value for him.

As always, he led by example and the former Olympian had plenty of superlatives to report: Member and President of the International Association of Sport Philosophy, Associate Fellow, American Academy of Physical Education (now known as the National Academy of Kinesiology), Member of the of the International Academy of Philosophy of Sciences, Member of Russian Academy of Science, President of the German-Russian Society of the Philosophy of Science and Technology, Member of the International Olympiad Union, Member of the Interna-

tional Academy for Philosophy, Honorary member of Philosophy Section of the Romanian Academy, Honorary member of the World Academy of Letters, Honorary Member of the International Olympic Academy. It may well be that I have forgotten some here; his entire environment was no longer able to follow his diverse activities and functions.

In Germany too, he held several offices: From 1973-1975, he was Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Karlsruhe, an office he also held outside Germany as Dean of the European Academy of Land Use and Development in Strasbourg, France, from 1993-1996. He was a member of the German UNESCO Commission, a member of the German Olympic Committee, an honorary member of the German Rowing Association and, from 1990 to 1993, the elected president of the German Society for Philosophy.

Subsequently, he was elected a member of the Steering Committee of the *Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de Philosophie* (International Federation of Philosophical Societies) and served as its Vice President from 1998 to 2003. In 2005-2008, Lenk was the first German to be elected president of the *Institut Internationale de Philosophie* (the “world academy” of the subject) in Paris, to which he had been appointed as a member in 1994 and whose board he had been a member of since 1996. From 2008, he was their elected honorary chairman.

Hans Lenk was also at the Olympic heights of superlatives when it came to international honors: Even his Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, which lists eight honorary doctorates, seems to have lost track of them here, which is not surprising, however, as Hans Lenk is probably the most prolific professor in the post-war history of this institution. As far as I can remember (he always told me about every new honor), so the number of honorary doctorates is more than ten. Among others, these include honorary doctorates from the German Sport University Cologne, the University of Moscow, Rostov-on-Don and other Russian universities, the University of Córdoba (Argentina), Budapest and Pécs (Hungary), Bucharest (Romania) and the University of Patras (Greece). In addition, he has received many prizes, including the scientific Carl-Diem-Medal, the UNESCO Philip Noel Baker Research Prize, the Outstanding Academic Book Award of the Association of College and Research Libraries (USA), the International Plato Award, Lifetime Achievement Award IBC and the Great Cross of Merit of the German Federal President, to name just a few.

Of all the German post-war philosophers, he stands out for his international engagement, which was not something he was born with, but which became his lifeblood through his early international sporting successes. Lenk's omnipresence is not only related to his works, but also to his proverbial worldwide engagement in many academic societies, at congresses around the world, and as a globally esteemed and well-connected official of world philosophy.

Another of his trademarks was his sense of humor. Although he was born in northern Germany and grew up in a place that is not considered a carnival stronghold, Hans Lenk was enthusiastic about the southern German carnival and embraced it with great gusto in Karlsruhe. He regularly gave carnival lectures at the back then University of Karlsruhe, in which he made fun of philosophers or philosophy or retold the history of philosophy in a humorous way. This even led to a series of books of his own, which he called "Neo-Jocologica" and which comprised no fewer than nine volumes.

But he also cultivated humor beyond carnival, which can be seen from the fact that he repeatedly printed cartoons in his books to lighten the subject matter a little. He regularly put copied cartoons or jokes from newspapers and magazines in the pigeonholes of his colleagues at the institute, which also served to maintain contact and exchange ideas in the hallway. In addition to the Neo-Jocologica series, other such works have been created, most recently *Satirische Sammelsuria*²³ [Satirical Collection] (2022) in verse form and with caricatures, which he published with a co-satirist and a caricaturist. Humor also played a significant role in Lenk's anthropology, where he never forgot to point out that humor is only a prominent feature of humans.

I remember how Hans Lenk, when I passed his closed office and he heard my voice through the thin wooden walls of the neighboring secretariat, opened the door to his office about every other week so that I would pass the open office door on my way back, where he then regularly invited me into his room for a short conversation. Once, he had an apple in his hand and said with a laugh: "Won't you come in for a chat over an apple?"

Hans Lenk was constructive and supportive. He was also very sensi-

²³ Günter Voss and Hans Lenk, *Satirische Sammelsuria*, In ernsten und heiteren Versen über die man schmunzeln, den Kopf schütteln oder sich ärgern darf, mit Karikaturen von Jan Tomaschoff (Bochum; Freiburg i.Br.: Projekt Verlag 2022).

tive. A former assistant of his, who later became the head of an institute at a Greek university, called one day to speak to Lenk's successor, who was the head of the institute at the time, to see if an exchange program could be arranged between the two institutes. Since he was not present, but I was assigned to him, the institute's secretary handed me the phone and asked me to take the matter up and instruct the institute's director about it. Thus, I talked with the Greek professor, who was a stranger to me. After the request, she told me that she had been Hans Lenk's assistant for a few years and enthused about what a wonderful and pleasant time it was working with Lenk as her boss. Then she asked if he might happen to be at the institute. But since that wasn't the case either, she then told me that he had written her such a sensitive letter on the death of her father that it meant so much to her that she would never forget it.

That was typical of Hans Lenk. He sensed when he needed to support and encourage someone. After years of not receiving any support from my doctoral supervisor before my doctorate on Wittgenstein, and not receiving any feedback from him on my work, he called me into his office one day and asked me when I had last been to a Wittgenstein conference. When I replied that this had been the case several years ago, he said without further ado: "You are now going to a Wittgenstein conference. You need to discuss the content to finish your doctoral thesis, and don't worry about the funding, I'll organize that."

But Lenk also perceived things the other way around with equal precision: Once, I reported to him, annoyed, about a book by a celebrated young German philosopher, because, in my opinion, she had written complete nonsense that is obviously illogical. He listened to a detailed description of the problem, understood it immediately, and simply said, "You are absolutely right." But he immediately added: "There's no question that you can tear this woman apart now, but you shouldn't do it." When I asked him whether such nonsense should be left unchallenged, he said: "No, but just don't refer to this woman by name. That will only cause bad blood, even if you are right. Focus on a good counter-proposal that makes it clear that it is not that simple. You can also criticize in the abstract but leave out the name of the colleague. That's better."

Lenk's qualities also included the ability to recognize the achievements of others without envy. Just recently, when I sent him a draft, he wrote back: "The essay is absolutely brilliant, every Wittgenstein journal or collection of essays should be thrilled to receive it." He always

tried to give special recognition to the achievements of others. That was rather unusual, especially since the institutional environment was not without envious people who regularly approached him. He saw this as envy on the part of people who had nothing to offer themselves, as he once told me. And how seriously he took it can still be seen today in a dedication in one of the many books he generously gave me, where it says: „‘Age does not protect against performance – but every mediocrity does.’ – In other words: Defy mediocracy!“

To sum up his life's work is an impossible undertaking, especially in a short memoir. His life enriched the world immeasurably, and the gap he leaves behind with his death is correspondingly large. Hans Lenk was a unique man. He was generous and cooperative. After his death, a friend and colleague from the Karlsruhe Institute wrote to me: "He was the one who supported me during the 'rigorosum'. I found that amazing."

But that was not surprising, because I saw how he made a student his graduate research assistant to protect her. She was probably dyslexic and had significant inferiority complexes due to her educational background from abroad, since the educational canon there was different from that of her fellow students in Germany. Some professors openly ridiculed the student, which had a clearly negative effect on her performance. She was often agitated and nervous, obviously permanently stressed. Lenk asked me if I could include her in my seminars as a participant and give her a little support and encouragement, which I was happy to do. In the end, she therefore attended every conceivable seminar with Lenk and me (she didn't miss any with me), gained in confidence and improved noticeably. She improved by more than one grade level and became increasingly self-confident.

One professor was amazed but asked me if we really wanted to invest so much time in weak students. I replied that an improvement of one grade, whether from 3 to 2 or from 2 to 1, meant that the student's potential had increased by the same amount. And wouldn't that be a wonderful sense of achievement for every lecturer? His answer was that he preferred to surround himself only with the already very good students, from whom he would have more than from improving average or below-average students. It was immediately clear to me that without Lenk's forward-looking decision to make this student his graduate research assistant, she would never have been able to successfully complete her studies.

Hans Lenk's view of the world was based on the fragility of every-

thing valuable and human, due to his experiences as a child during and after the war. He rejected any kind of grand ideological plans. Instead, he focused on human action and practice, as well as on the question of whether actions are beneficial for people. The pragmatic design of everyday practices in the sense of human benefit and in the tradition of the philosophy of pragmatism of William James, C.S. Peirce and John Dewey was the goal of his philosophical work.²⁴

Hans Lenk's efforts, not self-interested for himself and his own, but for humanity as a whole, were to contribute to developing a possibility for all of humanity to live well. Not with a grand plan, but with many humanistically minded fellow campaigners who were prepared to work daily to steer the world a little in the right direction, so that things would improve for everyone on the planet. Humane living conditions for all was the dream that defined his life.

Lenk was always constructive; the worst thing for him would have been to become cynical. He did not like this at all, and he was also quite open about this. He also expected those around him with whom he had closer contact to remain constructive and people-oriented. If someone was annoyed with someone, he would first show understanding, but then immediately admonish the person to be lenient. A pioneering example for others.

At the same time, he always approached people, tried to help them, sometimes repeatedly with those who were dismissive or not friendly towards him. It should never fail because of him: His hand was and always remained outstretched. Several times I watched him get a massive rebuff. Sometime later, he tried again. It took a long time before he gave up – temporarily, of course. But even then, he remained elegantly silent about it, only hinting to me once or twice, with disappointment, that he had tried very hard for nothing with this or that person.

Today I know that these characteristics were the secret of his success with people in general and the reason for his great popularity: People-oriented, constructive, supportive, never envious, never cynical.

On July 30, 2024, Hans Lenk died in Karlsruhe at the age of 89.

²⁴ Hans Lenk and Ulrich Arnsward, "John Dewey on Public Life, Technology and Modern Media. Notes on philosophy and public life with special regard to John Dewey's approach", *Philosophia. Yearbook of the Research Center for Greek Philosophy at the Academy of Athens*, Vol. 46, (2016): 325-333. Hans Lenk and Ulrich Arnsward, "Public Life, John Dewey and Media Technology", *Philosophy Now. A Magazine of Ideas*, No. 103, July / August (2014): 24-27.

Against Birth: a new Perspective on Antinatalism

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Abstract: Every living being, including humans, is destined to die. Throughout their existence they endure difficulties, illnesses, and tears. Starting from these premises, the paper aims to show how procreation may be considered a selfish practice carried out in obedience to the so-called will-to-live, the impulse that drives every living being to reproduce and ensure the survival of the species to which it belongs. To stop such an impulse requires a great deal of awareness and rationality. In the paper I shall demonstrate how, by assessing such truth, humans should escape what I define as the ‘demon of birth’ by abstaining from procreating so that other people will not suffer for their human predicament. In defending an antinatalist position I do not suppose any moral imperative but an ontological perspective which shows the perfection of the world where there is no organic birth but the painless power of Matter and Time.

Keywords: antinatalism, birth, life, matter, ontology

βίος

There are events that many human cultures, and even common sense, define as *sacred*. Among these are the birth and death of members of our species. Philosophical work and attitude do not submit to or obey any absolute values or meanings, instead they constitute an incessant critical questioning. Let us therefore analyze the sacred status of birth and verify whether it confirms or loses this nature. Philosophy consists also in seeing the world as it appears to what I name an ‘anthropo-decentric gaze’, namely the perspective of the whole, of which ζώή, life as such, is an insignificant expression.

I start by considering biological sciences. The generation of a new living being in animals, and in mammals in particular – the vertebrate class to which *Homo sapiens* belongs, though they often tend to forget this – is the result of the fortuitous encounter between egg and sperm, two gametic cells (female and male) whose fusion produces the zygote, and from here the embryo, then the fetus, and finally the newborn. The

considerable risks that something might not work in this process, producing miscarriages or malformed entities, is in itself an indication that birth is not a serene event. In any case, even when everything works and comes to a good end, it remains true that «each of us is the outcome of time and chance – the key events in the lives of all our ancestors. On a still smaller, microscopic, scale we owe our genetic inheritance to the near-random fate of individual spermatozoa»²⁵.

The situation becomes objectively painful at the moment of birth, a moment that for millennia has caused numerous deaths in the female generators of our species. Even if deaths during childbirth have decreased, the pain of the parturient still remains constant, and sometimes it persists for hours – unless there is a cesarean section, that is, a surgical intervention – with effects that women who have experienced it define as indescribable. It might be questioned: if birth were a process entirely inscribed in the laws of nature, like the fall of a heavy object in a vacuum for example, would it be so painful, uncertain, and dangerous?

Once born, the human cub, unlike those of other mammals (not to mention reptiles or fish), depends absolutely on adult human beings, without whose constant and complete care it would die within hours. As shown by anthropology (including Gehlen's philosophical anthropology, for example) and human biology (of Lorenz and Eibl-Eibesfeldt), the neotenic period, that is, the one in which the human cub depends entirely on adult individuals, has a very long and abnormal duration, measured in years, if not decades.

Once they reach adulthood (but naturally even before), every specimen of *Homo sapiens* is subjected to difficulties of all kinds, to psychosomatic illnesses, to existential anxieties, to a constant *insecuritas* about their own survival and a constant discomfort in their daily life. This insecurity and this discomfort certainly depend also on the historical circumstances and social contexts in which one is born and lives, but they are universal, by varying the degree of suffering, not its inevitability. To formulate other examples of such *insecuritas*, suffering and discomfort would mean unnecessarily using the space of these pages. It is sufficient for the reader to focus their mind and memory on the years they have lived so far, their current condition, and what they know about their fellow humans, to find proof and practical verification of what they are

²⁵ M. Rees, *Our Cosmic Habitat*, Princeton University Press, 2017, p. 159.

reading here. If we generally accept or endure such an uncertain, painful, and fleeting condition, it is either because we try not to think about it – thus denying the best of human nature: reflection on what happens to us – or we practice strategies of defense, or we evaluate life as an abstract concept, avoiding dwelling on the details of daily existence, which is usually not particularly pleasant.

Strategies

The strategies to cope with such a condition, and to endure it, are numerous and diverse. We can synthetically indicate universal phenomena and structures that we define with the names of *morals*, *philosophies*, *arts*, *religions*, *techniques*, alongside which there are rather different attitudes such as violence in general and aggressiveness; the multiple forms of deception – towards oneself and others –; inflicting purposeless suffering; the craving for money and power as if from this accumulation some form of guarantee against the fury of dissolution could derive for the person; the contempt for the love one receives and which is often used against those who love; the practice of humiliating others for the pleasure of humiliating; the fury of many against one; taking pleasure in others' misfortunes if they bring the individual some minimal advantage or even if they bring nothing; the general ferocity of which our species is capable.

Faced with such practices, attitudes, and strategies, it is inevitable to agree with the words of one of the greatest playwrights and narrators of the twentieth century: «Das Leben ist eine Schindluderei der Natur sondergleichen, eine obszöne Verirrung des Kohlenstoffs, eine böartige Wucherung der Erdoberfläche, ein unheilbarer Schorf. Aus Totem zusammengesetzt, zerfallen wir zu Totem»²⁶. I would say that nothing needs to be added, and nothing needs to be taken away, from such an exact and true definition of life.

Animal life is indeed particularly harsh compared to, for example, the life of plants, which having no nervous system have no sensitivity. Plants possess impulses towards light and liquids, but they do not fall into despair and torment in case they do not obtain the results they tend towards.

²⁶ F. Dürrenmatt, *Der Meteor*, in *Der Meteor – Dichterdämmerung*, Diogenes, Zürich 1980, pp. 94-95.

An even greater difference marks animal life compared to the inanimate and inorganic since it seems plausible that life is «un soulèvement à l'intérieur de l'inorganique, un essor tragique de l'inerte, la vie, c'est de la matière animée et, il faut bien le dire, ruinée par la douleur. A tant d'agitation, à tant de dynamisme et d'affairement, on n'échappe qu'en aspirant au repos de l'inorganique, à la paix au sein des éléments»²⁷. Of this peace is convinced also Sāriputta, disciple of Buddha, who believed that Nirvāṇa is happiness, «et quand on lui objecte qu'il ne saurait y avoir de félicité là où il n'y a pas de sensations, Sariputta répond : 'La félicité, c'est justement qu'il n'y a là aucune sensation'»; Cioran deduces from this that «le Paradis, c'est l'absence de l'homme»²⁸ but I would say that we must go even beyond such a form of anthropocentrism and recognize that paradise is the absence of every animal, of every device capable of experiencing pain and being aware of it.

A Ridiculous Tragedy

We must therefore recognize that far from constituting a privilege, a primacy, or even a manifestation of the sacred, animal and human birth is an unfavorable event compared to the absence of sensitivity, pain, and anguish that instead characterizes the inorganic that is to say – and this is an absolutely fundamental element – the existence of the whole, of cosmic matter that generates, perishes, and transforms itself in the immensity of the cosmos. Compared to the whole, our tiny planet and the phenomena that occur in it are nothing, substantially nothing. And therefore it is already too much to state that «das Lebende ist nur eine Art des Todten, und eine sehr seltene Art»²⁹; the living is in reality an utterly insignificant fragment of matter. Thus, the conviction of our species to be and represent the dominator, the meaning and the apex of the cosmos (even believing that some god sacrificed himself for the human species) can only be qualified as pathetic, not to say grotesque. One must find the right measure is necessary in everything, even in the inevitable narcissism that makes every sensitive entity believe it is the most important of all. It is therefore true that:

²⁷ E. Cioran, *La Chute dans le temps*, Gallimard, Paris 1964, p. 124.

²⁸ Ivi, pp. 77 and 113-114.

²⁹ F.W. Nietzsche, *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, edited by G. Colli and M. Montinari, De Gruyter, Berlin 1988, Band 3, af. 109.

es müsste geistigere Geschöpfe geben, als die Menschen sind, blos um den Humor ganz auszukosten, der darin liegt, dass der Mensch sich für den Zweck des ganzen Weltendaseins ansieht, und die Menschheit sich ernstlich nur mit Aussicht auf eine Welt-Mission zufrieden giebt. [...] Unsere Einzigkeit in der Welt! ach, es ist eine gar zu unwahrscheinliche Sache! [...] der Tropfen *L e b e n* in der Welt für den gesammten Charakter des ungeheuren Ozeans von Werden und Vergehen ohne Bedeutung ist [...] [there are infinite stars] zu den unendlich vielen, welche den lebenden Ausschlag nie gehabt haben oder von ihm längst genesen sind; dass das Leben auf jedem dieser Gestirne, gemessen an der Zeitdauer seiner Existenz, ein Augenblick, ein Aufflackern gewesen ist, mit langen, langen Zeiträumen hinterdrein, — also keineswegs das Ziel und die letzte Absicht ihrer Existenz.³⁰

The attitude synthesized in these statements by Nietzsche is the gaze capable of seeing and learning reality without pretense, capable of preferring understanding over hoping, observing over believing, capable of implementing the light of rationality over the mists of ephemeral and failing consolations. Faced with this objectivity, some political, religious, or moral perspectives tend instead to convince of the sacredness of existence. These are, however, strategies of illusion, even if necessary for the established order. Such order is indeed always founded on some moral convictions. And almost always such moral has the necessity of procreation as its central element, in order to guarantee the spread of the species, and of the number of humans who might serve to produce, to obey, to fight and to die in the countless wars that make human history.

To realize all this and embrace non-generation as a remedy against evil, power, and death, one must not preach ‘sustainable’ hopes and anthropological optimisms, it is instead required to grasp in the human the universality of limit and pain that are intrinsic to their own existence.

All human beings come into the world without having wanted to and suffer daily their being in the world. The being-there of such species configures itself as a *fault* that is not ethical or moralistic, but ontological. An ontological fault for which many ancient Greeks understood clearly that «not being born is the best thing of all (ἄριστον πάντων)»³¹.

³⁰ Id., *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches II*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, cit., Band 2/2, *Der Wanderer und sein Schatten*, af. 14.

³¹ Aristotle, Εὐδημος ἡ Περί ψυχῆς, fr. 6.

Entropy and DNA

Finitude is intrinsic not only to the negligible biological component of the world. What for the living being – whether plant or animal – is called dying, is in reality the universal experience of passing into something else, of metabolism, of entropy, of metamorphosis, of becoming.

The biological structure attempts to contrast this universal natural law of disappearing by breeding a new living being, a copy similar to oneself which should defer their passing away. This attempt is one of the clearest, most dramatic and banal expressions of *schlechte Unendlichkeit*, of the bad infinity that never stops adding lives to lives and therefore death to death:

Dieser Prozeß der Fortpflanzung geht hiermit in die schlechte Unendlichkeit des Progresses aus. Die Gattung erhält sich nur durch den Untergang der Individuen, die im Prozesse der Begattung ihre Bestimmung erfüllt [haben] und, insofern sie keine höhere haben, damit dem Tode zugehen.³²

The foundation of this attempt to survive, both biological and metaphysical, is the negative. If *omnis determinatio est negatio*, it is also because the appearance of an entity makes impossible the appearance of every other entity in the same spacetime; because the event that is happening excludes an innumerable quantity of other events, because every process is always and only the actualization of a determined potentiality to the exclusion of many others that would have been possible. The nothingness intrinsic to the structures of being is the difference³³, it is «die Zauberkraft, die es in das Sein umkehrt», the magical force that turns the negative into being³⁴, a force of which birth is only manifestation, expression, and condemnation.

The living being is a very odd entity, which in some ways seems to defy the laws of physics. This oddity appears in the attempt to define it. It is not at all easy to circumscribe a living being and structurally distinguish it from the non-living, it is not easy to find a clear and sharp limit

³² G.W.F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, § 370.

³³ Cfr. A.G. Biuso: *The Concept of Time in Husserlian Phenomenology and Quantum Physics*, «Humana.Mente», vol. 16, No. 43, August 2023, pp. 277-296; *Temporalità e Differenza*, Olschki, Florence 2013.

³⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. Meiner, vol. II, p. 29.

between these two modes of being. Jacques Monod identifies the three founding properties of the living being in teleonomy, autonomous morphogenesis, and reproductive invariance. Another fundamental characteristic is that the living being is never static, the structures that compose it are atoms and molecules, which it shares with the non-living, and cells which instead constitute its specificity. Cells represent a structure always in movement: its becoming is moved by the three central processes of evolution: replication, mutation, and selection.

Biological science has arrived at this ontology through what Monod defines as the postulate of Nature's objectivity, which consists in the rejection of any voluntaristic efficient cause and any providentialistic final cause. This is an enormous theoretical and methodological effort since the assumption that happening, particularly human happening, is moved by some conscious, powerful, and wise will that guides it in order to reach the destiny that such will has always established for it, is the same assumption on which human culture and its manifestations were born: myths, religions, ethics, political projects, philosophies, and sciences themselves. The awareness of this millennial dynamic does not hide, however, that the teleological and providentialistic foundation is characterized by some rationally unacceptable elements that are in fact unfounded.

This element is first of all anthropocentrism, which then branches out as vitalism and animism. But should be' evident, and sensible, that the universe certainly does not exist to generate life, nor does the biosphere exist to produce *Homo sapiens*.

A *vitalistic* perspective instead implies both the centrality of the human and, in general, a radical distinction between the being of the living and the being of inanimate entities. Immersed in a world where some entities constituted a danger, others a resource, and still others – mountains, rivers, clouds – appeared incomprehensible because indifferent and lacking will, our ancestors had the necessity to attribute consciousness and the ability to act towards ends to such entities as well.

This is one of the main reasons and roots of *animism*, an attitude by no means limited to prehistoric forms of approaching reality but which instead characterizes all great cultural and religious experiences, including some recent ones like Idealism (from the romantics to Giovanni Gentile), Teilhard de Chardin, Engels' dialectical materialism. In all these perspectives (and obviously in Judaism-Christianity), however different they may be, operates

the certainty that human becoming follows laws inscribed in a destiny and directed towards a future better than the past, whether it is a transcendent and spiritual future or an immanent and historical one.

Even the Darwinian evolutionary paradigm has run the same risks of falling into providentialistic animism, under the name of natural selection, a selection aimed at the 'improvement' of humanity. While in Darwin nothing of this sort exists, in many Darwinians it does. In reality, living beings, humans included, are chemical and autopoietic devices, which therefore develop not through external determinations but through biochemical programs inscribed in cells, programs that allow every living being to develop, replicate, leave offspring. Exactly this, *replication of the same form even in the infinite variability of individuals*, characterizes the living being, that is, species. This is a strongly and intrinsically teleonomic element, without being teleological however. The purpose indeed coincides with the entity and with its material structures, it does not lie outside of it, in any will of the entity itself or of other forces. This process is called *autopoiesis*, that is, the construction of self on the basis of chemical instructions. This is an element that, among other things, constitutes the unity of the biological since it is found in all living beings, from bacteria to *Homo sapiens*, which also from this perspective seems to have no particular privilege.

The central question then becomes how it is possible that based on the same constituents, synthesized in the same ways, the amazing variety of species and within species of their individual members then unfolds. What is the origin of the morphological and physiological diversity of living beings? The answer was found in DNA. The universal basis of living beings are indeed nucleotides and amino acids; on such biochemical basis there is no opposition between immutability and variety, between Plato and Heraclitus, since the modifications that occur within a system can happen because it exists and builds itself through some fundamental elements that never change, even if the structures that such elements build from time to time change.

The time of biological structures is made of mutations and perturbations that lead living beings inexorably to aging and death also due to the accumulation in time itself of accidental translation errors in DNA. It is through these processes and phenomena that the second law of thermodynamics operates in biology. 'Change' does not mean 'arbitrariness' but means the contingency of every particular entity and every specific

event – which could have existed or not existed, happened or not happened – within an ontological necessity given by some immutable rules in the sphere of the living.

Contingency is accepted without difficulty by humans when it concerns rocks, trees, or sparrows, but not when it extends to themselves. At that point the anthropocentric and animistic reflex kicks in that makes us believe we exist on a different plane compared to all other entities, whether inanimate or animate. «Nous nous voulons nécessaires, inévitables, ordonnés de tout temps. Toutes les religions, presque toutes les philosophie, une partie même de la science, témoignent de l'insassable, héroïque effort de l'humanité niant désespérément sa propre contingence»³⁵.

Necessity is inscribed in our genes as in those of every living being and is made of immutability, variations, entropy, descent, and dissolution.

Beyond life, the matter

Matter is both a concept and a plural, complex reality, which on the one hand is more than evident and on the other remains enigmatic. Its main characteristics are spatiality, sensitivity, and corporeality. Matter is an objective structure and not a construction of the mind or senses. These allow us to know matter but certainly not to produce it in any way. A specification that may seem (rightfully) obvious to common sense but that in the history of philosophy and sciences has found opponents who, from Berkeley to phenomenists and the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum physics, make the ontology of matter depend in different ways on the perceptual apparatus of some mind.

The most fruitful conceptions have instead always recognized, with different languages and modalities, that matter is the *matrix* of every entity. It is the ontological universal which «οὐ καθ' αὐτό, ἀλλ' ἀφθαρτον καὶ ἀγέννητον ἀνάγκη αὐτὴν εἶναι, neither generates nor destroys itself, but is necessarily incorruptible and ungenerated»³⁶ not only and not so much in a static sense but especially in a dynamic one, because it is subject to continuous δύναμις, to the possibility of a change that does not annul its being but continuously opens it to becoming, to transformation, to μεταβολή. Matter

³⁵ J. Monod, *Le hasard et la nécessité. Essai sur la philosophie naturelle de la biologie moderne*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1970, p. 55.

³⁶ Aristotle, *Physics*, I,9, 192a, 28-29.

is therefore intrinsically temporal and probably coincides with time itself, precisely because of its possibility to always become in its macroscopic manifestations without ever annulling itself in its atomic and molecular structure³⁷. Also because of this power – in the multiple meanings of that word – matter is not separated from form but is form itself in its being capable of undergoing every modification while remaining always different from nothingness.

In its resistance to modifications and in not dissolving itself when it undergoes to such modification, matter becomes the inertial structure of classical mechanics. In the different degrees and forms ranging from fossil and mineral monads, which become without perception, to the monad-soul, which perceives becoming, matter becomes matter aware of existing in humans and other animals.

As an objective and unknown reality that opposes but also serves as a foundation for the subjective and animal beings, matter may be considered? the noumenon, which is actually the prerequisite of all thinking, including critical-Kantian thinking; it is so also for Hume, who never doubted the material existence of entities outside the mind, taking it instead for granted. Matter as energy is the foundation of relativistic ontology and cosmology, from which the so-called *dark matter* has been hypothesized and is increasingly being investigated in depth. Dark matter is indeed «the No. 1 problem in astronomy today, and it ranks high as a physics problem, too. [...] We're reconciled to the post-Copernican idea that we don't occupy a central place in our universe. But now our cosmic status must seemingly be demoted still further. Particle chauvinism has to go: we're not made of the dominant stuff in the universe»³⁸.

The progressive, inexorable, and fruitful journey towards bringing the living and the human back to their limits proceeds swiftly in this way. We must de-anthropize cosmology and this also and especially means de-biologizing it: observing and evaluating life for what it is, nothing relevant. The cosmos is made of something else, which has nothing to do with life. It is made precisely of atoms, it is made of radiation, it is made of omnipresent gravity/mass/energy, it is made of light and dark matter.

Two of the most fruitful hypotheses about the nature and power of matter come from seemingly opposite poles in European thought: Lenin

³⁷ Cfr. A.G. Biuso, *Tempo e materia. Una metafisica*, Olschki, Florence 2020.

³⁸ M. Rees, *Our Cosmic Habitat*, cit., p. 75.

and Anaximander. Lenin, like Engels, quite clearly affirms the ontological and logical primacy of matter over any form of consciousness, a matter that is always dynamic, 'dialectical', which coincides with the very transformation of entities of every nature and structure. Anaximander maintains the integral autonomy of universal matter/form and its coincidence with being itself as infinite spatiotemporal dynamics.

Ἀναξίμανδρος...ἀρχήν...εἶρηκε τῶν ὄντων τὸ ἄπειρον...ἐξ ὧν δὲ ἡ γένεσις ἐστὶ τοῖς οὐσι, καὶ τὴν φθορὰν εἰς ταῦτα γίνεσθαι κατὰ τὸ χρεὼν διδόναι γὰρ αὐτὰ δίκην καὶ τίσιν ἀλλήλοις τῆς ἀδικίας κατὰ τὴν τοῦ χρόνου τάξιν.

The principle of beings is the infinite (energy/field and its becoming...) From where entities have their origin, there they also have their dissolution necessarily: all things are transient and suffer from one another the penalty of ending, at the rise of one the other must indeed set. And this happens due to the very structure of Time³⁹.

Matter is therefore the Being that depends on nothing else and which instead is the foundation of every entity and every consciousness. A being never generated and never destructible, of which each finite, determined and temporal entity is an expression: a transient figure of that which does not pass and which in this not passing is time itself as αἰών.

The World is Perfect

Matter as such is eternal, while living matter is ephemeral because it dies; this status has always been the subject of philosophical inquiry. In the *Apology*, Socrates seems not afraid of his own death which he accepts as a natural condition of his own being. From his perspective «άνηρ τῷ ὄντι ἐνφιλοσοφία διατρίψας τὸν βίον θαρρεῖν μέλλον, a man who has truly spent his life engaged in philosophy faces death without fears» and that philosophy is, must, largely a μελέτη θανάτου, a preparation for dying⁴⁰.

³⁹ Anaximander in Theophrastus, fr. 226 A, in Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, 24, 13; DK, B 1.

⁴⁰ Plato, *Phaedo*, 63e and 81a.

This wisdom, and detachment, produce the singular impression that Phaedo refers to at the beginning of the dialogue: Socrates «εὐδαίμων γάρ μοι ἀνὴρ ἐφαίνετο, appeared happy to me»⁴¹. Before dying he reminds Crito of being: «ὦ Κρίτων, ἔφη, τῷ Ἀσκληπιῷ ὀφείλομεν ἀλεκτρύονα: ἀλλὰ ἀπόδοτε καὶ μὴ ἀμελήσητε»⁴², meaning to thank the god of medicine for having recovered him from the *disease* of existence, from the illness he contracted at birth. If Socrates is so calm while he is dying, it is also because he hypothesizes that once dead, he

οὐκοῦν οὕτω μὲν ἔχουσα εἰς τὸ ὅμοιον αὐτῇ τὸ αἰδὲς ἀπέρχεται, τὸ θεῖόν τ' εἰ καὶ ἀθάνατον καὶ φρόνιμον, οἳ ἀφικομένη ὑπάρχει αὐτῇ εὐδαίμονι εἶναι, πλάνης καὶ ἀνοίας καὶ φόβων καὶ ἀγρίων ἐρώτων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων κακῶν τῶν ἀνθρωπείων ἀπηλλαγμένη, ὥσπερ δέλεγεται κατὰ τῶν μεμνημένων, ὥς ἁληθῶς τὸν λοιπὸν χρόνον μετὰ θεῶν διάγουσα, expects a state of happiness, since he frees himself from errors, foolishness, fears, erotic drives, and, as they say in the case of the initiated, spends the rest of time truly in the company of gods.⁴³

Socrates' philosophy aims to fight and defeat what I name the 'demon of birth'. The Greek philosophical tradition was aware of the human predicament and its misery in comparison to the perfection of the Whole. This should not be considered a passive Antinatalism, rather it is based on a cosmological and biological reflection; even from this perspective it can be highlighted the partiality of humans into Being.

In contemporary philosophy, this Greek comprehension of human being has been resumed by Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche. Schopenhauer believes that philosophy is not an anthropology but must constitute itself as geology and cosmology: «Dieserhalb muß sie Kosmologie bleiben und kann nicht Theologie werden»⁴⁴. A cosmology that has its synthesis in the initial words of a brief Nietzschean book:

In irgend einem abgelegenen Winkel des in zahllosen Sonnensystemen flimmernd ausgegossenen Weltalls gab es einmal ein Gestirn, auf dem kluge Thiere das Erkennen erfanden. Es war die hochmüthigste und verlogenste Minute der „Weltgeschichte“: aber doch nur eine Minute. Nach

⁴¹ Ivi, 58e

⁴² Ivi, 118a.

⁴³ Ivi, 81a.

⁴⁴ A. Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*. Zweiter Band, 1844. *Ergänzungen*, in A. Schopenhauer, *Sämtliche Werke*, III Band, Brockhaus, Mannheim 1988, p. 702 (700, lines 25-26).

wenigen Athemzügen der Natur erstarrte das Gestirn, und die klugen Thiere mussten sterben.⁴⁵

Similar to Nietzschean words:

Im unendlichen Raum zahllose leuchtende Kugeln, um jede von welchen etwas ein Dutzend kleinerer, beleuchteter sich wälzt, die inwendig heiß, mit erstarrter, kalter Ringe überzogen find, auf der ein Schimmelüberzug lebende und erkennende Wesen erzeugt hat: - dies ist die empirische Wahrheit, das Reale, die Welt. [...] Dabei nichts Beharrliches, als allein die Materie und die Wiederkehr der selben, verschiedenen, organischen Formen, mittelst gewisser Wege und Kanäle, die nun ein Mal dafind.⁴⁶

This is the core of an Antinatalism perspective which is founded on ontology, cosmology and metaphysics, it starts recognizing that *Homo sapiens* constitutes an irrelevant fragment which as no meaning and no purpose as well. What indeed is the ultimate goal of life, and thus of being born?

Ephemere und geplagte Individuen eine kurze Spanne Zeit hindurch zu erhalten, im glücklichsten Fall mit erträglicher Noth und komparativer Schmerzlosigkeit, der aber auch sogleich die Langeweile aufpaßt; sodann die Fortpflanzung dieses Geschlechts und seines Treibens. [...] Der Wille zum Leben, objektiv genommen, als ein Thor, oder subjektiv, als ein Wahn, von welchem alles Lebende ergriffen, mit äußerster Anstrengung seiner Kräfte, auf etwas hinarbeitet, das keinen Werth hat. Allein bei genauerer Betrachtung werden wir auch hier finden, daß er vielmehr ein blinder Drang, ein völlig grundloser, unmotivirter Trieb is.⁴⁷

It is sexual desire that guides this restless and senseless process; it may be considered the supreme expression of the will to live; the root of every falling in love – however ethereal and ‘spiritual’ it may appear –; the instrument through which the species can guarantee itself, the preservation and perpetuation of which is the true purpose of matter/nature/will so that individuals acquire meaning only for this universal goal. Of this painful and substantially senseless purpose, birth is the fundamental episode. This is why it is *against birth* that every metaphysics that wants to be equal to its own constitution must think and act.

⁴⁵ F.W. Nietzsche, *Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne*, § 1.

⁴⁶ A. Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*. Zweiter Band, 1844. *Ergänzungen*, cit., p. 3 (3, lines 3-7 and 13-16).

⁴⁷ Ivi, p. 407 (406, lines 23-28 and 407, lines 30-35).

The illusion that in various ways would like to root the immortality of the individual in the metaphysical principle of an eternal will is, precisely, a form of consolation with which humans face their *own* death trying the most varied strategies, certainly interesting but not therefore plausible, to convince the single living being that either it will never be destroyed once it has come into the world or, as in Schopenhauer's case, that it has always been and always will be as an inseparable conjunction of universal will and individual representation, or that death is only appearance, a passage towards the true world where one never dies.

Far from any humanistic consolation is the perspective of thermodynamics and its first two principles that combine the indestructibility of matter as such and the absolute finitude of every specific conformation of matter, that is of each of its individualized and temporal expressions, thus also of the organic, animal, and human beings.

As I have tried to show through the wisdom of the Greeks, a biological, ontological, and cosmological perspective on Antinatalism can constitute a valid position for truly understanding human life, for being more aware of its being into the world. Demonstrating that humans have no privilege in the cosmos, rather they are contingent beings destined to end, contributes to demonstrate the validity and fruitfulness of an antinatalist perspective. After all, Silenus's response to Midas, reported by Theognis, Aristotle, Nietzsche, is the most correct statement that can be given considering human life in its objectively painful nature: «Elendes Eintagsgeschlecht, des Zufalls Kinder und der Mühsal, was zwingst du mich dir zu sagen, was nicht zu hören für dich das Erspriesslichste ist? Das Allerbeste ist für dich gänzlich unerreichbar: nicht geboren zu sein, nicht zu sein, nichts zu sein. Das Zweitbeste aber ist für dich - bald zu sterben»⁴⁸. Also Schopenhauer facing the dying, observes that something is about to cease that should have never begun and that precisely for this reason is inevitably destined to end.

So far, I tried to highlight that our being has not any particular privilege in the world, and that their own presence into the world is something that should have never been or, otherwise, that has not any special reason to be continued by breeding. Now I claim more radically that also «daß sie [the world] etwas ist, das im Grunde nicht seyn

⁴⁸ F.W. Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Fritsch, Leipzig 1878, *Versuch einer Selbstkritik* § 3.

sollte»⁴⁹ by limiting – of course the meaning of such statement to the tiny world of beings who live on the Earth or on other planets where the same deviation from the perfection of matter has appeared.

Such world in its ephemeral is in reality an insignificant expression of the true power of Being. Such power consists on *nothingness* that operates cancelling what exists through their becoming.

Wisdom is therefore blessing the nothingness from which we come as individual being and the nothingness to which we will return when we are dissolved. At that moment our atomic and molecular components will take other conformations, different from those that *now* and for a brief *duration* constitute our being.

The metaphysical foundation of the world seems to be destruction toward which all that exists tends to. This is a statement far from any 'pessimism' or 'apocalyptic' attitude, it simply means understanding the structure and dynamics of every material entity and the speed with which such dynamics presents itself and happens in organic entities. This is the power of matter and the entropy that weaves it—which may be formulated as such: nothing *is* and everything *becomes*. Within this ontology, humans and all living beings are little more than nothing, constitute the result of a mixture of cellular compounds. This, nothing more, means to be born. And this is «la malattia più perversa, un flagello più iniquo della peste, è quella che si trasmette col seme e, generando, riempie di 'dannati' la terra. Questo è il virus più nefando. The most perverse disease, a plague more iniquitous than pestilence, is that which is transmitted with seed and, by generating, fills the earth with 'damned ones'. This is the most nefarious virus»⁵⁰ also for the reason, well known to all, that it is a virus with *always* lethal consequences.

Who generates a human generates one condemned to death who will not only die, but throughout the course of their existence will have to endure difficulties, anxieties, illnesses, tears. Such an action can only be defined as the fruit of supreme selfishness. Certainly, it is performed in obedience to a powerful order of βίος, the impulse that guides every living entity to reproduce itself and through itself makes survive the species to which it belongs. To escape such a force requires much awareness, much tenacity, much rationality. But precisely such is the ex-

⁴⁹ A. Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, cit., p. 661.

⁵⁰ M. Sgalambro, *Trattato dell'età. Una lezione di metafisica*, Adelphi, Milan 1999, pp. 41-42.

istence that philosophical practice gives, an existence made also and especially of awareness, tenacity, rationality. This is what *Homo sapiens* can do: escape the demon of birth, the imperative of the species, the order of death.

That even the Sun, like any other star, is destined to die and will die, that every exists is an infinite μεταβολή that shines everywhere and that only in sensible entities, particularly in those born of woman, becomes pain, is a revealing truth on which we should reflect more.

The world as such, beyond the living, is an energy and a destiny that happen without pain, as without pain exist and happen «la roccia o il mare, una cosa sorda e refrattaria, qualcosa che non può soffrire perché non conosce sofferenza: né quella che lui dà agli altri né quella che gli altri danno a lui; the rock or the sea, a deaf and refractory thing, something that cannot suffer because it does not know suffering: neither that which it gives to others nor that which others give to it»⁵¹. The world is perfect wherever there is no organic birth but rather the painless power of matter and time is given.

⁵¹ S. D'Arrigo, *Horcynus Orca*, Rizzoli, Milan 2003, p. 638.

II. BOOK REVIEWS

Димитър Божков „Марксизмът в месианизма“, София, Университетско издателство Св. Климент Охридски,” 2023. (Dimitar Bozhkov, *Marxism in Messianism*, Sofia: St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, 2023, 240 pp., ISBN 978-954-07-5529-8)

Megi Popova (University of Sofia)

The title of Dimitar Bozhkov's book inspires and provokes intellectually: *Marxism in Messianism*. There are numerous studies of Marx's philosophy and Marxism that trace their messianic elements, ideas and stakes. But this book traces, historically and philosophically, the dialectical relationship between Marxism and messianism along the various lines of thought in which the two intertwine. If we accept the interpretation that Marxism is a marginally messianic philosophy, can this book suggest that messianism contains Marxist elements, especially the ideas of liberation, justice, and salvation?

It is necessary to note that the method adopted by Bozhkov is not speculative; rather, it is radically anti-metaphysical. It does not exclusively seek out the ideological links between Marxism, as a philosophy divorced from historical context, and messianism, as an ahistorical religious worldview. Instead, Bozhkov's method uncovers the historical conditions in which the messianism in Judeo-Christian eschatology operates as praxis. A Marxist messianism is most evident in the revolutionary-reformist views and work of Thomas Müntzer, whom Ernst Bloch called a "theologian of the revolution."¹ *Marxism in Messianism* traces how elements of Judeo-Christian eschatology, rooted in the struggles of oppressed communities and in visions of an imminent advent of a new world, can be viewed as preceding and influencing Marxist thought; further, it elucidates "how Marxism alters some moments of

¹ Ernst Bloch, *Thomas Münzer als Theologe der Revolution* (Munich: Wolff, 1921).

messianism and, conversely, how messianism provides solutions to some fundamental problems in Marxism.”² Bozhkov does not interpret Marxism as a secular instance of messianism, but explores the similarities between the two traditions in terms of history: their relation to the past, present, and future. The book traces the ways in which they intertwined in the philosophies and visions of certain thinkers, especially in the twentieth century: Walter Benjamin, Franz Rosenzweig, Ernst Bloch, Gershom Scholem, Jacob Taubes, and others.

Marxism and messianism are mostly encountered in the philosophy of history, where the complex relations between past, present, and future are played out. In the exploratory reading undertaken by Bozhkov, the present turns out to be “the intersection between the past and the future, between memory and hope.”³ In contrast to traditional views, which see both Marxism and messianism as worldviews completely oriented toward the future, Bozhkov demonstrates that historical time gets entangled in a complex dynamic thread: from the future through the past to the present. The past holds revolutionary potential for the present, and the future propels imagination and history, even as it actualizes the forgotten potentials of the past.

The relation between Marxism and messianism inevitably prompts the central question of the relation between religion and politics, conceived in terms of political theology. One of the contributions made by this book is that it leads us to see that political theology is not necessarily conservative and reactionary – like Carl Schmitt’s – but can be revolutionary and progressive. An example of the latter is Latin American liberation theology, which developed a Catholic Marxism, but the book traces prior revolutionary religious views: early Christianity and Thomas Münzer’s theology of revolution. These examples show that religious resistance can play a politically emancipatory role in history.

Bozhkov explores Marxism and messianism in their historical dynamics: in the authors he addresses, a kind of hybrid of messianic views and Marxism is formed. Historically and philosophically, he presents the concrete philosophical views of principally Jewish thinkers in post-World War I Germany: Walter Benjamin, Jacob Taubes, Gershom Scholem, Ernst Bloch, Franz Rosenzweig, etc. The book reconstructs the de-

² Димитър Божков, *Марксизмът в месианизма*. (София: Университетско издателство “Св. Климент Охридски,” 2023), 11.

³ *Ibid.*, 99.

bates between these authors. Although they were all shaped by the traditions of Jewish messianism and Marxism, the “correlation” and relationship between Marxism and messianism appeared differently in each. Since the Marxism of the Weimar Republic was of a special kind, Bozhkov’s treatment of the first layer of the debate focuses on the fact that these authors were deeply influenced by Jewish tradition and its messianism influenced their Marxism. In some, like Scholem, Marxism is completely absent; in others, like Ernst Bloch, messianism is present in a fully secular, Marxist version. Walter Benjamin, on the other hand, maintained the highest balance between Marxism and messianism in his philosophy, managing to avoid both the passive expectation of the messiah, characteristic of religious messianism, and the revolutionary activism to build the kingdom of God on Earth characteristic of Marxism. Benjamin retains the two extremes through his notion of a *weak messianic force*. According to Bozhkov, this notion points to the present as actualizing the future and the past. The prevalent interpretation is that these authors’ debates succeeded in avoiding chiliasm: the idea of establishing the kingdom of God on Earth.

Bozhkov traces how an eschatological interpretation of Marxism took shape in Germany, both in the interwar period and after World War II. The field of theology itself experienced a renewal: a break with “nineteenth-century liberal theology and with classical rationalist-metaphysical theology.”⁴ This development aligns closely with the ambitious task set by Bozhkov for his book: to discover the “conditions of possibility for a non-metaphysical theology,”⁵ a project that requires a rethinking of eschatology. Bozhkov’s thesis on the possibility of a non-metaphysical theology is original and bold. He links metaphysics to rational thinking; however, a theology freed from metaphysics does not entail the deprivation or abandonment of transcendence. According to Bozhkov, because theology is a science, it is subject to renewal. Moreover, it is influenced by the intellectual advancements of the social sciences in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The chapter on Jacob Taubes illustrates what a left-wing, revolutionary political theology would look like. Taubes himself called his approach a “political theology from below,” one which starts from the people rather than the sovereign, as in Carl Schmitt. If conservative po-

⁴ Ibid., 16.

⁵ Ibid., 14.

litical theology “holds back,” postponing the coming of the eschaton, then for Jacob Taubes the eschaton is anticipated as the coming revolution that will bring liberation, the end of the Law, and the advent of freedom. According to Bozhkov, Taubes succeeded in liberating theology from metaphysics, replacing it with history. Taubes’ idea of abolishing the Law through the eschaton of revolution recalls Benjamin’s blurring of the boundaries between divine and revolutionary violence in *Towards a Critique of Violence*. Jacob Taubes and Walter Benjamin share a similar vision and adopt the position of religious anarchists. For Taubes, revolution dynamizes history by bringing the expectation of the end into the present and opening it up to future possibilities. It is apocalyptic because it works towards what has “not yet happened.”

Marxism in Messianism further provides the Bulgarian reader with a historico-philosophical study of liberation theology, or so-called Catholic Marxism in Latin America. If we were to look for contemporary socio-theological schools and movements, where Marxism and messianism intertwine, the most striking example is undoubtedly Catholic Marxism and its theology of liberation. The book traces the contextual nature of this encounter – Catholicism in Latin America is charged with the revolutionary ideas that enable resistance to both social injustice and to the attempted imposition of the Protestant spirit of capitalism. The late Pope Francis, who professed and preached liberation theology, was part of this movement.

I believe that Dimitar Bozhkov’s *Marxism in Messianism* constitutes a philosophical event in Bulgaria. It not only overturns traditional readings of the historico-philosophical and political traditions of Marxism and messianism, but provides a new understanding of political theology, of eschatology and the philosophy of history. The author of *History and Emancipation*, devoted to the philosophy of Walter Benjamin, employs the latter’s method in this book, developing ideas like an archivist and arranging them in a new constellation. *Marxism in Messianism* is both intense and intellectually prodigious: each chapter could grow into a book of its own.

III. ASPIRATION CORNER

Emergence Revisited: Uncovering the Path from Emergent Properties to Emergentism

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Abstract: The concept of emergence, central to both philosophy and science, describes how complex properties arise from simpler constituent elements in ways that are novel and irreducible. This paper explores historical and contemporary theories of emergence, particularly in relation to metaphysics, the philosophy of mind, biology, physics, psychology, and social sciences. Notable perspectives include strong versus weak emergence, as well as debates on whether consciousness is an emergent property of neurobiological processes. Figures such as John Searle, Jaegwon Kim, David Chalmers, and C. D. Broad have contributed to these discussions, with varying stances on the reducibility of mental states. Beyond philosophy, emergent phenomena appear in phase transitions, collective behaviors, and artificial intelligence, reinforcing the idea that higher-order systems display properties that cannot be strictly deduced from their components. This paper evaluates different emergentist theories, their epistemological and ontological implications, and their broader relevance to scientific and philosophical discourse.

Keywords: Emergence, emergent properties, philosophy of mind, reductionism, consciousness, strong vs. weak emergence, metaphysics, complexity science, artificial intelligence, psycholinguistics.

I. Introduction: The Rise of Emergence in Philosophy and Science

The concept of emergence has captivated philosophers, scientists, and scholars across diverse fields, offering an insightful and powerful framework for understanding the complexities of both natural and social phenomena. At its essence, emergence refers to the phenomenon where complex systems or entities display new, unexpected properties that cannot be fully explained or reduced to the behaviors or characteristics of their individual components (O'Connor and Wong 2015). These emergent properties arise from the intricate interactions and relation-

ships between the components at various levels of organization, often manifesting in ways that are unpredictable, novel, and irreducible. This concept is not merely an observation of complexity; it provides a theoretical lens for grasping how new qualities can arise in systems that surpass the simple aggregation of their parts. Emergentism, the philosophical stance that endorses this view, is not confined to any one field but resonates deeply across many disciplines, from metaphysics and the philosophy of mind to biology, physics, psychology, and sociology, suggesting that reality itself may be more than the sum of its parts.

Historically, the emergence of emergent properties as a formal philosophical and scientific concept can be traced back to early discussions in both science and philosophy, though its real prominence began to take shape in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The debates surrounding emergentism became particularly pronounced during this period, as prominent intellectual figures such as George Henry Lewes, Samuel Alexander, and C. D. Broad explored the relationship between emergent properties and reductionism, offering varying and sometimes conflicting perspectives. These thinkers sought to determine whether complex phenomena, including consciousness and life itself, could be fully accounted for by breaking them down into their simpler, more fundamental components or whether the higher-level properties of these systems represented something truly novel and irreducible. In particular, George Henry Lewes is credited with first introducing the term "emergence" in the context of philosophy, and his views influenced many subsequent theories about how complex systems could give rise to new properties. Samuel Alexander and C. D. Broad, in turn, contributed critical discussions about the ontological and metaphysical implications of emergent properties, framing emergence not merely as a scientific observation, but as a central issue in the philosophy of mind, and, more broadly, in metaphysics.

Emergent phenomena manifest across a vast array of contexts, providing rich insights into the functioning of natural and social systems. In the natural sciences, for example, emergent properties are central to our understanding of complex systems, ranging from biological organisms to intricate chemical reactions. The idea that life itself can emerge from a collection of non-living molecules exemplifies the power of emergentism to challenge traditional reductionist explanations of biological phenomena. Biological systems, such as cells, organs, and eco-

systems, demonstrate how higher-order properties - such as metabolism, homeostasis, and ecological balance - arise from the interplay of simpler components, properties that are not predictable from an analysis of individual parts in isolation. Similarly, in physics and chemistry, emergent properties manifest in phenomena such as phase transitions and the behavior of complex materials, like superconductivity, where the collective interactions of atoms or molecules produce properties that cannot be deduced from the individual particles alone.

In the philosophy of mind, the notion of emergence has become a central concern in discussions about consciousness and its relationship to neurobiological processes. Emergentism has been particularly influential in shaping contemporary debates regarding whether consciousness can be reduced to, or explained entirely by, the activity of neurons and brain chemistry, or whether mental states represent a higher-order emergent property that cannot be fully understood by examining the brain's individual components. Some philosophers argue that consciousness arises from the complex organization of neural networks, while others contend that the subjective experience of consciousness represents something qualitatively different from mere neural activity. This debate reflects deeper philosophical questions about the nature of the mind-body problem, as well as the broader question of whether emergent properties can be truly irreducible to the physical substrate from which they emerge.

The interdisciplinary nature of emergentism makes it a fertile ground for bridging metaphysical inquiries with empirical scientific investigations. This paper explores these issues, drawing upon key theoretical contributions from figures like Lewes, Alexander, and Broad, while also engaging with contemporary discussions on the philosophy of mind, neuroscience, and complex systems theory. By examining how emergentist frameworks can inform our understanding of complex phenomena, this paper aims to show how emergent properties are not just a theoretical curiosity but offer profound implications for the way we think about the relationship between mind and matter, the role of complexity in natural systems, and the ontological nature of reality itself.

II. Emergent Properties in Metaphysical and Scientific Contexts

The concept of emergence resides at the intersection of metaphysics and science, acting as a pivotal bridge between these two domains of inquiry. As O'Connor and Wong (2015) explain, emergent properties are

those characteristics that emerge from a complex system composed of various elements, but these properties cannot be fully explained or reduced to the properties of the constituent parts. In other words, emergent properties are not simply the sum of their parts; they are new, irreducible, and often unpredictable features that cannot be anticipated merely by analyzing the individual components of the system in isolation. The central issue surrounding emergent properties lies in the question of whether these properties can ultimately be reduced to the simpler elements that make up the system. This question raises broader philosophical discussions and forms the basis of a longstanding debate between reductionism and emergentism, two opposing perspectives that propose different views on the nature of complex systems and their explanation.

Reductionism holds that complex systems can be understood by breaking them down into their most basic, fundamental components, and that all properties of a system are fully explained by the interactions of these parts. Emergentism, in contrast, argues that some properties of a system cannot be understood or predicted solely by analyzing the components in isolation, as new and unexpected properties arise when these components interact. This philosophical tension is key to understanding the broader implications of emergent properties across different domains, from metaphysics to science, as it calls into question the very nature of causality, explanation, and understanding.

In the philosophy of mind, the question of whether consciousness is reducible to neurobiological processes or is an emergent phenomenon in its own right has spurred a substantial body of theoretical work. Leading philosophers such as John Searle, Jaegwon Kim, and David Chalmers have all advanced differing theories on the matter. Searle (1992) has put forward a view known as "weak emergence," wherein consciousness is seen as an emergent property that arises from complex neurobiological processes. However, according to Searle, while consciousness emerges from these processes, it does not possess causal powers independent of the brain's physical workings; in other words, it is entirely dependent on the underlying biological processes but does not exert any influence beyond them. On the other hand, David Chalmers (1995) has argued for "strong emergence," positing that consciousness is not only an emergent phenomenon but one that has causal powers that cannot be fully explained by the brain's physical mechanisms. In this view, consciousness is considered to be irreducible to the brain's neuro-

biological processes and possesses its own distinctive properties that cannot be entirely understood through a reductionist framework.

Beyond the philosophy of mind, emergent properties are equally crucial in various scientific disciplines, such as biology and physics. In biology, the emergence of life from molecular interactions offers a compelling example of how complexity can arise from simpler elements. As neuroscientist Herculano-Houzel (2009) points out, the human brain, with its estimated 86 billion neurons, demonstrates the profound complexity of emergent phenomena. The brain's intricate network of neurons and their interactions give rise to emergent cognitive functions, including perception, memory, and consciousness itself, which cannot be fully explained by simply studying individual neurons in isolation. The human brain, in this sense, is an ideal model for understanding how emergent properties can arise from complex biological systems, where the behavior and function of the whole system cannot be predicted or reduced to the properties of its individual parts.

Similarly, in the realm of physics, emergent properties play a crucial role in understanding phenomena such as superconductivity and phase transitions. Superconductivity, for instance, arises when certain materials exhibit zero electrical resistance at very low temperatures, a property that is not evident from the behavior of individual atoms or electrons within the material. Instead, it emerges from the collective behavior of the particles as a result of quantum mechanical effects. Similarly, phase transitions, such as the transition of water from a liquid to a gas, exhibit emergent behaviors where the system's properties - like temperature, pressure, and volume - suddenly change in non-linear ways. These transitions cannot be understood by simply examining individual molecules or atoms but require an understanding of how these components collectively interact under specific conditions.

In the social sciences, emergent properties can also be observed in the behaviors and structures that arise from the interactions of individuals within larger societal systems. Economic systems, political institutions, social norms, and cultural practices are all examples of emergent phenomena that cannot be reduced to the actions of any single individual. Rather, these systems emerge from the complex interactions and relationships among individuals, groups, and institutions within society. As Beckermann (2008) notes, these social phenomena exhibit properties that are not attributable to any single actor, but rather arise from the col-

lective organization, collaboration, and sometimes even the competition between individuals within the system. Economic recessions, for example, emerge from the interactions between consumers, businesses, governments, and financial institutions in ways that no single participant in the system could predict or control. Similarly, political movements and social norms emerge from the interplay of individual beliefs, values, and actions within a given cultural and political context. These phenomena are not reducible to individual actions or intentions but arise from the broader structures within which individuals and groups operate.

Thus, emergent properties are found across diverse fields, from the natural sciences to the social sciences, illustrating the breadth and significance of emergence as a concept. In each of these contexts, emergence challenges traditional reductionist approaches by asserting that complex systems can give rise to properties that are fundamentally new and irreducible. Whether in the realm of consciousness, biological systems, physical phenomena, or social structures, the study of emergent properties provides profound insights into how complexity, novelty, and unpredictability arise from simpler elements. As such, the concept of emergence offers a powerful framework for understanding the world around us, encouraging us to look beyond reductionist explanations and embrace a more holistic view of complex systems.

III. Emergence in the Philosophy of Mind: Consciousness and Reductionism

A particularly contentious and enduring issue in the philosophy of mind is whether consciousness can be fully explained through neurobiological processes, or whether it represents an emergent property that transcends the physical realm. This question touches on some of the deepest and most debated issues in philosophy, with dualism and materialism presenting two major competing perspectives on the nature of the mind. Dualism, most famously championed by René Descartes, posits that the mind and the body are two distinct substances: the mind is non-physical and separate from the material body, and this separation is what accounts for the unique nature of mental phenomena (Cottingham 2006). Descartes' dualism has been a foundational framework for much of modern philosophy of mind and continues to influence contemporary debates. However, emergentist theories stand in opposition to both the reductive materialism found in physicalism and the radical separation of

mind and body that dualism implies. Emergentism suggests that consciousness and other mental properties arise from the complex interactions of physical processes, yet they cannot be fully reduced to or explained by those processes alone. This offers an alternative to both the materialist view, which seeks to reduce consciousness to purely neurobiological phenomena, and to dualism, which maintains an ontological separation between the mental and the physical.

Emergentist views in the philosophy of mind, particularly those related to consciousness, challenge traditional reductionist approaches by suggesting that the mind may not be reducible to simple physical explanations. The concept of emergence, which emphasizes how complex systems can produce novel properties, has gained significant traction in this context. One of the earliest and most influential proponents of emergentism in the philosophy of mind is George Henry Lewes, who, in his work *Problems of Life and Mind* (1877), introduced the term "emergence" in relation to consciousness. Lewes argued that the human mind emerges from the complex interactions among the various components of the brain, and that consciousness cannot be fully explained by studying individual neurons or the interactions between them. This perspective aligns with the notion of weak emergence, which suggests that while higher-order mental properties emerge from the lower-level processes of the brain, these properties do not exert causal powers beyond their physical substrate. In other words, consciousness emerges from neural activity, but it is not an independent or separate force that acts outside the brain's neurobiological processes. Instead, it is intricately bound to the workings of the brain, though it exhibits novel properties that cannot be fully explained by the parts alone.

Samuel Alexander (1920) further extended the idea of emergentism in his metaphysical theory. Alexander proposed that consciousness is an emergent property that arises from the interactions of simpler entities, but it cannot be reduced to biological or physical explanations. According to Alexander, the mind and consciousness emerge from a complex web of relations between simpler physical elements, but these emergent qualities are more than just the sum of their parts. Alexander's view introduces a form of emergentism that is ontologically distinct from materialism. He suggested that qualities like knowledge, intentionality, and freedom emerge from the intricate relations between physical entities. However, Alexander's ideas have been subject to criticism, par-

ticularly for potentially carrying a form of dualism. His concept of emergent properties, which he positions as irreducible to the physical, has been interpreted by some scholars as suggesting a mind-body distinction similar to Cartesian dualism (Alexander 1920, 428). Critics argue that this separation of the emergent mind from the physical world introduces a new form of dualism that is at odds with physicalism and challenges the idea that consciousness can be fully integrated within the physicalist framework.

In addition to Lewes and Alexander, C. D. Broad (1925) contributed significantly to the development of emergentist thought with a more refined and nuanced approach to the nature of emergent properties, especially in relation to the mind. Broad sought to clarify and develop the concept of emergence in a way that would account for both the scientific understanding of the mind and the philosophical implications of emergentism. Broad introduced a distinction between what he termed maximal and minimal physicalism. Maximal physicalism is the view that all properties of the mind can be fully reduced to the laws of physics, while minimal physicalism posits that while mental properties do indeed emerge from physical systems, they cannot be fully explained by these systems alone. Broad's realization thesis emphasized that emergent properties, such as consciousness, are not reducible to the properties of their components, but they still adhere to the laws of nature. Broad's theory thus attempts to strike a balance between the extremes of reductionism and dualism, positioning emergent properties as real phenomena that arise from physical processes, yet retain a level of irreducibility and complexity that defies simple physical explanation (Beckermann 2008, 220).

Broad's work represents an attempt to reconcile the scientific understanding of the brain as a physical system with the recognition that certain properties, like consciousness, cannot be fully explained through a purely reductionist lens. He argued that while consciousness may emerge from neural processes, it possesses qualities that cannot be wholly accounted for by examining neurons and their interactions in isolation. These qualities, according to Broad, require a more complex understanding of how properties arise from interactions within a system, rather than simply attributing them to the characteristics of the components themselves.

The ongoing debate between reductionism and emergentism in the philosophy of mind reflects broader questions about the nature of expla-

nation, causality, and the relationship between mind and body. While reductionist approaches argue that the mind is fundamentally physical and can be entirely explained by neurobiological processes, emergentist theories suggest that the mind exhibits new, irreducible properties that arise from but cannot be fully explained by the underlying physical processes. This tension between reductionism and emergentism continues to shape contemporary discussions in the philosophy of mind, consciousness studies, and the broader fields of cognitive science and neurobiology. Ultimately, the exploration of emergent properties in the context of consciousness forces us to confront fundamental questions about the nature of reality, the limits of scientific explanation, and the possibility that some aspects of the mind may never be fully reducible to physical processes alone. The challenge, as philosophers and scientists continue to investigate, is to understand how consciousness arises from the physical brain while acknowledging that it may be more than just the sum of its parts.

IV. Beyond the Philosophy of Mind: Emergence in the Natural and Social Sciences

As we have found, the notion of emergence extends well beyond the philosophy of mind, impacting a wide array of scientific fields and offering an alternative framework for understanding how complex phenomena arise from simpler elements. In physics, emergent phenomena challenge the traditional reductionist view, which asserts that all phenomena can be fully explained by examining the interactions of lower-level components. For instance, the liquidity of water is an emergent property that arises from the collective behavior of water molecules, yet this property cannot be predicted simply by examining the individual molecules in isolation. The liquid state of water emerges from the interactions between molecules, but no single molecule on its own possesses the properties of liquidity. This example illustrates how new properties arise at higher levels of organization that are not reducible to, nor directly explainable by, the behaviors of individual parts. Similarly, in the realm of chemistry, the formation of complex molecules from simpler atoms demonstrates how new properties emerge when components combine in specific ways. A water molecule, for example, exhibits properties such as polarity, surface tension, and the ability to dissolve many substances - properties that no single hydrogen or oxygen atom possesses individually. Thus, emergentism

offers a compelling explanation for how novel and often unpredictable properties arise in both physical and chemical systems when the parts interact in particular ways.

This framework also finds relevance in other scientific domains, such as biology, where emergent properties are central to understanding the complexity of life. Biological organisms are made up of cells, tissues, and organs that exhibit behaviors and capabilities that cannot be reduced to the individual components alone. The ability of a single cell to perform complex biochemical processes, or the capacity of a group of cells to form a functioning organ system, is an emergent property of the collective actions of these cells. The complexity and organization of life itself provide a clear illustration of how emergent properties are crucial for explaining biological phenomena. The principles of emergence in physics and chemistry thus find analogs in biology, where the interactions of simpler biological components give rise to the complexity of life.

Similarly, in the social sciences emergentism plays a crucial role in understanding complex societal phenomena, highlighting how individual actions can lead to the emergence of larger, more intricate patterns. Economic systems, political movements, cultural shifts, and social institutions all emerge from the interactions of individuals within a society. These phenomena cannot be reduced to the actions of any single individual; instead, they arise from the collective behaviors and interactions of people within larger social structures. This collective emergence of social phenomena is a key aspect of the study of social systems. In economics, for example, market trends and consumer behavior emerge from the complex interactions of buyers and sellers, often in ways that cannot be predicted by examining the behaviors of individual participants alone. Similarly, political movements often arise from the aggregation of individual beliefs and actions, but the movement itself takes on a life and direction that goes beyond the intentions of any single participant. The complexity of human societies and institutions demonstrates how emergent properties are essential for understanding how individual actions, when aggregated, lead to the creation of complex social structures and dynamics.

The study of collective behaviors in social psychology further underscores the role of emergent properties in understanding human interactions. Social norms, shared values, group dynamics, and even collective emotions are all emergent properties that arise from the interactions

of individuals within a group. O'Connor and Wong (2015) emphasize how emergent phenomena like social norms cannot be traced back to the actions or intentions of any single individual but instead emerge from the collective behavior of a group. These norms guide behavior in a society and influence how individuals act and interact with each other. For instance, the phenomenon of peer pressure emerges from the shared expectations within a group, affecting individual behavior in ways that are not reducible to any one person's actions. Understanding the role of emergent properties in these contexts can provide deep insights into how societies function and evolve over time.

Furthermore, the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and computational systems has provided new insights into emergent properties and their relevance in the technological sphere. Artificial neural networks, a foundational element of machine learning and AI, exemplify how complex behaviors can emerge from relatively simple algorithmic rules. These networks are designed to simulate the way the human brain works, with nodes (or artificial neurons) that process and transmit information. Despite their simplicity and the limited processing power of individual nodes, these networks can learn, adapt, and generate sophisticated outputs, such as recognizing images, translating languages, or playing complex games like chess or Go. The ability of these networks to produce emergent behavior, such as recognizing patterns or making decisions, showcases the power of emergentist principles in explaining how complex systems can arise from relatively simple rules or interactions. The development of AI and machine learning technologies highlights the importance of understanding emergence in computational systems, where novel capabilities arise as a result of the interactions between basic computational elements.

Emergence in AI also draws attention to the idea that intelligence, and even consciousness, might emerge from complex systems of artificial neural networks. While these systems do not possess consciousness in the same way humans do, they demonstrate how intelligence-like behaviors can emerge from the interactions of simpler components. This challenges the traditional view that intelligence must be directly linked to biological processes, offering new perspectives on the nature of thought, cognition, and consciousness in both artificial and biological systems.

The exploration of emergent properties in fields such as physics, chemistry, biology, the social sciences, and artificial intelligence provides

a powerful framework for understanding complexity. Rather than seeing the world as a collection of isolated parts, emergentism encourages us to look at the interactions between components and how these interactions give rise to new, often unpredictable, properties. In doing so, it offers new perspectives on the nature of reality and opens up exciting possibilities for both scientific research and technological development.

V. Conclusion: Emergentism as a Framework for Understanding Reality

In conclusion, the theory of emergence provides a robust and compelling framework for understanding the complexities of reality across a wide range of disciplines. It offers valuable insights into how novel properties and behaviors arise from the interaction of simpler components, and this concept is applicable to various scientific and philosophical fields, including the philosophy of mind, physics, biology, and the social sciences. Emergent properties serve as a way to bridge the gap between the reductionist desire to explain everything in terms of its basic elements and the recognition that the whole may be more than the sum of its parts. Whether it is the emergence of consciousness from neurobiological processes or the rise of complex systems in natural or social contexts, emergentism helps to explain how new, often unpredictable qualities arise from simpler entities and their interactions.

Emergentism offers a new perspective on phenomena that resist simple reduction to their constituent components. For instance, the study of consciousness in philosophy presents a central application of emergence, where the relationship between the mind and body is explored. While reductionism has often struggled to account for the subjective and qualitative aspects of consciousness, emergentism proposes that these qualities arise from the complex interactions of the brain's neurons and other components. This view challenges the simplistic reductionist accounts that attempt to explain consciousness solely in terms of neural processes, as well as the dualistic approaches that attempt to separate mind and body entirely.

Further, emergentism has found strong support in various scientific fields as well, particularly in understanding complex systems such as those found in physics, biology, and social science. In physics, emergent properties, such as the liquidity of water or superconductivity, demonstrate how the collective behavior of simpler entities results in properties

that cannot be explained by the properties of individual molecules or atoms. In biology, the rise of life and the emergent properties of biological organisms further illustrate how complex systems arise from simpler components. Similarly, in social sciences, the interactions of individuals within a larger society lead to emergent phenomena such as social norms, economic systems, and collective behaviors, which cannot be reduced to the actions of any single person but arise from the collective organization of individuals.

Thus, the key conclusions from retracing philosophical emergentism to emergence as a concept and emergent properties themselves are

1. the fact that emergentism provides a powerful tool for explaining how novel properties arise from the interactions of simpler components, challenging reductionist approaches that attempt to explain complex phenomena solely in terms of their constituent parts,

2. that theories of emergence offer promising approaches to understanding consciousness as alternatives to both reductionist materialism and dualism, with weak emergence, as posited by John Searle, sees consciousness as arising from neurobiological processes but not exerting causal power independent of those processes, and strong emergence, as argued by David Chalmers, suggesting that consciousness may have properties that cannot be fully explained by the physical workings of the brain,

3. in fields like physics and biology, emergent properties help explain how complex systems like water, life, or biological organisms exhibit novel behaviors and properties that cannot be reduced to the individual components, with superconductivity, liquidity, and life itself being examples of how complex interactions between components give rise to new phenomena,

4. emergentism also playing a significant role in understanding social phenomena, e.g. social norms, political movements, and economic systems emerging from the interactions of individuals within a larger social framework, with the phenomena all the while being irreducible to individual actions but arising from the collective behavior and organisation of society, and

5. that while emergentism faces challenges in distinguishing itself from reductionism and dualism, it represents a middle ground that addresses the limitations of both, in the sense that it rejects the oversimpli-

fication of reductionism, which fails to account for the complexity of systems, and counters dualism's separation of mind and body, offering a more integrated understanding of consciousness and other complex systems.

In this sense, although emergentism is not without its challenges, particularly in distinguishing itself from reductionism and dualism, it continues to represent a significant area of philosophical and scientific inquiry. Emergentism provides a middle ground between reductionism, which attempts to explain everything by reducing it to its simplest parts, and dualism, which posits that there are separate realms for mind and matter. Emergent properties point to the importance of understanding systems as wholes rather than merely as collections of parts.

Ontology of Data

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Abstract: This study offers a systematic ontological investigation of the concept of data. Drawing from the triadic distinction between data, information, and knowledge, it proposes a definition of data as abstract units for the structured retention of availability. Central to the analysis is the role of interpretation, which mediates the transition from the objective being of data to the subjective being of information. The concept of the non-being of data is developed through the dialectic of absolute randomness and absolute determinacy, analyzed in light of Shannon entropy as a measure of interpretive potential. In the final section, the study introduces the novel category of modal data, defined as data that retain not only what *is*, but also what *could be*, *must be*, or *might not be*. This opens new horizons for logical, epistemological, and computational analysis. The study synthesizes insights from ontology, logic, hermeneutics, and information theory.

Keywords: ontology, information theory, data, interpretation, modality

Introduction

The question of how we ought to understand—and consequently, what kind of value we ought to ascribe to—what is today (especially in recent discourse) widely referred to as “data” is of critical importance. This is not only due to its centrality in contemporary conversations surrounding so-called “artificial intelligence,” but also in a much broader context—for instance, in cases where a decision is justified with the claim that “the data indicates so”.

The problem explored in this study is of exceptional significance, particularly given the growing tendency to treat “data” as the highest form of legitimacy in numerous debates, serving as an almost indispensable foundation for any argument that lays claim to being “rational”. A proper understanding of the nature of what data mean can help us make high-quality judgments about when, how, and under what conditions it is appropriate—or inappropriate—to employ or appeal to them.

This paper attempts to address the ontological structure of what

ought to be called “data,” to delineate what is “non-data” and to identify the moment at which data cease to be merely data—that is, when they move beyond their mode of simple availability and become something else: namely, the transition from data to “information”.

The clarification of these two transitions will aid in illuminating the essence of data by revealing, first, the shift from merely determinate being (*Dasein*) to essential being (*Wesen*), along with the disclosure of the non-being (*Nichtsein*) of the object under consideration; and second, the transition from the objective being of data to the subjective being of information—a transition that could be topic of a more extensive inquiry beyond the scope of the present study, which remains focused on a form of object-oriented ontology.

Clarifying the Essence and Defining the Concept

While it is important to emphasize that information depends on data, it is more customary to understand the former in terms of the latter, rather than the reverse.¹ Thus, the question of how data are to be understood *in themselves* remains an open one. At the same time, not all data serve as a source of information in the usual sense, where information is equivalent to some content about a given referent. A music compact disc, for example, may contain gigabytes of data, yet no information *about* anything.²

Returning to the practical motivation for exploring this problem, it is precisely in clarifying these transitions—and in systematically exposing the relations between “non-data” and data, as well as between data and information—that the true horizon of validity of the otherwise too-broadly and often uncritically applied concept of data will be revealed. Why is it, for instance, that in some cases—such as the diagnostic analysis of a phenomenon in the scientific, social, political, or economic domain—we can confidently rely on data, while in others it would be, to say the least, absurd to grant them any relevance for decision-making or judgment? Such examples would include the choice of a romantic partner, aesthetic evaluation of art or other forms of creativity, or the resolu-

¹ Floridi, Luciano. “Information.” In *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Computing and Information*, edited by Luciano Floridi, 40–61. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003.

² Floridi, Luciano. “Is Information Meaningful Data?” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 70, no. 2 (2005): 351–370.

tion of moral and ethical dilemmas. The answer to such questions helps us grasp the intrinsic limits contained within the objective being (*objektives Sein*) of data, along with the essential characteristics and constraints this being entails.

Let us begin with the etymology of the word. The Latin *data* is the plural of *datum*—a “given”—which in turn is the past participle of *dare*, “to give.” Already at this level, we can provisionally infer that data represent a kind of “retention” (in the sense of the distinction between “retention” and “apprehension,” which parallels the difference between *determinate being* (*Dasein*) and *essential being* (*Wesen*)) of some availability or presence. More concretely, let us formulate the following provisional working definition of data: *Data are abstract units that serve to “retain” raw, unprocessed facts of availability, which can be collected, stored, processed, and analyzed. They can take various forms, structuring this act of retention.*

Through data, we retain elements of availability, granting them a certain form or structure—but not *essence*. We merely hold them as they are. Therefore, through data, we are not meant to do anything beyond preserving certain facts of availability.

Another interesting aspect of the being of data becomes visible in the basic division widely adopted in Data Science, Experimental Psychology, Sociology, and other disciplines that work intensively with data—namely, the fundamental distinction between *qualitative* and *quantitative* data. From both a practical and a theoretical point of view, it seems that data can only be either qualitative or quantitative, but not both at once, nor something entirely outside these two categories.

By delving into this strict and irreducible division through the lens of the first part of Hegel’s *Science of Logic*—the “Doctrine of Being” (*Seinslogik*)—we can further substantiate the interpretation of data as *determinate being* (*Dasein*). This becomes clear through, on the one hand, the qualitative determination of the being of data—the determinacy that makes being what it is³—and, on the other, the quantitative determination of being—the aspect that admits of change without essential alteration.⁴ The impossibility of synthesizing these two dimensions into a unified concept—of grasping them in their speculative unity as

³ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. and ed. George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 59–83.

⁴ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 154–167.

*measure*⁵—reveals the fundamental limitation of data: their incapacity to rise to the level of *essential being* (*Wesen*). In this sense, data remain confined to the ontological register of pure availability.

The Systematic Place of the Concept and the Transition from Objective to Subjective Being

Let us return, then, to the notion of data as the retention of availabilities. This immediately raises the question: why would we need to *retain* facts of availability at all—facts which, in certain colloquial contexts, might be referred to as “raw reality”? The answer to this question will help us uncover the *telos* of the being of data precisely as the retention of availabilities. What do we intend to do with something that we first need to retain?

One possible answer—within the conceptual horizon of this investigation—is that what we ultimately aim for is the possibility of *interpreting* that which has been retained, at some future moment. In other words, this act of retention enables us to extract a fragment of availability, potentially preserve and “safeguard” it, so that it may later be interpreted and used in the generation of information—and, eventually, perhaps even in the acquisition of knowledge. Yet within the framework of data, we are strictly limited to this retention alone. The possibilities of interpretation and of knowledge acquisition are not yet realized at this level.

The problem of *interpretation* as such demands a deeper philosophical inquiry, but since it introduces us to the domain of *subjectivity*, and that lies beyond the scope of the present study, I will employ the term in its broad, common-sense usage. Nevertheless, the subjective character of interpretation—as a potentiality *immanent* in data as structured retention of availability—allows us to locate systematically the ontological status of data as object.

It is precisely at this point that we may articulate the *telos* of data: their transformation into information. This constitutes the transition from *objectivity* (*Objektivität*) to *subjectivity* (*Subjektiver Begriff*), realized through the actualization of data as information.

Up to this point, we have arrived at the following systematic understanding of data:

1. First, data are to be conceived as *abstract units* through which we

⁵ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 302-326.

retain certain availabilities within a given structure, whose form is determined by the specific type of data in question. In this sense, data constitute an *immediate unity of form and content*⁶, which, by structuring a given availability, enables its retention, preservation, and “displacement.”

2. Second, the transition from *objectivity* to *subjectivity*, mediated by the telos of the being of data—namely, their transformation into *information*, a process that is mediated by interpretation.⁷

However, we still lack an answer to the question of the non-being (*Nichtsein*) of data. Before we can approach that issue, we must first demonstrate how interpretation—though not yet actualized within data—is nevertheless *contained within them as a latent potentiality*. This possibility of interpretation embedded in data forms the structural horizon that makes the transition from data to information ontologically thinkable.

The Non-Being of Data

What is that which is *on the way* to becoming data, but is not yet data? To address this question, let us delve more deeply into the essence of data, whose *telos* lies in the possibility of interpretation and thus in their transformation into information. The transition from information to knowledge is also philosophically compelling, yet it exceeds the scope of the present inquiry and could become the focus of a future investigation.

As we have already demonstrated, our guiding conceptualization of data is that of *retained availability*, structured in a particular form. The possibility of employing diverse structures reveals to us the multiplicity of data types—qualitative, quantitative, and others. One essential characteristic that may aid in further clarifying the nature of data is a property stemming from their *teleological orientation*: their *potential for informativeness*.

In everyday discourse, we often encounter questions such as: “*What information is in this data (on a given topic)?*” From a strictly philosophical and systematic standpoint, such a formulation is conceptually inaccurate, as *information is not something immediately contained in data*; rather, it exceeds them conceptually. But what do we mean, then, when we employ such phrases? Clearly, such statements, while

⁶ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 396-399.

⁷ Ibid.

imprecise, do not strike us as absurd. This suggests that they gesture toward an essential trait of data. Given the distinctions articulated so far, a more accurate reformulation of such a question would be: “*Which part of the data could I interpret so as to obtain information (on the issue that currently concerns me)?*”

Hence, data contains *something* that is *amenable to interpretation*. Going further than that, the possibility of interpretation is both the *telos* and an *essential characteristic* of data. For convenience, and in accordance with colloquial usage, we will continue to refer to this as “*the information contained in the data*”, by which we mean more precisely: “*that content of the data which is interpretable with respect to a given question in a specific context*”.

Once again, we will set aside the possibility of a *hermeneutic approach* to data—particularly the one grounded in Hans-Georg Gadamer’s dialectic of *question and answer* (*Frage und Antwort*) and the living interplay between subject and object in interpretation, as developed in *Truth and Method*⁸—since this would fall within a subjective ontology of information, which lies beyond the scope of this study.

Let us return, then, to the notion of the *interpretability* of data—what we have provisionally termed “*information contained in the data*.” Here, the concept of *entropy*—originally a thermodynamic measure of disorder—becomes helpful. In a more specialized context, this concept appears in Claude Shannon’s *A Mathematical Theory of Communication*⁹, where entropy quantifies the *expected information content* of a probabilistic system. It is important to clarify that in mathematics and physics, “information” is conceived quite differently than in our current philosophical analysis. Within the systematic triad of data, information, and knowledge employed here, the scientific and mathematical notion of “*information*” more closely corresponds to *data* in our sense. In the mathematical sciences, “*information*” refers to availability (*Bestand*) without regard for the subjective character of meaning. This is precisely why we may appropriate the concept of *entropy* from information theory and apply it not to information (in the philosophical sense), but to *data*.

Now, returning to our provisional notion of “information contained

⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2004), 356–384.

⁹ Claude E. Shannon, “A Mathematical Theory of Communication,” *Bell System Technical Journal* 27, no. 3 (1948): 392–401.

in data,” Shannon entropy (H) can be understood as the *measure of informativeness* of a given data set. It is a probabilistic function that reflects the *predictability* of the data. In this framework, entropy quantifies the degree of *disorder* within the probability distribution defined by the data. If the entropy of a data set is low (approaching 0), the data are highly predictable and thus carry minimal information. Conversely, high entropy indicates unpredictability and thus high informativeness. Shannon entropy values range from 0 to 1 for normalized binary systems. A value of 1 indicates a maximally random distribution—each possible outcome is equally probable. A value of 0 implies complete determinacy—any given selection from the data set yields the same result every time.

A classic illustration of these extremes is the case of a coin toss. A fair coin (50% heads, 50% tails) yields a Shannon entropy of 1: maximal unpredictability. If, however, the coin is biased to always land on tails, the resulting data become entirely predictable, and entropy drops to 0. This analysis reveals an important ontological insight: the interpretability of data is always present as a potential, and this potential may vary qualitatively, depending on the degree of determinacy or randomness. Interpretation presupposes neither total randomness nor absolute certainty. But how does this help us understand the *non-being* (*Nichtsein*) of data? We have now seen how both *absolute randomness* and *complete determinacy* negate the possibility of interpretation: the former because it offers no pattern, the latter because it offers no ambiguity. This raises a subtle question: Is *absolute determinacy* truly a form of interpretability, or is it, paradoxically, a negation of interpretation?

Consider the contrast between a literary text and mathematical proof. The literary work is neither a random sequence of signs nor a completely determinate object. Its meaning is neither fixed nor arbitrary; it exists *in between*. By contrast, a mathematical proof permits no interpretive ambiguity. One does not engage in “interpretive analysis” of a proof; its meaning is fixed in its formal structure. The reader’s task is merely to *understand*, not to *contribute* to meaning. This example illustrates a crucial point: just as *absolute randomness* forecloses interpretation, so too does *absolute determinacy*. From this we may conclude: If the *telos* of data is to become *information*, then they must neither be entirely random nor entirely fixed. For data to fulfill their function, they must point to and retain availabilities that are *neither purely arbitrary nor exhaustively determined*.

In this structured retention and pointing, there lies the potential for essence, the potential for becoming *being-for-another*¹⁰, and thus for transitioning to the *subjective being of information* through interpretation. Therefore, the non-being of data can be understood as that which *lacks the potential for interpretation*: either because it is entirely chaotic, or because it is entirely fixed. Just as in Hegel's dialectic of *pure being* (*Reines Sein*) and *pure nothing* (*Nichts*)—both of which are indistinguishable due to their shared indeterminacy¹¹—so too, in the ontology of data, the two extremes of absolute determinacy and absolute indeterminacy amount to the same ontological invalidity in relation to the *telos* of data. Both are equally devoid of content with respect to interpretability and, by extension, to the transformation of data into information. Hence, we are justified in calling both extremes forms of the *non-being of data*.

Expanding the Ontological Field through the Introduction of “Modal Data”

Let us now turn to the practical dimension of the reflections developed so far—namely, the classification of different types of data and the conceptual articulation of a novel type of data. As we have established, data are a mode of *objective determinacy*, understood as *abstract units* that serve to retain raw, unprocessed facts of presence, which may be collected, stored, processed, and analyzed. These data can take various forms—numbers, text, images, audio recordings, etc.—each structuring availability in its own way. What is common to all these forms is their role as *pure retention*, without inherent interpretation or subjective transformation. Once they are subjected to analysis or use in inference, they move beyond their purely objective character and enter the domain of *subjective being*, i.e., information.

The proposal advanced here is the conceptual introduction of a new kind of data that we shall call *modal data*. Unlike standard data,

¹⁰ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 128-129.

¹¹ “Pure Being and pure Nothing are, therefore, the same. What is the truth is neither Being nor Nothing, but that Being—does not pass over but has passed over—into Nothing, and Nothing into Being. But it is equally true that they are not undistinguished, that they are not the same, that they are absolutely distinct yet equally unseparated and inseparable, and that each immediately vanishes in its opposite.” Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 59-60.

which retain what *is*, modal data would retain what *could be*, what *must be*, what *might not be*, or what is *impossible*—that is, they would encode presence not as actuality, but as *modality*. This form of data would integrate the classical modal categories: *possibility*, *necessity*, *impossibility*, and *contingency*. In doing so, it would open entirely new domains of analysis, processing, and epistemic extraction. Modal data could serve in the training of artificial systems (so-called “artificial intelligence”) capable of modal inferences, e.g., identifying potentialities or necessities in various contexts. They could also be deployed in simulation environments and the construction of virtual or counterfactual realities.

The conceptual foundation for this proposal draws on developments in *modal logic*, particularly the systems of C. I. Lewis¹² and the later semantics of *possible worlds* elaborated by Saul Kripke.¹³ In Lewis’s system, modal categories are treated as logical operators governed by necessity and possibility; in Kripke’s possible world semantics, these operators are given model-theoretic interpretation across accessible worlds, providing a rigorous framework for counterfactual reasoning. This semantic apparatus allows us to speak not only of what is, but of what might be the case under varying conditions. From a metaphysical perspective, this is deeply resonant with the work of Leibniz, who viewed *possibility* as grounded in the principle of *compossibility*, i.e., the logical and metaphysical compatibility of possible states of affairs.¹⁴ In this Leibnizian sense, modal data would not simply speculate, but systematize the virtual, treating potentialities as ordered elements within a conceptual universe.

In terms of ontological grounding, such data may also be thought of in connection with Hegel’s category of the Possible (*das Mögliche*) in the *Science of Logic*, where possibility is not mere abstraction but a determinate moment within actuality—“*the possible is only insofar as it belongs to the actual*”.¹⁵ Modal data would therefore not exist outside

¹² Clarence Irving Lewis, *A Survey of Symbolic Logic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1918), chap. 11, “Strict Implication and Modal Logic,” 366–408.

¹³ Saul A. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), lecture 2, “Naming and Necessity,” 63–87.

¹⁴ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*, trans. E. M. Huggard (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1989), part I, §§8–21, 42–60.

¹⁵ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, §§146–148, 399–415

actual data but would supplement actuality with structured virtuality.

A simple example may illustrate the core idea. Suppose we are conducting a standard survey regarding voter turnout. A typical data collection might ask: “*Will you vote in the upcoming election?*” (Yes/No).

Modal data, by contrast, would introduce structured hypothetical conditions: “*Would you vote in the upcoming election if a political party with a clear commitment to social policy reform were on the ballot?*”

In this way, modal structures are superimposed on standard data to yield *conditional and counterfactual datasets*, enabling modal inferences. Instead of stating merely “*X% of eligible voters will vote*”, one could say “*X% of eligible voters will vote, but if a party with a clear social platform were present, Y% would vote*”. This extension allows not only for descriptive statistics, but for *modal projections*—mapping the space of social possibility. Similar methods could be developed to structure the remaining modal categories into data architectures: necessity (*must vote if...*), impossibility (*would never vote even if...*), and contingency (*might vote if...*).

Such developments could transform not only data science, but the epistemology of prediction and the logic of future-oriented knowledge. In philosophical terms, they bring the *modal horizon* into the ontological fabric of data itself, redefining the boundary between what *is* and what *might be*.

Conclusion

In the present work, we have undertaken an ontologization of data. Beginning with the distinction drawn in the introduction between the concepts of *data* and *information*, we were able to identify interpretation as the central mediating function through which the transition from the objective being of data to the subjective being of information becomes possible.

The practical impetus for this inquiry lies in the increasing centrality of “*data-driven decision-making*” within contemporary political, social, and economic life. A successful investigation into the essence of data—and a clarification of their mode of being—may assist us not only in understanding them more fully, but also in discerning those contexts in which we are justified in *relying on data* as the ground of judgment or action.

Through an analysis of the triadic relation data–information–knowledge, we have seen that data represent the most abstract and ontologically empty of the three categories. Within this framework, we in-

troduced and defended the following working definition:

Data are abstract units that serve to “retain” raw, unprocessed facts of availability, which may be collected, stored, processed, and analyzed. They may take various forms, thereby structuring the retention they perform.

Building on this definition—and on our earlier explication of interpretation as a latent potential within data—we advanced toward a determination of the non-being of data. Here, we introduced the concept of entropy, initially understood (in thermodynamics) as a measure of disorder within a physical system, and subsequently reformulated in information theory as Shannon entropy, which quantifies the degree of uncertainty or unpredictability within a probability distribution.

Through this concept, we articulated the dual character of the non-being of data: on the one hand, absolute randomness, and on the other, absolute determinacy. We argued that both extremes are, with respect to the potential for interpretation, equally ontologically empty. Just as Hegel shows that the distinction between pure being and pure nothing is merely nominal—since both are equally indeterminate—so too is the distinction between total randomness and total order nominal with respect to the capacity of data to become information through interpretation.

Drawing on these ontological reflections—framed by the *telos* of data as becoming—we concluded by proposing a novel category: modal data. These would not merely retain *what is*, but also retain that which *could be*, *must be*, *might not be*, or is *impossible*—thereby expanding the ontological scope of data to include modalities of being. Such data could allow for the retention of potentialities, thus opening new teleological pathways toward the richer and more determinate categories of information and knowledge, by amplifying the interpretive potential that is intrinsic to the essence of data.

Types of, Reasons for & Consequences of Censorship

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Abstract: Censorship can be defined as the suppression of knowledge and/or information or their exchange. It is typically imposed by government entities, private organizations, or powerful groups. Other entities involved in censorship include industrial lobbies, political and social activists, thinktanks, political groups, and even groups of ordinary citizens. The reasons and intentions behind censorship vary, as do the consequences and outcomes of it. Some types of censorship are more overt and may be easier to spot, such as direct censorship, while others are more subtle like indirect censorship. The rationale behind the reasons for censorship may be motivated by faith, as is the case with religious censorship, or it may be inspired by more mundane concerns, e.g. financial ones, which often happens with corporate censorship. Finally, the consequences of censorship may be regarded as positive, for example when it aids in protecting children from potentially harmful content, or as negative, such as when it is used to discourage or silence students, scholars and researchers.

Keywords: censorship, politics, religion, society, mass media.

1. Introduction

On the surface level, the core principle behind censorship is that certain knowledge or information is harmful to the individual, society, and the nation. If such information is disseminated and reaches the masses, the social order and citizens' lives can come under threat. While knowledge is the awareness, understanding, or skills you gain through experience or education, information consists of the facts or details about a subject. Since they are closely related—knowledge is about what you understand, while information is what you can (or sometimes can't) know, these terms will be used interchangeably in this article.

The following is a comprehensive but not exhaustive list of kinds of censorship which will be discussed in this article.

- Direct censorship
- Indirect censorship
- Moral & Justified censorship
- Religious censorship
- Progressive censorship
- Political censorship
- Corporate censorship

Contrary to popular opinion, the consequences of applied censorship may not necessarily be negative. In certain circumstances, censoring data seems to be the only viable option to keep individuals and groups safe from harm. In order to give a balanced overview, both positive and negative consequences of censorship will be discussed.

In the conclusion, a general summary and overview will be provided on the complex issue of censorship.

2. Direct censorship

This includes withholding information, altering/modifying information, excluding certain information, destroying information, and self-censoring. Sometimes, the objectionable content is excluded, while at other times, the information is destroyed. A historically parallel example is the burning of “unsuitable” books during the Nazi regime. It indicates that destroying knowledge is not a 21st-century activity, but has indeed been going on for ages. In the 12th century, the Turk Muslim invaders burned a colossal library of the ancient Nalanda University of India, in which 9 million books were burned¹⁶. We cannot imagine the sheer amount of ancient knowledge of Vedas, Upanishads, and Buddhist scriptures that were lost. Similar incidents are happening in the 21st century.

3. Indirect Censorship

Indirect censorship is also called soft censorship. Indirect censorship is more sophisticated than direct censorship¹⁷. In indirect censorship, knowledge is not censored through attacking, killing, destroying, or

¹⁶ Ravikumar Pillay, “Nalanda: 9 Million Books Burnt in 1193 by Bakhtiyar Khilji,” *My India My Glory*, September 11, 2017, <https://www.myindiamyglory.com/2017/09/11/nalanda-9-million-books-burnt/>.

¹⁷ Carlos Cortés, “Indirect Censorship: The Silent Enemy,” *AS/COA*, November 19, 2009, <https://www.as-coa.org/articles/indirect-censorship-silent-enemy>.

shutting down media outlets. The imposed restrictions are invisible. For example, there are several censorship incidents in which the government freezes the funds of some research institutions. For example, during the Trump administration, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was asked to remove climate change-related information from its website¹⁸. The research conducted by the EPA and the United States Department of Agriculture was strictly monitored and reviewed before its publication. The review committee consisted of political appointees. The White House also imposed several restrictions on big news outlets and allowed only those who were favorable to the government. This move was unconstitutional. It was indirect censorship, consisting of activities such as holding or curtailing funds, monitoring studies, removing unfavorable content, or altering it.

In today's world, the government prefers to impose indirect censorship to avoid outrage. Indirect censorship is not limited to politics and literature, but it is prevalent in art also. Robert Mapplethorpe was a photographer, and his artwork, including some nude photographs, was canceled on the grounds of nudity and obscenity. That was back in the 1980s. Recently, in 2023, the art exhibits in Idaho were canceled and censored. These artworks included the cross-stitch work on mifepristone and misoprostol, some series and documentaries in which women were sharing their experiences on abortion. These exhibits were removed from the exhibition¹⁹. This incident was shocking and unbelievable for the artists. Such censorship and canceling practices are concerning and harmful for a democratic country like the United States.

The libraries in public schools are also under scrutiny, and the faculty members in the colleges are fired for speaking freely and giving their opinions. Boone²⁰ reported that the bans on books are also growing rapidly in the United States. A total of 1586 books were banned in April 2022, according to a Washington Post report, which further states,

¹⁸ Valerie Volcovici, "Trump administration tells EPA to cut climate page from website: sources," *Reuters*, January 25, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-epa-climatechange/trump-administration-tells-epa-to-cut-climate-page-from-website-sources-idUSKBN15906G/>.

¹⁹ Rebecca Boone, "Experts say attacks on free speech are rising across the US," *AP News*, March 15, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/first-amendment-free-speech-censorship-mccarthyism-815865bafa52bb821400be15fdf76119>.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

*“The bans targeted 1,145 unique books by more than 800 authors, and a plurality of the books—41 percent—featured prominent characters who are people of color. Thirty-three percent of the banned books, meanwhile, included LGBTQ themes, protagonists, or strong secondary characters, and 22 percent ‘directly address issues of race and racism’.”*²¹

Such growing activities of banning books have become a serious threat to American educational institutions. The political opponents are also silenced and blamed for holding undemocratic opinions.

Indirect censorship is on the rise in the United States, and this phenomenon is concerning for people who think that the government is actively engaged in censoring freedom of speech.

Various types of indirect censorship have been reported in previous studies. Podesta²² mentioned some of the examples of indirect censorship:

- Bribing journalists to promote narratives in favor and support of the government.
- Threats of national or local governments to withdraw the revenue stream of newspapers and broadcasters by stopping advertising in them.
- Pressuring private businesses to publish adverts only in certain media, excluding others.

4. Moral & Justified Censorship

Sometimes, limiting freedom of speech becomes mandatory due to several reasons and circumstances. Moral censorship is the type of censorship in which the government intends to protect the citizens from something morally wrong. In the United States, hate speech also cannot be censored because the First Amendment has offered the privilege of free speech to the citizens of the United States. Moral censorship is the act of

²¹ Hannah Natanson, “More books are banned than ever before, as Congress takes on the issue,” *The Washington Post*, April 7, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/04/07/book-bans-congress-student-library/>.

²² Don Podesta, “Soft Censorship: How Governments Around the Globe Use Money to Manipulate the Media,” *Center for International Media Assistance*, January 9, 2009, <https://www.cima.ned.org/resource/soft-censorship-how-governments-around-the-globe-use-money-to-manipulate-the-media/>.

censoring immoral acts²³. This censorship intends to protect children from pathogens. Therefore, such censorship must be allowed. It prevents potential threats to individuals and society.

Dholakia²⁴ makes a salient point when he argues that although freedom of speech is the right of every citizen of a democratic nation, it cannot be absolute. Reasonable restrictions on speech are what may be called justified censorship. For the collective well-being of the citizens, social stability, and national security, if this freedom is restricted, it is justified and moral because it does not have any selfish intention. Maurer²⁵ argues that good or moral censorship is the solution to bad or hate speech, including rumors, abusive remarks, and misinformation. Hate speech is aggressive, violent, and poisonous, and it suppresses the minorities' voices. Such hate speech creates biased violence in which both the individual and society at large are affected. While focusing on the moral censorship of hate speech, the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres²⁶ argues,

“Addressing hate speech does not mean limiting or prohibiting freedom of speech. It means keeping hate speech from escalating into something more dangerous, particularly incitement to discrimination, hostility, and violence, which is prohibited under international law.”

However, morality, goodness, and badness are relative and circumstantial concepts, and their context varies from person to person. It would be an injustice if individuals' opinions were suppressed in a democracy, but the citizens should also know that they are publicly accountable. There-

²³ R. A. Anderson and E. J. Masicampo, “Protecting the Innocence of Youth: Moral sanctity values underlie censorship from young children,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 43, no. 11 (2017): 1503-1518, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167217722557>.

²⁴ Het Dholakia, “Censorship Mandates: Better Or For Worse,” *Legal Service India*, accessed March 8, 2025, <https://www.legalserviceindia.com/legal/article-9042-censorship-mandates-better-or-for-worse.html>.

²⁵ Barry Maurer, “Censorship Is Not All Bad,” *UCF Forum*, March, 2016, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/297730211_Censorship_Is_Not_All_Bad.

²⁶ Antonio Guterres, “Opening remarks at press encounter at launch of United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech,” *United Nations*, June 18, 2019, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2019-06-18/un-strategy-and-plan-of-action-hate-speech-press-remarks>.

fore, they should use words responsibly, especially on public platforms. If the public arena is becoming insecure and unsafe due to the comments, statements, and speeches of any individual, it becomes mandatory to censor them.

Military censorship is also justified censorship, which is the activity of keeping military strategies secret to prevent enemies from accessing it. Such censorship is critical, especially during wartime. The national security relies on this military censorship. If any confidential data is leaked, it can put the entire nation in great danger. However, within the military, everyone should have a clear understanding of which information is to be hidden and which information is to be disseminated. Dissemination of necessary information is as crucial as censoring information. So, military personnel should be clear in their decision-making regarding censorship.

5. Religious Censorship

Religious censorship is imposed on individuals by religious authorities. It is not a recent phenomenon but has been practiced in many societies since ancient times. Religious censorship is imposed on multiple grounds. For example, the work is censored because it is considered obscene in the religious framework, or sometimes it challenges the religious dogmas if something is a direct challenge to the religious principles. The Catholic Church has banned hundreds of books that were directly challenging the Church's authorities. In Islam also, censorship was imposed, which is called *Fatwa*.

In Saudi Arabia, non-Muslims are not allowed to perform their religious activities in public. If such a person is found, he/she may be imprisoned, deported, or tortured²⁷. Such incidents are largely absent in the western world. However, in a global context, it is essential to discuss how religious censorship is a serious issue.

6. Progressive Censorship

Attacking freedom of speech is not a modern phenomenon, but it existed in previous centuries as well. The Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 cen-

²⁷ "2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Saudi Arabia," U.S. Department of State, accessed March 2, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/saudi-arabia/>.

sored writing against the United States, calling it scandalous, malicious, and false. However, today's political censorship has also become a great threat and cannot be overlooked. Along with the government and political entities, academicians, students, writers, innovators, and other such non-political individuals, groups, and social media are engaged in censoring. This progressive agent-driven censorship is more dangerous than the Alien and Sedition Acts. The major reason is that the First Amendment rights are guaranteed by the constitution but progressive acts of censorship are perpetrated and enforced by private entities.

Social media and censorship have a close connection. Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube remove some content from their sites that they perceive to be wrong, untrue, and misleading. It is undoubtedly justified or moral censorship, but while doing this, these sites do not remove other untrue and wrong content. They are selective in censoring the content. Here, the problem is that offensive, objectionable, and inappropriate content is subjective, especially the censorship imposed by the progressive agents. It is selective because, according to Facebook, a certain matter will be inappropriate, but Instagram or Twitter policies may not censor the content. Many progressive agents censor the content on different grounds, and it becomes challenging to decide whether the content is really censorable. For example, a feminist group might appeal to the government to ban a certain film or book that is offensive to women. The LGBTQ groups may appeal to ban a certain film or content that offends the group. It means that there is no clear definition of objectionable, controversial, or inappropriate content.

This indicates that censorship has become highly complex in the modern technological era, unlike in the past. The government's or church's activities of censorship are taken over by progressive agents, including individuals, groups, and social media.

7. Political Censorship

Government and political leaders are the key agents in political censorship, in which the government bans content, books, films, or any such content that they feel is inappropriate. One such example is China's control of all media in the country. The communist government regulates

the media. Bennett & Naim²⁸ state that governments around the world are trying to manipulate and regulate media through various means of censorship. The government plays a crucial role, especially in autocratic regimes, in disseminating information. For example, Chinese citizens will know what the Chinese government wants them to know. They have no privilege to explore and gain knowledge independently. The knowledge acquisition process of Chinese people depends upon the government's wishes and attitudes.

The technological disruption and emergence of smart technologies have made it challenging for the government to control the information. However, governments are active and finding techniques to regulate digital media. For example, according to recent amendments, the government can close websites or content if it feels that national security and public orders are under threat. Recently, many journalists in Turkey were imprisoned for investigating taxation. In Russia, Vladimir Putin ordered to ban and block several websites and medical outlets.

8. Corporate Censorship

Corporate censorship happens when businesses regulate information. Corporate censorship is economically motivated²⁹. Businesses are highly careful about controversial content and censor it to keep the reputation of the company. If any accident or wrong thing takes place within the premises, the companies' first response is to hide it from outsiders, especially the media. It is to preserve the reputation and good image of the corporation.

9. Positive Consequences of Censorship

9.1. Protecting Children from Risky Content

Children are vulnerable to fake and falsified information. The kids must gain proper knowledge and information. However, some sources are ex-

²⁸ Philip Bennett and Moses Naim, "21st-century censorship," *Columbia Journalism Review* 53, no. 5 (2015): 22-28, https://www.cjr.org/cover_story/21st_century_censorship.php.

²⁹ Susanne Kopf, "Corporate censorship online: Vagueness and discursive imprecision in YouTube's advertiser-friendly content guidelines," *New Media & Society* 26, no. 4 (2022): 1756-1774, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221077354>.

tremely dangerous because they provide them with partial or wrong information in which they start believing. The inappropriate content for children includes violence, pornography, and websites promoting unhealthy and anti-social behavior. For example, drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, and consuming drugs are projected positively in ads, films, or video games. When the kids see it as a socially accepted activity, they are motivated to partake in them. It can further lead to the development of substance abuse problems or anti-social and violent behavior among children.

Exposure to highly sexualized content at a tender age may lead them to start copying sexual acts at an early age. Furthermore, they are equipped with false information about sex. Therefore, they are likely to be involved in unsafe sexual activities. According to Ben-Joseph³⁰, early and excessive exposure to violence is extremely dangerous for the healthy growth of children. The author stated that American children are exposed to 200,000 violent activities by the age of 18 through mainstream media such as television. Such content makes them frightened and upset and can adversely affect their mental well-being.

Every day, their screens are flooded with commercials, and they can make children confused about what is authentic and what is fake. They are simply too young to interpret what they see and thus cannot differentiate between good and bad. These floods of commercials also sow the seeds of consumerism among children at a very early age. If all these adverse outcomes of information are to be avoided, the wrong, inappropriate, and dangerous information deserves to be censored.

9.2. Protection and Wellbeing of the Citizens

Censorship is justified by associating it with public welfare and the protection of public interests. It is also used to prevent insults of shared values. Sen³¹ puts forward the concept of “broad social purposes” to explain the well-being and protection of the citizens. The writer argues,

“The broad social purposes of censorship can be laid down as to

³⁰ E. P. Ben-Joseph, “How Media Use Can Affect Kids,” *Nemours KidsHealth*, August, 2022, <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/tv-affects-child.html>.

³¹ Shameek Sen, “RIGHT TO FREE SPEECH AND CENSORSHIP: A JURISPRUDENTIAL ANALYSIS,” *Journal of the Indian Law Institute* 56, no. 2 (2014): 175-201, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43953700>.

*ensure that ordinary members of the community are not affronted by the display of material to which a majority of reasonable adults would object, to maintain a level of public decency [...]*³²

For example, it is strictly banned to burn the national flag in some countries around the world or to show the destruction or defamation of any such artifacts that might be suitable to hurt public sentiments, leading to communal fights or riots. Censoring something to protect the public from life-threatening incidents is undoubtedly justifiable. However, the concept of welfare is relative and subjective.

Another point to be mentioned here regarding public protection and censorship is related to public welfare. It is said that overfishing leads to a serious marine threat and imbalance in the marine ecology. If such research is published, it may lead to aggressive demands from environmentalists and other people to ban fishing (even if just partially). This decision will push several people into unemployment because millions of people will lose their main source of income. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has reported that today, around 58 million people are associated with fisheries and aquaculture. When there is a question of protecting the collective welfare of the citizens, censorship becomes mandatory for the government. Out of such objectives, if censorship is imposed, it is justified. Such subtle and inconsistent factors make it challenging to define the role of censorship in protecting citizens' welfare.

9.3. Maintaining Peace and Order

The peace and order of the society and nation can be threatened due to the dissemination of certain content. If hateful and offensive speech or content is published, it leads to serious conflict and damages law and order. To regulate such content, the government or concerned organizations have to impose censorship. Race, sex, religious beliefs, and LGBTQ issues are some of the most sensible topics. Peace and order are likely to be at stake if something is published on these topics in certain societies. However, it depends upon how the content creator deals with these topics in his/her content. If the topic is handled sensibly, it will bring positive outcomes, but if it is presented in an objectionable man-

³² Ibid., p. 175.

ner, it will disturb social harmony. Therefore, it becomes essential to censor these topics from social media content or research.

9.4. Regulating Military Operations

No scientific evidence is required to state that the 9/11 terrorist attack is one of the biggest failures of the American government and military. After the attack, much was talked about the safety and security of the nation. However, no study is available on the probability of leaking military and other sensitive information. It is clear that the American military was unprepared. However, it is also true that sensitive and confidential information must have leaked, and the terrorists had utilized it to attack not just the World Trade Center but the pride of the United States. Here, strict and uncompromising censorship of sensitive data would have been critical. Failure to enforce such censorship led to the terrorist attack. Not just this attack but many of the terrorist attacks in different parts of the world might have occurred due to the blatant disregard for the rules of military censorship. It is the self-developed theory of military censorship of the researcher, so it is highly recommended that this theoretical perspective should be further researched to find the probability of inadequate censorship in the failure of military activities.

10. Negative Consequences of Censorship

10.1. It Limits the Process of Acquiring Knowledge

Censorship of books, articles, or any resources from which individuals acquire knowledge means taking away intellectual power. In schools, when an unjustified ban on any specific content or book takes place, it denies the right of the students to gain power through knowledge. Knowledge acquisition is not just a process of obtaining information, but it further leads to thinking critically and improving analytical thinking.

The process of censoring knowledge starts in school and later continues in colleges, workplaces, and society. The swift flow of knowledge is blocked through unreasonable and unjustified censorship from various entities. Knowledge censorship means pushing society several years behind or keeping society immature.

Critical inquiry and creative thinking are the backbones of knowledge. The pedagogy stimulating critical and creative thinking of

the students includes social, economic, cultural, and multiple other critical components. Such an all-encompassing curriculum encourages students to explore things from multiple perspectives. It widens the peripheries of knowledge. In short, it helps to gain knowledge about the world through texts and apply textual theories in real-life situations. Critical inquiry is crucial in almost every field. Additionally, the benefits of reading books or otherwise engaging with unfamiliar material also encourages personal growth, allowing for the development of values such as empathy and compassion, and to use imaginative engagement “[...] *to conceive of the world beyond ourselves and our own viewpoints, widen our appreciation for ways of living that are different from those we know, and gain insight into what gives meaning to others.*”³³

10.2. Threat to Democratic Values

One of the arguably most essential traits of a democracy is people’s right to access knowledge and information and the right to freedom of expression. However, it is also challenging for the government to balance between freedom of expression and national security, law and order, as many times they are bound to come into conflict.

10.3. Spreading False Ideologies and Propaganda

It is a common strategy of politically dominant groups to manipulate data and thus spread false ideologies, which are not facts but propaganda to pamper their political interests. Iran, China, Saudi Arabia, and several other countries have imposed upon the public explicit laws and policies to keep citizens away from the facts³⁴.

10.4. Discouraging and Silencing Students, Scholars, and Researchers

Censorship makes people fall or stay silent because they know the dire consequences of speaking out. By censoring topics and banning books, schools and universities have shut down the voices of students, acade-

³³ Heidi J. Torres, “Developing Imaginative Engagement in Young Children Using Children’s Literature,” *The Social Studies* 110, no.4 (2019): 161-169, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00377996.2019.1587736>.

³⁴ Allie Funk et al., “Freedom on the Net 2024. The Struggle for Trust Online,” *Freedom House*, accessed March 12, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2024/struggle-trust-online>.

micians, and scholars. The entire campus is thus censored by limiting students' rights to free speech and writing.

All this can lead to self-censorship, where, instead of questioning manipulative research for its legitimacy, researchers and scholars prefer to be silent rather than lose their credibility³⁵.

11. Conclusion

This article has discussed various forms of censorship and several examples were given. It has made clear that censorship is not a new phenomenon, but one that has accompanied humankind and its various cultures and civilizations for many centuries.

Still, with the rapid advancements in science and technology in the recent decades, it is undeniable that censorship has reached a new quality and pervasiveness, especially owing to mass media and mass communication.

While censorship does indeed often infringe on personal and civil liberties, it would be unwise to dismiss it as an altogether negative or destructive phenomenon. State, group and personal welfare unfortunately often require a certain amount of secrecy or discretion.

³⁵ Esa Väliverronen and Sampsa Saikkonen, "Freedom of Expression Challenged: Scientists' Perspectives on Hidden Forms of Suppression and Self-Censorship," *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 46, no. 6 (2020): 1172-1200, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0162243920978303>.

Systemic Violence Against Women: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Girard's Theory of Sacrifice

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Abstract: The structure of sacrifice alludes to systemic violence and poses a question: What are we sacrificing when we sacrifice? In this research, I revisit Rene Girard's concept of ritual sacrifice as systemic violence. I examine sacrifice and systemic violence through a psychoanalytic lens (e.g. Lacan, Irigaray, Kristeva, McGowan, Morris). The logic of sacrifice and systemic violence is analyzed to demonstrate that these systems of violence correlate within the realm of the unconscious – and may reveal why this connection is both disturbing and instructive regarding some of the origin points of our culture(s). Following Kristeva, I analyze the abject feminine as the unconscious target of systemic violence. The unconscious tensions are dealt with through systematized violence against women and others who evoke the threat of the feminine abject. This adds a critical feminist and psychoanalytic turn to the initial question: When we sacrifice, are we sacrificing the feminine?

Keywords: systemic violence, sacrifice, abject, feminine

Introduction

The ancient concept of sacrifice and its scapegoat extends beyond the study of religion, myth, and the ancient past. In this article, I revisit Rene Girard's concept of ritual sacrifice as systemic violence centered around the scapegoat to continually confront the problem and the question: what are we sacrificing when we sacrifice? This question is engaged through a psychoanalytic lens to understand the unconscious dynamics behind ritual sacrifice.

In this work, I aim to untangle the logic of ritual sacrifice through a psychoanalytic lens and suggest how violence becomes systematic. The logic of sacrifice and systemic violence is analyzed to demonstrate that these systems of violence correlate through the realm of the unconscious. I claim that the unconscious dynamics behind these systems of violence

may reveal the role systemic violence plays in structuring society.

This analysis addresses sacrificial violence as the precursor to systemic violence. By examining ritual sacrifice through a psychoanalytic lens, I explore the ritual of sacrifice as a system of violence, highlighting the notion that the scapegoat, which represents the focal point of systemic violence, is the feminine. The scapegoat structure suggests its relation to the feminine – a symbolic threat to the (societal) order.

Sacrifice and systemic violence are inextricably linked as they both deal with the unconscious anxieties over the threat – the threat that I claim to be feminine. The unconscious anxiety becomes materialized and contained by the ritual structure for the stabilization of society. The ritual structure shared by sacrifice and systemic violence implies societal categories and localizes the unconscious anxiety of that society onto a scapegoat. The ritual of sacrifice, as a systematization of violence in this work, is argued to be rooted in the structure of societies.

For Girard, society is an affair of men,³⁶ however, the pact between brothers brings harmony within society only if the brothers resolve their conflicts over the same desires through a third party – a scapegoat who, when sacrificed, ensures their unity. In this way, the pact for societal security and the sacrifice of a scapegoat imply one another. This pact of brothers, as a signifier of society, takes place to evade the conflict over the same desires; this is what I assume for Luce Irigaray and her scholar Margaret Whitford was the regime of the same. Thus, the pact between brothers forms a society that conducts the regime of the same – society of multiple selves, multiple ‘I’s who possess the same (logic of) desire.

To answer the question posed earlier about what are we sacrificing when we sacrifice, I use the Lacanian interpretations of desire and enjoyment (*jouissance*), as treated by Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Todd McGowan, and Margaret Whitford. By employing a psychoanalytic approach, I introduce the scapegoat as the materialization of the unconscious threat of the feminine. This connection reveals how ritual sacrificing persists as systemic violence against women, exemplified by honours crimes and oppressive regimes.

The conceptualization of the scapegoat through psychoanalysis helps dissect how the ritual logic of sacrifice is reflected in systemic violence against women – why that connection is both disturbing and sig-

³⁶ Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray. Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991), 145.

nificant, providing insight into some of the origin points of our culture(s). The proximity of ritual sacrifice and systemic violence, analyzed through psychoanalysis, unveils an unconscious structure behind systemic violence, thus opening and contributing to the initial question of this work: what are we sacrificing when we sacrifice (*women*)?

The Rare Sacrifice of Women

*“The sacrificial victim is almost always an animal”*³⁷

In his later work, Girard suggests with more clarity that women were chosen as sacrificial victims, as the mere fact of being a woman was considered a stereotypical victim’s sign as she belonged to a precarious social group.³⁸ He further develops the thought that human victims selected for sacrificial rituals had qualities that hardly changed from culture to culture, implying that sacrificial violence is not one culture-specific, but rather a structure detected within various societies.

However, I argue that there is a specific tension in Girard’s work, because he firstly rejects the idea that women are scapegoats, and in later work, he changes his mind, albeit subtly. Girard never clearly develops the idea that the scapegoat is a woman or that sacrifices always target something specific. However, he subtly alludes to a woman as a scapegoat within the society: “The historians continue to affirm the actual existence of the victims massacred: lepers, Jews, foreigners, women, those who are disabled, marginal persons of every sort.”³⁹ He states that the ritual survives only in the form of comedies of terror intended to impress the uninitiated, women, and children.⁴⁰ This supports my view that sacrificial ritual survives in modern societies as violence against a more oppressed group.

Rather than typologizing forms of violence, I focus on Girard’s notion of the scapegoat within ritual sacrifice. I argue that the sacrifice of a scapegoat could be seen as systemic violence against women through its

³⁷ Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 9.

³⁸ Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 49.

³⁹ Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 75.

⁴⁰ Girard, *I See*, 81.

shared ritual structure at the core of society. Girard's *Violence and the Sacred* is mainly used in this analysis because it productively deals with the psychoanalytic perspective on sacrifice. This perspective helps to problematize the scapegoat position within the symbolic order, and understand sacrifice as a structure dealing with the unconscious tensions. Such analysis shows the high stakes of sacrifice in connection to systemic violence, serving as part of the self-formation of an individual as well as the collective.

Girard mentions women as sacrificial victims among others; yet, the psychoanalytic reading of sacrifice unwinds the scapegoat as feminine. Girard does not fully differentiate sacrificial victims; however, reading his work through a Lacanian psychoanalytic lens opens a venue to view the scapegoat of sacrifice through the symbolic tensions of the masculine and the feminine. This way, I argue, sacrificial logic reveals a particular violence that persists in modern societies as a system – one that maintains order within that society.

Girard argues that all society is based on self-destructive violence. Through sacrifice, the violence that threatens the community is ritually cast out and turned outward rather than inward. Girard emphasizes that the sacrificial act is similar, but symbolically completely different from spontaneous violence – like a man kicking his dog because he cannot kick his wife or boss. Human/animal hierarchy is immediately evident; discontent is vented out through violence toward an animal instead of a human. For example, in the myth of Ajax, that Girard re-tells, after the Greek army denies him Achilles's weapons, he vents his rage towards the army by slaughtering a herd of sheep. Even though sheep were traditionally used by Greeks for sacrificial purposes, this act took place outside of the ritual framework; thus, Ajax is seen as a madman.⁴¹ Not only does this myth suggest that ritual framework is what legitimizes violence, but also that the sacrificial victim is animal-like and, hence, less human. In his later work, Girard states that there is an evident gradual disappearance of the border between animal and human in those who were marked as victims. Girard argues that there are other societies in which human victims are substituted for the individuals who are threatened by violence.⁴² This argues that groups that are vulnerable or marginalized are more likely to be ritually sacrificed. Such notions following his work pave the way

⁴¹ Girard, *Violence*, 9.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 10.

for gendered interpretations of the scapegoat, or more specifically, as I argue, indicate that the scapegoat contains the threat of the feminine.

The human-victim, or a woman scapegoat to be exact, is challenged by Girard when he states that “looking at the vast spectrum of human victims sacrificed by various societies, the list seems heterogeneous, to say the least.”⁴³ He notes that there was no unified victim of sacrifice. For Girard, sacrificial victims ranged “from the very dregs of society to kings, and mostly included prisoners of war, slaves, small children, unmarried adolescents, and the handicapped.”⁴⁴ Girard includes the Greek *pharmakos* (a person often already condemned to death in ancient Greece as a means of purification or atonement for a city or community) as a reminder that societies saw ritualistic sacrifices as the essential lawful formations for communities because it served to cleanse and thus form (confine and define) them. *Pharmakos* “was used as a kind of sponge to sop up impurities, and afterward he was expelled from the community or killed in a ceremony that involved the entire populace.”⁴⁵ Through sacrifice, the violence threatening the community is ritually cast out and directed outward rather than inward: “The function of sacrifice is to quell violence within the community and to prevent conflicts from erupting.”⁴⁶ By agreeing on those who can and will be sacrificed, the community unites itself, as those who will sacrifice and prevail. In this way, through sacrifice, society cleanses itself and defines its norm – a purified standard, exiling those who do not fit under that category as a threat to the norm, prompting the question of what is truly being targeted when women are killed. This ancient position of sacrifice within society shows the cleansing logic of (systemic) violence.

Girard notes how the court’s fool is the outlet for the king to vent his anger: “From every point of view, the fool is eminently ‘sacrificeable,’ and the king can use him to vent his own anger.”⁴⁷ Yet a fool is not necessarily a sacrifice, because the anger toward him is not regulated in any way. A fool is an object that soaks a king’s passionate, uncontrolled, and unsanctioned anger. Thus, a sacrificial victim is structurally different from a victim of an accidental outburst of violence. The victim of a

⁴³ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 95.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 14.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 12.

ritual sacrifice is a central part of a specific structure that regulates the flow of violence in society. Therefore, I presuppose that a scapegoat is not an accidental victim of rage. The violence of sacrifice is formulaic. This formula contains the tensions and addresses anxieties enacted within this structure. The scapegoat serves as an outlet – an outlet for the unconscious tensions embedded in societal organization.

For Girard, “violence will accumulate until it overflows and floods the surrounding area. Therefore, the role of sacrifice is to stem this rising tide of indiscriminate substitutions and redirect violence into proper channels”.⁴⁸ Not only does the regime of the proper (normative standard) need a sacrifice to confine and define itself, but it also needs a proper victim towards which it may redirect violence, so that it would not contaminate society. Here I introduce an Irigarayan-like reading of Girard, society defined as the pact between brothers, needs the other to maintain itself, as without the other – the non-brother, they cannot have the pact in the first place. As it follows, the opposite of a brother (he) is a sister (she) who contains all that is not accepted into the normative. For the standard to function, the abject must be pushed out. The abject here is taken from Julia Kristeva as “the opposite of an ‘I’”.⁴⁹ This ‘I’ can be viewed as the society of brothers or the symbolic order. This brother’s pact forms society to prevent conflict over the same desires for Girard, what Irigaray and Whitford called the regime of the same – a society of multiple selves, multiple ‘I’s with the same logic of desire.

This abject stands as the opposite of an ‘I’. The ‘I’ represents the society of brothers. Therefore, the opposite of an ‘I’ is someone with a different logic of desire. This different logic of desire is found with the feminine; thus, in this work, I view the abject as the feminine that poses a threat to the brothers’ pact and their (symbolic) order. Kristeva states that “the abject and abjection are my safeguards, the primers of my culture”⁵⁰ shedding a different take on Girard’s idea that the scapegoat is central to societal organization. The abject-feminine is central to the society of brothers. Thus, the scapegoat is guarding the abject-feminine at the center of societal organization.

However, what is interesting is that Girard does not go to this split

⁴⁸ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

so quickly and clearly states, though in later work he fluctuates in his position to a degree, that women's sacrifices were a rare phenomenon. A degree of integration between those who could be sacrificed and those who could not is a deciding factor for Girard. Yet, he notes that in many historical epochs, or even current cultures, women are not considered fully-fledged members of society, and yet they are rarely sacrificed: "In many cultures women are not considered full-fledged members of their society; yet women are never, or rarely, selected as sacrificial victims."⁵¹ Girard explains the rarity of female sacrifices because a woman, even when married, retains ties with her kin.

Thus, I assume her former family is always a threat, as they are believed to seek vengeance if their member is sacrificed. In this logic, a woman's sacrifice entails a risk of violence. Hence, the possibility of vengeance is the primary reason why Girard claims that women's sacrifices are rare: "The considerable importance this freedom from reprisal has for the sacrificial process makes us understand that sacrifice is primarily an act of violence without risk of vengeance."⁵² I would argue that it does not seem to be true in contemporary discourse, which shows that vengeance does not stop men from killing women. It is crucial to problematize Girard's system of vengeance: what kind of violence, or even murder, is simply not avenged? The kind that is justified.

(Not) Avenged Violence and Regimes

In modern contexts, the risk of vengeance is averted when violence is seen as deserved or violence towards a victim is not perceived as a crime; in other words, it falls into the state of the normal, or regular functioning order. In this way, the violent act is seen as 'good' violence, as it protects society and occurs within a ritual – it is systemic. 'Good' violence protects the pact of brothers from the 'bad' violence that threatens them. For Girard, the act of vengeance is undertaken by the judicial system, and therefore, there is no fear of repetition or a cycle of vengeance (violence causing another vengeful violence). It could be argued that modern society is less prone to treating vengeance as a family matter, with the judicial system expected to take on the duty of revenge. However, I propose that this is where the vengeance system fails: when

⁵¹ Girard, *Violence*, 12.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 13.

the violence inflicted on specific groups is not considered worthy of avenging. It is not perceived as an injustice in a legal, structural way. Some violence against certain people is seen as part of the system's ordinary functioning.

For Girard, in primitive societies, the role of and prevention against vengeance was assumed by religion. To prevent private vengeance and the overflow of violence within the community, public vengeance manifested through judicial or religious law. For Girard, the unique public vengeance in heavily regulated societies like ours is known as the judicial system. Thus, it can be seen that a policed society, where it is 'natural' to be governed by moral laws and monitored by behavioral rules, tends to justify violence when it conforms to a rule: it is a law, therefore it is just(ice). Conversely, violence that occurs outside of society's established channels is forbidden and, therefore, not 'good': it does not structurally benefit brother society.

Along the lines of Girard, the society that is structured by a system of religious or judicial laws delegates the process of vengeance to a higher power that is law and this way supposedly averts the dangers of escalation: "Under the public system, an act of vengeance is no longer avenged; the process is terminated, the danger of escalation averted."⁵³ From this logic, it follows that the principle of justice is revenge, which is taken up by religion or the judicial system.

Violence becomes a public matter in the religious or judicial system. For Girard, the purpose of religion concerning violence was initially aimed at protecting society from violence; the private and thus uncontrolled violence is symbolically exercised as a collective sacrifice. It is also in this context that the scapegoat is most prevalent, appearing necessary for a collective execution of just violence. The scapegoat transfers violence from a private domain to a public one, creating an illusion of societal balance. Sacrifice becomes legal vengeance, transforming violence from private to collective. Ritual sacrifice is legitimate, and structures violence. Sacrifice legitimizes violence through a structure by shifting vengeance from the private to the public domain – violence from an individual to culture. This transformation is significant because it depicts just and thus 'good' violence as a preventive measure against a potential threat.

For Girard, vengeance protects a woman from being sacrificed.

⁵³ Ibid.,16.

However, I posit that the public system, which adopts vengeance as its role, eliminates the threat of private vengeance, making women dependent on such a system and thus more vulnerable to violence. Will that system include them as part of the societal pact? The very thing that kept them protected – the threat of vengeance – is removed, because vengeance is institutionalized and becomes a matter of religious or judicial law that might not consider violence directed towards them as illegal and, therefore, vengeance worthy. The religious or judicial system does not treat a woman as an equal member of society; she is not a brother and, thus, is not a part of the pact between brothers. Consequently, the public system may not avenge her. The pact of brothers is what constitutes a society; therefore, the vengeance system of that society will not necessarily protect those outside of this pact.

For Girard, sacrifice is inextricably linked to religion, which he sees as the origin of human culture. Thus, systemic violence can be viewed as a modern form of ritual violence: “all human institutions, and therefore humanity itself, are rooted in sacrifice.”⁵⁴ Sacrifice becomes a societal instrument, preventing internal threats. When societal organizations take up vengeance as their public function, private vengeance does not pose a threat. Therefore, women can be, and are, sacrificed in such societies.

As Girard has many times defined, the scapegoat is not a direct reason for anger and violence, but rather, it is a stand-in for violence that would otherwise permeate the entire society. I would propose that this underlying force of violence – which for Girard is deflected to the victim of sacrifice – could be read, in psychoanalytic terms, by drawing a direct connection between sacrifice and the unconscious, or violence and desire.

Irigaray’s scholar, Whitford, comments that, for Girard, society is an affair of men. Based on these thinkers’ reading of Girard, it can be assumed that the mission to keep violence away by redirecting it to the scapegoat is a ritual organized by men. Since men are led by desire, which is initially the same for Girard and Irigaray, violence is expelled only temporarily. This clear indication that male desire is uniform suggests that its opposite – female desire – is perceived as different. Therefore, I assume that the scapegoat becomes a permanent structure within

⁵⁴ Girard, *I See*, 93.

such a community to continuously atone for the violence, and it is crucial for maintaining the border between the abject other and the self-same (the pact of brothers). For Irigaray, Girardian sacrifice and its function corresponds to the model of male sexuality described by Freud – the model of tension/discharge/homeostasis⁵⁵ indicating that identity is deeply linked to violence.

For Irigaray, relations between men and women are paralyzed because society does not recognize the initial sacrifice of women in that society, as Christianity ritually consumes the body and blood of women. As the symbol of sacrifice, she proposes fertility, which I would read as desire, while initially, Irigaray does not only talk about the biological possibility of women to bear children, but of the various possibilities of their desire. This way I interpret her work within the symbolic rather than the material. The suppression of maternal genealogy (feminine desire) and the incorporation of paternal genealogy (masculine desire) leads, for Irigaray, to disrespect towards fertility or, more plausibly, to the inferiorization and even sacrifice of the feminine desire.

I propose honor crimes as an example to expand on the concept of sacrifice and its scapegoat – a woman – not to victimize women, but rather to understand the threat of the feminine within systemic violence against women. According to Girard, the violence threatening society can be seen as desire, which is an illuminating thought for my claim that systemic violence targets the feminine (desire). Honor crimes exemplify Girard's notion of vengeance-free violence and highlight the fear that female desire poses to societal order, making female desire a threat and thus women scapegoats of systemic violence.

Sociologist Meltem Ahiska proposed an example showing how desire is lurking as an object-cause of violence against women. She comments that in “February 2015, Turkish Parliament suggested that a monthly allowance should be paid to single men to enable them to ‘satisfy their sexual needs,’ as a remedy for the problem of increasing violence against women”.⁵⁶ The sociologist notes that this proposition is trying to suggest to society, in order to structure the law on a falsified pseudo-fact, that it is their unsatisfied sexual needs that cause men to be

⁵⁵ Whitford, *Luce Irigaray*, 150.

⁵⁶ Meltem Ahiska, “Violence against Women in Turkey: Vulnerability, Sexuality, and Eros,” in *Vulnerability in Resistance*, ed. Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 211.

violent against women.⁵⁷ Ahiska suggests that sexuality and violence are inextricably linked, and that they lead to the formation of political practices. I propose that vengeance does not pose a threat to the sacrifice of women (femicide) because the force that drives this violent action is unconscious, and these acts are justified as a necessary protection of honor; in this way, through viewing feminine desire as a threat, violence inflicted on women becomes systemic. For Ahiska, honor crimes show that male desire can be murderous, yet I argue that the masculine (order) is threatened by and fragile to the feminine (dis-order), thus making feminine desire a threat to the masculine order.

This is how violence inflicted on women becomes ritualistic and built into the structure of society. It seems that this violence is linked to desire and is trying to destroy this ungraspable threat that is lurking beneath women's bodies. This threat appears as through the activity of women's bodies and expression of female desire, as throughout history the female body was seen as a source of men's honor. "Honour is said to reside within the bodies of women as women are the supposed 'repositories' of honour".⁵⁸ Examples like Turkey, or violent regimes in history, show that women are murdered because their bodies exhibit signs of feminine desire and are seen as a provocation of, and a threat to, the (masculine) rules.

Violent regimes that take control of sexuality know this. Nazi racism was indirectly connected to regulations on sexuality. Controlling sexuality, for the regime, was one of their main and most important tasks, and failure to control the sexuality of certain groups was considered a quasi-terrorist (anti-national) act: "Sexual activity per se entered the discussion when it served as a diagnostic marker".⁵⁹ Sexual activity defined who was normal or abnormal, and 'sexually promiscuous' women faced penalties in the Nazi state. The regime not only denied them medals and restricted their reproduction, but also institutionalized them, imprisoned them, and sent them to concentration camps.⁶⁰ These

⁵⁷ Ibid., 212.

⁵⁸ Mohammad Idriss, "Abused by the Patriarchy: Male Victims, Masculinity, 'Honor'-Based Abuse and Forced Marriages", *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (2021): 2.

⁵⁹ Elizabeth Heineman, "Sexuality and Nazism: The Doubly Unspeakable?" *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, no. 1/2 (2002): 43.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 44.

examples in actual lived experiences of women shed light on the symbolic argument about sacrifice of the feminine I try to make: uncontrolled feminine desire in violent regimes seems to come in as a challenge for the masculine order, or the order of the masculine. Feminine desire challenges this order by exposing the weakness of the symbolic power that this order seems to claim.

It is interesting to note that regimes expose that the line between acceptable and illicit female desire is often blurred. For example, the women's killings in Turkey, in most cases, are viewed as provoked by signs of female desire that are deemed unacceptable within the family (and society). Signs of female desire that are deemed unacceptable include the wearing of tight trousers, carrying love poems, going out or traveling without permission, wanting a divorce, and so on.⁶¹ Her desire to enjoy not any particular man but life itself seems to put a man on the losing side: she desires something else than (just) him. A man is desperate to fulfill his symbolic role, but the encounter with the feminine desire threatens and destabilizes his symbolic claim: "A man is traumatized by not being able to assume his symbolic role. This gives us an answer as to why some men are so concerned to keep intact their well-organized life and dread encountering the woman who provokes their desire".⁶² The symbolic role is attempted to be assumed in a relationship with a woman. I propose that state-controlled sexuality seems to put forth this anxiety as the primary motivator of violence against women. A version of my initial question in this work is also asked by Irigaray: "What man looks for in violating her?"⁶³ reappears and seems to be answered here, he looks for his own lack. In this violent quest to find it, he will enact his symbolic power. Symbolic power is what is reclaimed in the act of violence towards the threat. As the masculine subject, a violent regime is desperate to fulfill its symbolic role, but the encounter with the feminine desire threatens to destabilize its symbolic claim. The reconstitution of power within the symbolic is the reason that ritual violence takes place within modern society.

These examples in actual lived experiences of women shed light on the symbolic argument about the sacrifice of the feminine that I aim to

⁶¹ Ahiska, "Violence against Women in Turkey", 218.

⁶² Renata Salecl, *On Anxiety* (London: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005), 50.

⁶³ Luce Irigaray, "Divine Women," *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 7.

present: the uncontrolled feminine leaks through desire in these examples and appears to challenge the phallic order or specific regime. Here, violence can be viewed as an attempt to deal with provocations that the feminine poses to normative/ masculine; such violence reinforces the symbolic function and well-organized boundaries of the normative. Violence occurs when the encounter with the other (woman) reflects and therefore, brings to the surface the lack of a normative standard. “Men are frightened by the emerging sexuality of young women and their (potential) challenge to male rules ... cutting down a few women in the prime of their youth is expected to deter other young women from expressing themselves in a sensual way”.⁶⁴ Feminine is a threat within the symbolic. Therefore, a social category of a woman translates this threat into material terms, and it is in her that this threat hides. Therefore, she and all the other others who carry the threat of the feminine need to be controlled through sacrifice for this threat to be stopped.

Woman as a Rival: The Threat of Other’s Enjoyment

Honor crimes and systemic violence against women along the lines of Girard’s notion of sacrifice show that women are doomed to be split as a source of honor (pure-virgin) and shame (deviant-slut). Through violence, or a threat of violence, women are bullied into not expressing their desire.

Expanding on Irigaray, I hypothesize that society that is functioning by the pact of brothers would not break that pact easily by sharing its initiative with the other-woman: “a person who is in a position of mastery does not let go of it easily. In other words, the masculine is not prepared to share the initiative of discourse”.⁶⁵ A man, the society of brothers, and the symbolic order prefer to experiment with consuming a woman rather than leaving her any right to intervene, to act in her own interests.⁶⁶ Thus, any expression of her desire, pursuit of her own interests, or any intervention in the male-dominated order is blocked for her through violence. To prevent her from intervening, society consumes and this way sacrifices a woman.

As mentioned, the unresolved tensions in the symbolic are threatened by feminine desire, and this is what makes a woman a scapegoat of

⁶⁴ Idriss, “Abused by the Patriarchy”, 10.

⁶⁵ Whitford, *Luce Irigaray*, 131.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

ritual violence within society. For Irigaray, as soon as something valuable appears to be coming from the side of women, men want it.⁶⁷ Something valuable, in this sense, is feminine desire and enjoyment. Thus, I would propose that here is where a woman comes in as a rival: something about her desire makes him anxious. “He desires something he lacks: which the other seems to possess.”⁶⁸ This way, I propose that this tension about the desire of the other rises not between the brothers, but rather between him and her, or more specifically, masculine and feminine symbolic positions.

Rivalry does not arise because of the fortuitous convergence of two desires on a single object; rather, the subject desires the object because the rival desires it. In desiring an object, the rival alerts the subject to the desirability of the object. Thus, the rival serves as an essential model for the desires of the subject. But what is important to note here is that feminine desire (a mystery since Freud’s “What does a woman want?”) can be interpreted as not having a particular object of desire; exactly what would make a man anxious, as he does not and cannot know that object of her desire. For Girard, the mimetic quality of desire is most obvious in childhood as children shamelessly want something simply because the other desires it. “The mimetic quality of childhood desire is universally recognized.”⁶⁹ But for adults, this quality of desire is disguised, as a mimesis of desire reveals a lack. “Adult desire is virtually identical, except that (most strikingly in our own culture) the adult is generally ashamed to imitate others for fear of revealing his lack of being.”⁷⁰ I propose that this logic of mimetic desire shows that the feminine desire and enjoyment expose the masculine lack. This lack is what frustrates a man; a lack that a woman, on the contrary, does not seem to possess. Ergo, the society of brothers denies this lack and is obliged to destroy what reminds them of this lack on their side. Feminine desire exposes this lack, and a woman, because of her desire, becomes a rival for a man, and this way, a scapegoat for the society of brothers.

According to Girard, desire is essentially mimetic: it is directed toward an object desired by the other who becomes a model for desire.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 146.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

Feminine desire is marked by, what Bethany Morris calls, partial ‘lack of lack’⁷², as feminine desire is not marked by castration. Following her, I assume that a lack does not define feminine desire and enjoyment, therefore, it is not confined by (the lack of) an object and anxieties to possess it. In this way, her desire, because it does not revolve around the object that would fill the lack, exposes that a masculine position lacks. He cannot come to terms with this lack and thus takes up violence as a solution: as for Girard, mimesis coupled with desire leads automatically to conflict. A woman is a rival because the object of (her) desire is hidden (for a man); it is unattainable and out of reach (for him).

Girard alludes to a scapegoat’s connection to mimetic desire, which I propose is inherent to certain forms of violence, such as sacrificial or systemic. When the desire of the other appears to be something you are lacking, the other becomes a rival, which opens up the venue for violence. I argue that because of the different structures of masculine and feminine desire, this rival in society of brothers is first and foremost a woman – the non-brother. Therefore, a woman can be viewed as a rival for a man: the locus of her desire is elsewhere than his, thus it is out of reach. A mimesis of desire defines this exchange of difference between him (I) and her (Other) as rivalry because he wants yet cannot obtain what she seems to enjoy.

It is helpful to expand on the role of the other’s enjoyment in the acts of systemic violence, as it helps to reveal motivations for this violence that are rooted in unconscious dynamics. The philosopher and psychoanalyst Todd McGowan proposes a critical addition to the reading of systemic violence. He criticizes the common discourse of biopower, in which the will-to-power is portrayed as the most significant motivator for any attempt at destroying the other. For McGowan, “Neither Foucault nor Agamben offers any theory about why the Nazis pursued the Final Solution. For both, the answer is obvious and lies in the determinations of power.”⁷³ However, as McGowan notes, despite Hitler’s claims, the Nazis did not kill the Jews “like lice” at all. They performed horrific experiments on them and submitted them to every kind of brutal humiliation. They killed the Jews as figures of threatening en-

⁷² Bethany Morris, *Sexual Difference, Abjection and Liminal Spaces: A Psychoanalytic Approach to the Abhorrence of the Feminine* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 68.

⁷³ Todd McGowan, *Racist Fantasy* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2021), 161.

joyment, rather than “lice”.⁷⁴ The threatening enjoyment that I argue is taking the symbolic position of the feminine.

In this way, Girard’s ‘sacrifice’ can be understood as systematic violence directed toward an individual or a specific group designated as a scapegoat due to the distinct logic of their desire – a feminine logic. As mentioned earlier, sacrifice represents violence that is justified within society (legal or quasi-legal) and is not accidental, but rather structural, essential for the organization of that particular society, which bases itself around the other as its own opposite. This other is the scapegoat at the center of the ritual, just as the victim is central to systemic violence. Nevertheless, what is particularly intriguing about sacrificial violence and its scapegoat, or systemic violence and its victim, is that it deflects the true cause of and motivation behind that violence.

Through sacrifice, society deflects the true object of this violence. Following McGowan and Irigaray, I would argue that the object, that ritual or systemic violence against women tries to destroy is this enjoyment and desire. Following McGowan, we can trace that systemic violence often interacts with desire. It is evident in honor crimes, and state regimes where a victim’s sexuality is a major concern. The psychoanalytic reading of the sacrificial scapegoat puts forth anxieties over the sexuality of the other as the main cause of its destruction within systemic violence. This connection highlights how feminine desire challenges the masculine-normative order, leading to women’s tragic murders as a warning to other women. The victims of honor crimes are scapegoats as their deaths are quasi-legal because they maintain the social order by suppressing female desire, which poses a threat to the pact of brothers.

For McGowan, the Jewish “obscene enjoyment posed an absolute threat to the German nation and the enjoyment of that nation.”⁷⁵ McGowan said that what needs destroying by the persecutors (by men, by racists and antisemites, or by regime) – systematically, in the case of the Jews or African-Americans – is their enjoyment, indicating that the essence of their ‘evilness’ is none other than their sexuality, thus he underlines that: “we don’t see the sexuality of the killing when we examine only in terms of biopower.”⁷⁶ Therefore, a psychoanalytic perspective on systemic violence is productive and reveals that this sexuality, or rather desire and enjoyment,

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 162.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

which poses a threat, occupies the position of the feminine within the symbolic system – as the feminine is something that disrupts. Following this line of argument, it is possible to see that this enjoyment of the other – the other that is not in the symbolic phallogentric position – is the unconscious object of the persecutors' violence.

Therefore, I propose that in the act of sacrifice, women are often scapegoats, because the object of the persecutor's violence is any sign of feminine desire – that desire that is unattainable for him. Female desire and enjoyment show that she is enjoying despite a man. Her autonomous desire shows she is not lacking; her desire is not focused on this absence, unlike a man's desire. This feminine excess (desire and enjoyment) that constitutes the feminine, for men if encountered, is a new-found discovery, almost a shock, as Irigaray puts it: "a pleasure that perhaps constitutes a discovery for men has long been familiar to women."⁷⁷ What Irigaray calls pleasure here can be seen as feminine enjoyment (*jouissance*). Her desire seems to involve something a man does not have, and exhibits her enjoyment as active and independent. It contradicts a man's active role because it, and thus his symbolic power, is defined by her supposed passivity. Signs of her desire provoke anxieties for a man, suggesting he lacks that, what she enjoys.

Following the developed argument, I hypothesize that ritual violence, or quasi-legal/systemic violence, is an attempt to control and sanction feminine enjoyment. Systemic violence against women, even in such examples as a witch hunt, shows that something about feminine enjoyment is the root cause of societal anxiety. For Morris, witches can be seen as beholding feminine enjoyment.⁷⁸ Women whom the church did not protect were persecuted and burned due to speculations about their involvement in witchcraft.⁷⁹ In one way or another, women who were challenging the expectations of women with their desire (had no children, who were deemed suspiciously smart) were deemed dangerous by society. In such contexts, the church performed ritual violence in early formations of the law, where women were sacrificed by this system to 'protect' society.

"For men, the way they desire (which is crucial also for the rela-

⁷⁷ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1987), 141.

⁷⁸ Morris, *Sexual Difference*, 42.

⁷⁹ *ibid* 53.

tion they form with the object *a* on the side of their partner) is conditioned by the fact that castration marked them by a lack, which also means that their phallic function has been negated”.⁸⁰ As a result of this negation, men are anxious that they might not be able to do it: that their organ might deceive them at the time they will need it most, and that others, especially a female other, might find them powerless.⁸¹ Jacques Lacan points out that the myth of Eve was created by men because of the anxiety felt by this lack. The creation of Eve out of Adam’s rib signifies that only this rib was taken away from him; thus, he lacks only it and nothing more.⁸² However, it could follow that this is where the myth fails: when a man encounters feminine desire. A myth that was mainly created to combat the anxieties felt over the feminine. The anxieties felt over facing the lack by encountering the feminine are unconscious; the anxiety is signified into the consciousness and thus dealt with via violence. The anxiety felt over his own lack motivates the quest to reclaim his symbolic power through the act of violence.

Systemic violence aimed at women targets the feminine, to eliminate the disorder it signifies for the symbolic masculine order, and asserts the symbolic power that feminine desire and enjoyment challenge. Feminine desire is where the symbolic power is contested by confronting its lack.

The Polluting Feminine: Sacrifice and the Symbolic Order

As previously argued, a woman’s uncontained sexuality is dangerous to the man, to the phallic symbolic order, and thus, to society. Her sexual appetites, if not controlled, pose a threat to society. Therefore, her desire is kept intact, and her body is heavily policed. “There is nothing more spiritual than female sexuality”⁸³, Irigaray writes, and yet, the body, for a woman, and consequently, her sexuality, has been deprived of its spiritual dimension. Following Irigaray, female sexuality, deprived of the spiritual/symbolic dimension, takes up a lower function and is rendered

⁸⁰ Salecl, *On Anxiety*, 49.

⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁸² Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX, Encore, 1972–1973*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 10.

⁸³ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 57.

more nature-like, more bestial. Bram Dijkstra, who analyzed the ‘evilness’ of femininity by researching the female vampire, states that “racial, sexual, and political prejudices converged during the Middle Ages to make the sexual woman into one of the most terrifying human monsters of all time”.⁸⁴ Such example illustrates that female sexuality mirrors the anxieties regarding feminine desire, shaping it as fundamentally dangerous for society, a society that is constituted by the pact between brothers.

An evident reduction of a woman to either purity or animality can be seen. Irigaray offers a compelling rift on this divide, arguing that humankind has been divided into two functions, and that one sex takes over from the other the unwanted functions: “Humankind has divided itself into two functions, two tasks, and two kinds. Woman has given up her kind under the threat of death. Man has too, but in a very different way”.⁸⁵ Due to this division, Irigaray argues that only relationships between men have been spiritualized, as only male sexuality has a place in the symbolic. I interpret Irigaray’s notion of the spiritual as the symbolic, viewing the masculine (sexuality) as phallic symbolic order. Due to this division of functions, the woman is seen as more nature-like, bestial, and corporeal (monstrous), and the man as more human and rational. Therefore, he is associated with the spiritual, or the symbolic. In contrast, women are relegated to guarding all that is considered abject. Clean and proper masculine, which serves as the normative standard (a more accurate reflection of God), comes in contrast with the feminine as his dirty mirror-opposite – the non-spiritual, para-symbolic, dis-orderly.

Irigaray claims that the spiritualization or symbolic representation of the feminine in the spiritual discourse is essential to avoid the reduction of women to animality and dependence. I want to echo Irigaray’s thought by stating that the feminine has been deprived of a spiritual or, as I claim, symbolic dimension: it has been reduced to a lower function, existing not by its own right, but according to the masculine symbolic principle. Instead of asserting another logic of symbolization, the feminine is abjected, the feminine as it does not present itself in its own right, enters the phallic symbolic order as a glitch, as a collapsed meaning, a non-meaning. The feminine creates a glitch in the symbolic order,

⁸⁴ Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 253.

⁸⁵ Irigaray, “Divine Women”, 11.

as it is not a part of it; it is the abject to that phallic order. Therefore, the abject feminine is where symbolic meaning collapses, as the feminine is another order – a dis-order *par excellence*. However, the feminine is symbolized and materialized according to masculine symbolic principle, and this way takes up a lower function. The feminine that carries this threatening desire and enjoyment is a para-symbolic position. I claim that it is not a particular woman that the violence targets, it is this uncontained and unsymbolized force of the feminine that threatens to destabilize the symbolic order.

This is where Irigaray's model of duality alludes to the abject of Kristeva: the abject, instead of being a form of otherness, serves as a constant reminder of what should be expelled from "the self's clean and proper body"⁸⁶. This remainder of what is exiled from the clean and proper body (man) is the dirty and improper (woman). It is evident that a certain element of contamination appears when talking about the feminine as abject, and I want to propose that this connection opens up an approach to violence against women as a certain cleansing mechanism. This anxiety of contamination is what Kristeva called 'the return of the abject'. The encounter with the feminine as abject is unconscious. This encounter is materialized through sacrifice, which conveys the logic of pollution and cleansing. The unconscious threat of destabilizing feminine manifests as anxiety. This anxiety finds a substitute object and materializes the unconscious threat through violence. In this way, violence purifies from the threat and materializes it. Kristeva's concept of the abject correlates with Girard's view of ritualized violence as a protective and cleansing force against contagion, which, I suggest, represents the feminine.

Following Irigaray, it is evident that religion, functioning as a societal organization, has not spiritualized female sexuality but rather rendered it dark, dirty, and dangerous. In such a way, violence enters as a form of purification, not only to society as a whole but to individual women: the systemic violence against women is what cleanses women of their sins/desires/deviation. Thus, ascribing a woman to normative categories, without her own predicaments of her sexuality (enjoyment and desire), she, or rather the feminine that implies another independent logic from that of the phallic symbolic one, becomes stupid, deaf, senseless. Considering that this encounter with the feminine is realized only

⁸⁶ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 78.

unconsciously, a dangerous female sexuality makes meaning of this abject feminine and serves as a substitute for the persisting anxieties of men. She is sacrificed because this is how he deals with the content of his unconscious and his anxieties over the feminine destabilization. This is also the role of the scapegoat in society: it makes meaning from the abject feminine and contains its threat through violence.

Girard links purity and contamination within ritual violence, stating that concepts such as impurity and contagion translate human relations into material terms and provide a sort of camouflage – a camouflage from the unconscious. The encounter with the feminine is realized in the unconscious; this way, the scapegoat victim serves as a substitute. Sacrifice channels anxiety over the destabilizing feminine. The framework of sacrifice translates this unconscious threat of the abject feminine into material terms. The abject feminine disrupts meaning in the phallic order. Sacrifice reconstitutes that meaning through violence and its distinctions.

Otherwise, the abject feminine would threaten to annihilate and disturb the phallic order by proposing another logic of signification. Nevertheless, when the collapsed meaning of the abject feminine is materialized, the glitch in meaning is stopped. The materialized threat, in any form of other, contains within meaning this force of the feminine destabilization, and indicates what to do with this threat – we annihilate it, we erase it. Perhaps we do cling to this “threat”, because we need to stabilize the order in which we exist; otherwise, the structural distinctions posed by it, and us with it, cease to be.

In this way, this threat containing the feminine is made to be sacrificed for the sake of stability and order in society. This threat that contains the abject feminine is what we detect in the scapegoat of sacrifice. The feminine implies a certain dis-order, or non-order, as it always escapes and disturbs the phallic order and the symbolic realm as an abject – a collapsed meaning. The scapegoat victim of violence is what materializes the unconscious threat of the feminine. The symbolic order needs to be protected by containing this threat of the feminine, and organizing the society of the normals around this non-normal threat. The threat becomes actualized in the symbolic when violence perpetually and continuously inaugurates it into being; society calls for this threat to release the tensions phallic symbolic order holds for the unsymbolized feminine dis-order. Just as the uncontainable abject (feminine) must be pushed

from the clean and proper (masculine) subject, so too must the disturbing logic of the feminine be expelled from society; and this is where the sacrifice of the scapegoat enters society as a structure that keeps it balanced, clean and proper.

Therefore, I claim that the structure of sacrifice illustrates the tension between the symbolic order, which is the masculine, and the disruption or glitch in that order, the abject dis-order that is the feminine. Thus, sacrifice can be viewed as a structure of violence that addresses the unconscious threat posed by the unsymbolized feminine to the symbolic masculine order. The scapegoat that stands in for and materializes the abject feminine is prone to be sacrificed in ritual violence to prevent the abject feminine content that threatens to contaminate the normative by re-entering.

As the feminine does not exist as an independent logic from the phallic one, the feminine becomes 'abjected', and all that through which we encounter the abject feminine is denounced as evil and dangerous. The scapegoat, the victim of systemic violence, materializes the unconscious threat of the feminine. Through this framework, violence materializes the unconscious threat, perpetually and continuously inaugurating it to being: society calls for this threat to release the tensions the phallic symbolic order holds for the unsymbolized feminine dis-order.

If the boundary between the normative (phallic order) and non-normative (feminine dis-order) is clear, all threats can be evaded through ritual purification (systemic violence). However, if the ritual no longer exists, its clearly formulated distinctions (normative-masculine-prosecutor vs. non-normative-feminine-scapegoat) also collapse. The stakes of this inquiry extend as far as the constitutive quality(s) of ritual sacrifice for the structure of modern society itself, and a lingering question of if/how the horizon of that societal structure might look different without such a system of violence?

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>.

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

General Information

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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

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