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Academic Philosophy in Malta



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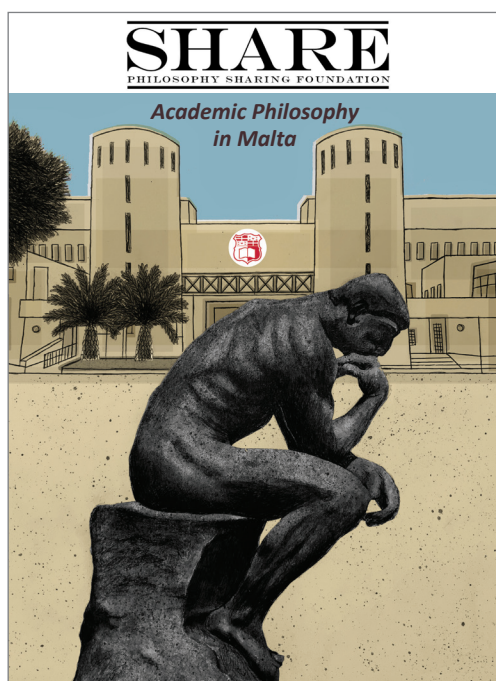
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SHARE MAGAZINE

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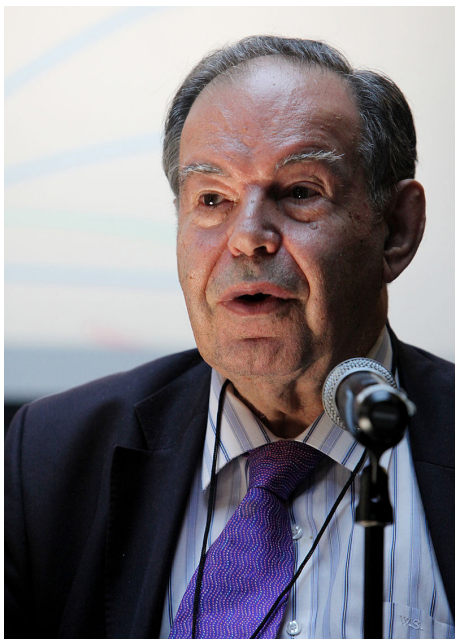
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Editorial

With a land size of just 316 km² and a population that does not exceed half a million, the Maltese Archipelago is one of the smallest countries in the world. Throughout its history, Malta has always formed part of a Mediterranean Empire or part of a Kingdom until Charles V handed the islands to the Knights of Saint John, a Roman Catholic Order, which were followed by 268 years of uninterrupted rule (1530-1798). The Knights invested considerably in the fortification of the islands and influenced the architectural style of many buildings and cities. However, in the process, Malta lost out to the developments of revolutionary intellectualism relating to the periods of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Napoleon put an end to the rule of the Order in Malta in 1798 but his forces were expelled two years later before the islands were ceded to British colonial rule for another 164 years (1800-1964). Overshadowing the lack of political voice and the struggle for Maltese identity, was the overbearing influence of the Catholic Church which left a significant mark on any new-born Maltese intellectual movements.

Despite such constraining forces, Malta did produce two giant philosophers of international stature. The most recognized is Edward de Bono (1933-2021) who was born and educated in Malta before he moved to Oxford and pursued a master's degree in psychology. He is known worldwide for having originated the concept of lateral thinking. He has written 85 books with translations in 46 languages.



Edward de Bono



Peter Serracino Inglott

Another intellectual giant in philosophy was Rev. Professor Peter Serracino Inglott (1936 – 2012) whose in-depth study of the philosophy of language and linguistic analysis formed the basis of his other philosophical reflections. In his renowned publication *Peopled Silence*, Serracino Inglott claims that the sole purpose of philosophy is to understand and explain the puzzling features of the verbal interplay between human beings.

SHARE Magazine in its 19th edition felt inspired to explore further the possible contributions that Maltese philosophers could make on the international scene with their ongoing research and publications. SHARE invited all local philosophy academics teaching at the University of Malta and post-secondary education to introduce their main research activities in philosophy or special subject areas of interest. In the process, SHARE was curious to learn what were the most prevalent themes in the study of local philosophy and whether any particular focus could serve as a link to other international movements and traditions.

The feature on academic philosophy in part is divided into two parts. The first part is a contribution from six academic philosophers on their research activities while the second part of the feature highlights specific areas of interest from articles contributed by seven other academic philosophers.

Research Activities

Claude Mangion, a professor of philosophy and head of the philosophy department at the University of Malta, proposes a number of theses from his research on the philosophy of communication where he develops an analysis of communication beyond the simple linguistic mode of human interaction. From Mangion's research, one appreciates the complexity involved in communication which requires that certain necessary and sufficient conditions be met so as to claim that a communicative act has occurred.

Kurt Borg, a lecturer in public policy, views philosophy as an activity, a way of life and an attitude. Influenced primarily by Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, Borg studies the ethics and politics of trauma narratives within institutional settings. Borg strongly believes that philosophy must be engaged with current contemporary issues, particularly those of a social and political nature. He has published a number of papers in this regard.

François Zammit who works in the education sector, conducts ongoing research in the field of political philosophy and political economy. His specific focus lies mainly on how neoliberal policies in modern politics and economics are redefining all aspects of human lives. He also looks into how new technologies are supporting and expanding neoliberal theories and policies within contemporary societies.

Robert Farrugia is a teacher and also a doctoral candidate whose main interests lie in the intersections between phenomenology, existentialism, perception, metaphysics, psychology, religion, and ethics. His research centers on what it means to be truly an individual. Through his research, he argues for the thesis that humans can become genuine and authentic individuals only when they get in touch with their personal uniqueness and interiority.

Clive Zammit, a senior lecturer at the University of Malta, conducts various experiential in experiential phenomenology. He proposes a meditative encounter with the night sky to challenge common-sense assumptions that the sense of sight requires a vision to function. Zammit maintains that such phenomenological experiences could offer opportunities for philosophical engagement with the question of being that goes beyond the notion of substance as defined by Western thought.

Dominic Garcia, a philosophy teacher at the Higher Secondary has created software that aims to present another way of doing ethics without limiting or categorizing events of an ethical nature as right or wrong. The software, based on a concept that Garcia coined as hypertextethics, seeks to transform the standard unilateral style of communication which is based on a rigid expression of chronological and orderly styles. Garcia believes that the concept of

hypertextuality can set the stage for an unrestricted self and an authentic humanity that will eventually become the post humanistic way of doing justice.

Special Areas of Interest

Joe Friggieri, a professor of philosophy at the University of Malta, clearly indicates in his article that the teaching and learning of history is an important subject in the study of truth in philosophy. The truth in history depends to a certain extent on trust in the authority of historical experts, particularly when they construct and interpret narratives from available sources. Friggieri expresses concern when postmodern doubts are sown on historical studies portraying them as unreliable sources of knowledge and lacking in objectivity.

Niki Young, a lecturer in philosophy at the University of Malta, explores one of his philosophical interests in the metaphysics of continental thought by revisiting Matthew Calcarco's approaches to the understanding of human/animal relations. Young proposes that the way forward is to think about the common ground that connects humans to animals which must ultimately also be extended to the various living and non-living beings.

Sandra Dingli, a professor at the University of Malta, has set up the Edward de Bono Institute for Creative Thinking and Innovation in collaboration with Professor Edward de Bono in 1992. In her article which focuses on her research interests in creativity, she discusses the views of various philosophers on the subject before attempting to define what creativity is. While she subscribes to Boden's views that creativity involves originality, surprise, and positive values, she raises awareness that creativity has also a dark side which could be destructive or used in socially unacceptable ways.

Duncan Sant, a philosophy teacher at De La Salle College, asserts that the Cartesian dualistic principle of the body and mind can be splendidly mirrored in the virtual world of the gamer. Furthermore, he proposes that the immersed gamer embodies the absurdist perspective of Albert Camus on human experience. He concludes that the immersed gamer is akin to the absurd hero who struggles through life and exists to the full potential of what life can offer.

Robert Govus, an academic at the University of Malta, Junior College, with research interests in virtue ethics and Iris Murdoch presents Murdoch's understanding of what the virtuous life consists of. He refers to the process of unselfing which involves the struggle against the ego in the rejection of its desires. By drawing on a paradigm taken from Murdoch's essay The Idea of Perfection and making parallel observations with Plato's Allegory of the Cave, Govus strongly makes the point of how the concept of unselfing is linked to moral philosophy.

David Vella, a philosophy teacher at St. Edwards College, considers the relationship between the experience of the limit and the experience of the stranger as one of the most prevalent themes in various branches of 20th and 21st-century philosophy. Limit experiences refer to foreign thoughts that pervade self-reality and make us incapable of being ourselves. The stranger experience, on the other hand, attests to an event of hospitality where faith and love open up oneself to other persons. Although the relationship between these two phenomena has been explored by thinkers such as Levinas, Derrida and Caputo, Vella feels that such a relationship must focus on greater depth in the reconciliation of opposing phenomena.

Keith Pisani, a philosophy teacher at St. Aloysius College, feels intrigued from his teaching experiences with questions

that are often raised on the scope of studying philosophy. Pisani finds standard answers such as the acquisition of general critical thinking skill sets to be unsatisfactory. He recommends that philosophy should be rather seen as an umbrella of subjects that holds various branches of inquiry together. Hence, the value of philosophy comes to depend on the kind of inquiries one pursues.

From this feature, one can perhaps appreciate that our local academic philosophers share a rich diversity of interest in philosophical subjects. Apart from the leading influence of De Bono's thoughts on creative thinking and Serracino Inglott's thoughts on the philosophy of language, local philosophy academics contribute to the rich domains of phenomenology, metaphysics, ethics, politics, and epistemology.

The Other Articles at a Glance

Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek, a Polish utilitarian philosopher from the University of Lodz, is interviewed by Ian Rizzo with some questions focusing on her special areas of interest – utilitarianism, effective altruism and the good life. She will be the guest speaker for the Annual Philosophy Lecture of the Foundation to be held on the 1st of June with the theme – The Good Life in Ancient and Current Philosophy.

Matt Qvortrup provides an insightful appreciation of the Irish Born British politician Edmund Burke who was known for his denunciation of the French Revolution. Qvortrup argues that Burke was much more of a fresh thinker and a great deal more libertarian and democratic than what his conservative image might have suggested. His understanding of aesthetic feelings led to his pioneering account of the sublime that revolutionized aesthetic theory. Immanuel Kant was one of the first Continental philosophers to recognize Burke's contribution to aesthetic philosophy.

Neb Kujundzic, seeks to understand why the sense of touch seems to have been overlooked in philosophy when scientific evidence points to the calming influence and the reduction of stress it can have on people - apart also from the increased trust and cooperation it can lead to. While arguing for more philosophical research on this subject, Kujundzic argues that the sense of touch ought to be more fully integrated within future models of ethics.

Thomas O. Scarborough argues that the concept of holism must leap beyond the standard definition that views holism as an interconnection of parts and embrace a wider understanding of how the related elements come into union, fusion, or coalescence. Once the whole is broken into parts, our description of things becomes fragmented and drops to a level fundamentally different from the whole. From such an analysis, Scarborough derives various principles and applies them to the understanding of the world.

Stephen G. O'Kane, in referring to the articles on the future of feminism that appeared in the previous issue of SHARE 18, points out a factor that has not been mentioned - the huge impact that artificial intelligence and gene editing will be having on the arguments about sex and gender. Questions around gender will become more complex as both AI and gene editing extend themselves into biological sex. He reminds us, that with such technological advances, there always exists the possibility in the future whereby gender or sex becomes a consumer choice like any other commodified experience.

Ian Rizzo provides a review on Thomas O. Scarborough's book *Everything, Briefly: A Postmodern Philosophy*. The review commends the author on his attempt to reconcile divergent views in philosophy through a concept that he originates as the philosophy of relations. Based on the understanding of a universe with a boundless expanse and supported by seamless interwoven webs of relationship, the author devises ten ethical maxims and applies them across the public domain.

Luke Fenech, provides a review on the book edited by Kurt Borg and Robert Farrugia *Xi T'fisser Tkun Bniedem?* (What does it mean to be a human?) In this book, the editors engage in conversation with eleven academics from various fields to answer the fundamental question of what it means to be human. The reviewer considers this publication to provide insightful knowledge on how to broaden and rethink one's understanding of humanity.

My Research in the Philosophy of Communication

By Claude Mangion



2 Increased communicative modalities do not imply the superiority of any species. Each species has its own naturally given mode of communication and each is incredible in its own right. It is only when comparisons are introduced that there is a tendency to place humans at the top of the evolutionary ladder on account of their dominant mode of communication in what turns out to be a kind of linguistic speciesism. While it is true that language has enabled humans to achieve complex forms

of social organisation, great works of art, incredible technological achievements, it has also contributed to a decline in our humane-ness: with language we have lost our species feeling or in Marxist terms, our species-consciousness, as can be seen in the relative ease with which humans kill each other. Few other species in the animal kingdom kill their own kind.

My main area of research is in contemporary western philosophy from both analytic and continental perspectives. In particular, I focus on the philosophy of communication, film as philosophy, the problem of evil, and I am now interested in the return to realism that has characterized contemporary philosophy in the writings of Meillassoux, Harman and Badiou. I have published *Philosophical Approaches to Communication* (2011) and am currently working on my second book, also on communication. My most recent publications are 'On the Communicative Intent in Augustine's Confessions' (2022), 'On Quentin Meillassoux and the Problem of Evil' (2020) and 'Nietzsche's Philosophy of Communication' (2016).

In this article, I will introduce a number of key themes in the philosophy of communication proposing nine theses.

1 All organic things communicate. By organic I refer to plants, animals, and humans. What the various beings show is that there are degrees of sophistication and complexity in terms of communicative modalities. Some beings communicate more than others. Two points need to be kept in mind:

- a) some argue that inorganic material also communicates in that the release of energy is a form of communication; and
- b) this thesis is not including other non-organic forms of communication such as computer technology.

3 The necessary conditions for communication to occur are:

- a) The need for signs and a system: in other words, there must be something to produce signs. Animals and humans have a nervous system connected with their sensor apparatus that enables them to produce signs. Saussure distinguishes between 'langue' and 'parole' to distinguish between the actualization of speech (parole) and the mechanism then enables this speech to be generated (langue).
- b) Signs are meaningful to someone or something; meaningful signs are opposed to noise which is defined as the disruption of signs (it could be physical noise as when a jackhammer disrupts your conversation or psychological as when you daydream during a lecture). For there to be communication there must be something meaningful to communicate to someone or something else.

c) Communication is always directed at an-other whether real or implied. It entails that the other understands the meaning and responds to those signs. If someone talks to you, but you ignore them, then unless the speaker recognizes your intention to ignore them, communication did not occur, and this is usually described as a communication breakdown. It can also happen that the other misunderstands or misinterprets the signs; this can occur for any number of reasons: the other might not know well the language you are using or hold a grudge against you and so misinterprets what you say. It is in the nature of communicative interaction that it is not always guaranteed to succeed; in the case of vegetal and animal beings, on account of their natural being, there is less misunderstanding or misinterpretation. With the human linguistic form of communication, these are always possible and part of the nature of linguistic communication.

4 Communication is always contextual or situated:

- a) Signs always circulate within a context or in the case of humans, within a culture. The linguistic is always embedded in the non-linguistic
- b) A culture is a way of life: it is the world of meaningful relations, a world of significance. The world has a meaning independently of language: for e.g., going to the post office is a meaningful activity.
- c) This shows the redundancy of the linear theory of communication that explains communication in abstraction from the context within which participants communicate.

5 Communication is both integrative and interactive. Interaction explains the dynamic of communication between participants within a context; it accounts for communication as it unfolds in the present. Integration explains the way participants are connected or belong to a context that is inherited, that comes down to us, as custom and tradition. Communication here shows its connection with the past. Carey describes this aspect as the ritualized model of communication.

6 Communication can be verbal, non-verbal or both simultaneously:

- a) plants and animals communicate non-verbally, while humans communicate both non-verbally and verbally. What is quite fascinating is linguistic meaning i.e., how words as sounds (spoken) or a script acquire a meaning.

b) the difference between animal and human linguistic communication is that human linguistic communication is (i) has different temporal modalities (past-present-future), (ii) is learnt (not instinctive), (iii) is performative (not reactive) and (iv) is open-ended, creative (on account of the syntax).

c) human non-verbal communication is vast: music, food, clothing, movies, and advertising (among others) are all communicative; they say something about us as persons or about our cultural values.

7 Linguistic and non-linguistic communication is governed by conventionally formulated codes:

- a) a code is defined as agreed upon rules; they are created by a society for different reasons. They include traffic codes to enable smooth traffic flows, codes of etiquette which might indicate social status, and linguistic codes, which enable a shared or common meaning of words for communicative purposes.
- b) that might require interpretation. Stuart Hall's theory of codes offers three ways of understanding the way codes of communication can be interpreted as (a) dominant (b) negotiated and (c) resisted.

8 Linguistic and non-linguistic communication can be intentional and non-intentional:

- a) intentionality in linguistic communication can be explained in terms of Austin's speech act theory as the force of human utterances i.e., how one intended to use their utterance (as a warning, as a threat, as an ironic remark).
- b) intentionality in non-linguistic communication occurs when codes are flouted to send a particular message, for e.g., going to a wedding in shorts and sandals so as to communicate your anti-wedding revolutionary thinking.

9 Communicative acts fulfil three purposes:

- a) *representational*: they describe or picture situations in the world.
- b) *expressive*: they present or disclose ourselves, our identity.
- c) *relational*: they establish our relations with others, both in terms of appropriate behaviour as well as our ethical relations.

Claude Mangion is Professor of Philosophy and Head of Department of Philosophy at the University of Malta.

My Research in Politics and Ethics: Philosophy as a Way of Life

By Kurt Borg



consolations) to reading and writing exercises (think of the *hupomnemata*). Moreover, such *techniques of the self*, had a fundamental embodied dimension too: they included conversing, spending time with friends, walking, fasting and other forms of self-restraint. Importantly, this conception of philosophy also has a necessarily social role, which includes political activity in a broad sense. Philosophy, understood in this way, is a manner in which one conducts one's life until it comes to an end. To philosophize, ultimately, is to learn to die, as Plato has Socrates say in the *Phaedo*, a formulation that resurfaces again in

My main philosophical interests revolve around politics and ethics, which I approach from a point of view informed by poststructuralism and contemporary continental philosophy. My outlook towards philosophy considers philosophy as a *critical practice* that is necessarily interdisciplinary. For this reason, my teaching uses philosophy in a range of academic disciplines, such as politics, public policy, medical sociology, and disability studies. Teaching in these areas allows me to bring philosophy in dialogue with a diversity of disciplines, as well as ensuring that philosophy responds to contemporary socio-political realities.

My philosophical practice centers around the idea that philosophy is less about rigorous argumentation or the construction of explanatory theories, and more of a doing, an activity, a way of life and an attitude. Philosophy, as I understand it, shapes one's character and is embodied as one's ethos. I am not saying anything new here – according to scholars such as Pierre Hadot, this *spirit* of philosophy as a way of life (rather than a solely academic endeavor) was dominant in antiquity and has remained present in different forms in modern writers and thinkers such as Montaigne, Spinoza Nietzsche, and Foucault. Hadot, extending Ignatius of Loyola's beyond its Christian context, characterizes philosophy as a series of *spiritual exercises*. Such exercises range from meditations (on death or suffering) to consolations (think of Boethius's, Seneca's, or Cicero's

the work of Cicero and Montaigne, as well as contemporary thinkers such as Cornel West and Simon Critchley.

This is the spirit that led me to study philosophy and that still guides my thinking. I wanted to learn philosophy, and continue to do so, simply to explore ways of dealing with myself, those around me, and the world at large. I do philosophy *for its own sake*, as well as *for my sake*. My undergraduate studies in philosophy enabled me to familiarize myself with major figures, debates, and ideas in the history of philosophy. To grapple with staple ideas in the canon of philosophy is a challenge and a pleasure, be it spending time with Anselm's ontological argument for the existence of God, navigating Kant's transcendental idealism, or exploring what Nietzsche meant by will to power.

With time, my interest narrowed down to contemporary continental thought, particularly the work of the 20th century French philosopher Michel Foucault. I became enamored with Foucault's work; first with his later writings, lectures and interviews on ethics and practices of the self, then systematically making my way through his earlier books, especially *Discipline and Punish* and the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*. Foucault's work offered me a vocabulary with which to describe matters such as identity, social power, and political resistance. I was particularly drawn to Foucault's account of how power functions in modern

Western societies, how disciplinary power and biopolitics impacts most realms of our life, and how identity categories impact people's experiences. My postgraduate research was dedicated entirely to Foucault's work, specifically on the relation between his middle work on power and his later work on ethics. This allowed me to conduct close and detailed readings of Foucault's texts. Related to this work, I published my first journal article on Foucault, titled "Conducting critique: Reconsidering Foucault's engagement with the question of the subject" (2015).

Once I finished my MA, I wanted to further expand my 'knowledge base' to explore thinkers beyond Foucault, as well as strands of thought that explore similar socio-political matters from other theoretical frameworks. This process of voracious and enthusiastic reading – which is one true joy that I keep associating with philosophy as a way of life – led me to learn more about feminist and queer theory, particularly the work of Judith Butler, who I co-interviewed "The CounterText Interview: Judith Butler" (2017, with Aaron Aquilina). Slowly, a project started taking shape in my mind that led me to enroll on an interdisciplinary PhD course, which allowed me to combine my philosophical interests with sociological thought and contemporary politics.

For my PhD research, I studied the ethics and politics of trauma narratives. Practices of narrating one's life (or a part of it) interest me, especially in view of contemporary notions of subjectivity, and how social norms and discourses impact these practices. I was particularly interested in how experiences of trauma impact the practice of self-narration. Moreover, rather than literary or autobiographical accounts of trauma, I wanted to study how trauma is narrated within institutional settings. Traumatized individuals, for example sexual violence survivors or asylum seekers, encounter a variety of institutions, including psychotherapeutic settings, legal institutions such as the courts, and other state institutions. Inspired and influenced by the work of Foucault and Butler, I engaged with questions such as: how do institutional settings impact how trauma is narrated? In what way do dominant norms and conceptions of the human (propagated by the psychological sciences, for example) impact the narration of trauma? How must a trauma survivor (ex: a survivor of sexual violence) narrate their trauma in order for their narrative to be more favorably received by institutions? What characteristics of trauma narratives (ex: aspects of their form or content) make them harder for institutions to believe them? How can trauma stories function politically as acts of subversion and resistance?

Related to this work, I published a number of articles and book chapters, such as "Narrating trauma: Judith Butler on narrative coherence and the politics of self-narration" (2018) and "Foucault, the politics of ourselves, and the subversive truth-telling of trauma: Survivors as parrhesiasts" (2020).

Beyond the doctoral study, this research also led me to consider narratives of illness and disability (which, too, may have traumatic dimensions) from a similar theoretical framework informed by poststructuralism, narrative selfhood theories, feminist theory and critical disability studies. This gave a more interdisciplinary flavor to my work, which combined theoretical inquiry with social research methods, particularly narrative methods, and discourse analysis (where Foucault's work is a principal influence). Such interdisciplinarity and the ability to utilize philosophical ideas beyond the 'discipline' of philosophy made me appreciate the critical power that philosophy has to inform debates across multiple fields of study. It also reminded me of the importance to ensure that philosophy is 'out there' in the world, 'on the ground,' immersed in and engaged with current contemporary issues, particularly of a social and political nature. Some of my publications related to this work include "Narrating disability, trauma and pain: The doing and undoing of the self in language" (2018) and "Unpretentious education: A Foucaultian study of inclusive education in Malta" (2021, co-authored with Georgette Bajada and Anne-Marie Callus).

Ultimately, what combines most of my research and academic interests is politics, broadly construed. This ranges from analyzing institutional political structures locally and internationally, to critically interrogating processes and implications of policy-making, to the study of social movements and practices of resistance. I also lecture on the relation between ethics and politics, as well as the ethical standards that should be demanded of politicians in democratic societies. In the realm of political thought and theory, I am interested in the meanings and histories of core political concepts, without which we cannot start to think about politics. I have in mind here concepts and notions such as power, ideologies, citizenship, identity, human rights, freedom, resistance, and democracy. Finally, I am interested in the critical thought and praxis of left-wing political parties and social movements that seek to overcome neoliberal hegemony, social injustices, and violence around the world.

Kurt Borg is Lecturer in the Department of Public Policy at the University of Malta. He holds a doctorate in Philosophy and Humanistic Studies from Staffordshire University.

My Research in the Political Thought of Neoliberalism

By François Zammit



Over the years I have delivered courses linked to philosophy of mind, philosophy of technology, education, and political philosophy. I have also participated in numerous conferences and forums linked to these fields and others like aesthetics and ethics. As an individual I find myself unable to restrict my interests to a few categories and this is also reflected in my studies and research.

Although I am working in an academic environment and producing work mostly targeted towards an academic audience, I still believe that philosophy is about life, and therefore it should go beyond books and libraries. I practice this vision in two ways, by participating in initiatives that help in the dissemination of philosophy in non-academic circles, and by focusing my research on philosophical topics that are related to phenomena that have an impact on our daily lives or lived experiences. This is the primary motivation that has led me to direct my research towards the field of political philosophy.

My current research revolves around my doctoral studies which are in the field of political philosophy, and political

economy. The aim is to use a conceptual framework based on works in economic theology, political theology, biopolitics, and political ontology to analyze and critique neoliberal thought, and policies.

My departure starts from reading the theories and publications of some of the main figures that have shaped neoliberal economic policy, theorists such as Milton Friedman, or Friedrich August Hayek, whose work is based on the notion of the free market as formulated by Adam Smith. In these authors the dominant paradigm is the belief that there should be no interference in the self-regulating market in which individuals participate. For neoliberal thinkers, the free market, and therefore the economy, should be prioritized over everything else, because it is only through the free activity of the market, and its ability to self-regulate, that individuals can fulfil their potential and take care of themselves. Thus, the main principle in neoliberal politics is to have a politics that does not interfere or try to regulate the market and allows the mechanisms of the market to function independently.

This approach ensures a maximization of individual economic freedom and provides the general prosperity of the state.

The first part of my research focuses on interpreting neoliberal trust in market mechanisms as a form of religious thinking. The market as a self-regulating entity that exists separately from its participants is a form of metaphysical thinking that ascribes cosmological qualities to the market. Furthermore, my research shows how concepts like 'The Invisible Hand' are theological concepts that rely on the same type of religious thinking required in traditional forms of religion. This implies that neoliberal market thought is a form of secularized religious concept like others identified in the field of political theology.

Faith plays a central role in the functioning of a neoliberal economic model. Some forms of faith are founded on a rationalized trust in institutions, such as the faith in money because they are certified and backed by central banks. However, blind faith in market dynamics and mechanisms also exists, such as what we experienced with the rise and downfall of the cryptocurrencies and NFT markets. Similarly, a blind faith that pervades most contemporary western political and economic ideologues is the myth of trickle-down economics, even though experience shows that this does not work.

A major component of my research is to identify and analyze the concept of freedom proposed and developed by neoliberal thinkers and their political disciples. This analysis uncovers the paradoxical nature of neoliberal theories which reduce freedom to economic freedom and thus willfully disregarding, and even antagonizing, other forms of freedom such as civic freedom. Historically this has led neoliberal ideologues to ally themselves with authoritarian regimes such as Pinochet in Chile. Neoliberal policies also propose anti-democratic initiatives to curtail society's influence and its attempts to control the effects of market driven economics.

In transforming itself into a political project, neoliberal thought gives primacy to the market and everything else is subsidiary to it. Politics is an epiphenomenon of economics, reducing human life to an economic activity or enterprise. In



this light, the value of human life is redefined in terms of human capital and every individual is responsible for their own success as individualized beings who are competing with everyone else. As Margaret Thatcher declared in a 1987 interview, 'who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families, and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first.' This explains the crisis of the political which has lost its purpose of providing a good life to its citizens and members.

Neoliberal politics redefines human life. The redefinition of all aspects of life into economic terms has real life consequences that can be detrimental to individuals and society alike. It is therefore the purpose of my research to look into the intersectionality between economics, politics, and human life.

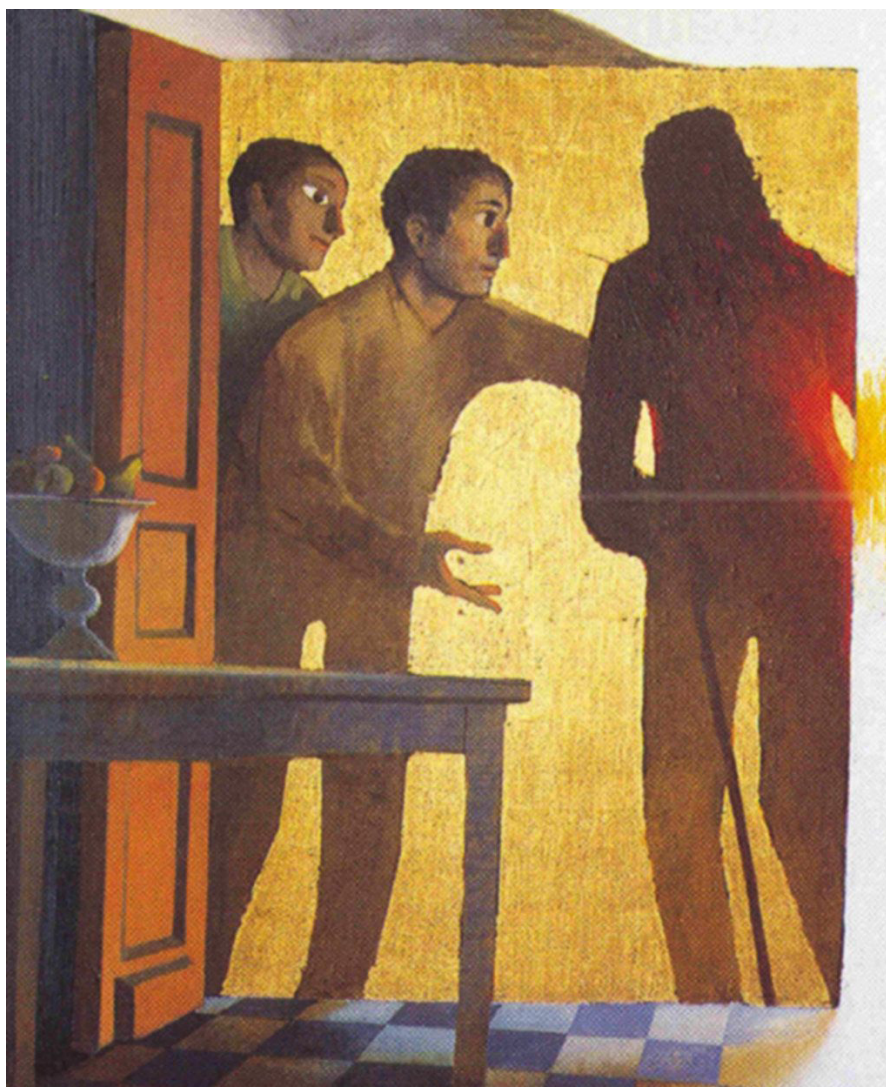
As an added dimension, I also delve into the role of new technologies in how they support and expand the principles and paradigms created by neoliberal theories and policies. We can see this in the promulgation of business models that revolve around the use of apps, such as ride apps or food delivery apps, which form the epicenter of the gig economy in which the individual is fully transformed from employee to an entrepreneur of the self or as service providers. Furthermore, there is also the phenomenon of datafication of society, whereby all individuals are transformed into digital assets because they produce data which is a limitless commodity.

The aim of my work is to show how economic thought is also political thought and to show how economic decisions have deep seated consequences that affect the very core of human life.

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My Research in the Phenomenology of Interiority and Encounter

by Robert Farrugia



At some point in the last year of my bachelor's degree in philosophy, it became clear to me that phenomenology is the area that I wanted to specialize in. Since then, I graduated with an M.A. in Contemporary Western Philosophy, attended a summer school in Phenomenology and Philosophy of Mind at the University of Copenhagen, and published articles in international journals. I have also recently presented parts of my doctoral research at the Sorbonne University, in Paris, and the Catholic University of Portugal, in Porto, where I delved into the philosophy of interiority, transformation and community by working through Michel Henry's phenomenology of life, world, and truth.

But why phenomenology, and what is it anyway? In its most basic sense, phenomenology is the study of appearance (phenomenon). More specifically, it studies *the way* things show themselves to us when we encounter them and how their meaning is revealed in our conscious experience. These include all lived experiences, such as joy, suffering, desires, hopes, truth, imagination, belief, understanding, and the like, which have their own particular way of showing themselves to us. Phenomenology is precisely aimed at enriching our lives by 'including' all forms of experiences – as opposed to the typical 'excluding' arrogant attitude of the hyper-rational and hyper-scientific projects – as being all worthy of our attention.

By hindsight, I could say that it was this openness and wider sense of the lived experience that got me lured into phenomenology. During my master's degree, I had decided to focus my research on its founder, Edmund Husserl, who at the dawning of the 20th century devised this school of thought with the aim of salvaging the abundance of experience from being reduced and impoverished by the rise of scientism and naturalism. His project was immediately taken up by his own students and colleagues, eventually spreading like wildfire across Germany, France, and the rest of Europe, becoming one of the chief schools of thought that shaped the 20th century minds. It has gained even more traction today in fields like health care, cognitive science, religious studies, and architecture, amongst numerous others.

What eventually became even more significant to me is how, ultimately, as Husserl claims, the phenomenological attitude is destined in essence to affect a "complete personal transformation, comparable in the beginning to a religious conversion, which then, however, over and above this, bears within itself the significance of the greatest existential transformation which is assigned as a task to mankind as such."¹ This, of course, cannot be a cosmetic change, and therefore cannot remain on the level of exteriority. Rather, it must involve a change from *within*, which in turn makes us encounter the world anew.

The aim of this change is meant to aid us to penetrate and experience the real and transcendent world as it gives and shows itself to us when we encounter it. What this entails, on our part, is a fine tuning of our receptivity to this *givenness*, which means that we might have to renounce what we had previously assumed and held dear, and what we want, or wish, this encounter to be, so as to allow for the possibility of newness. This calls, as the novelist Flannery O'Connor writes in one of her proses, a reversal of thinking: "to measure oneself against Truth, and not the other way around."² Husserl, in fact, devised phenomenology as being a rigorous science that is meant to get us back in touch with the truth of reality. In this sense, phenomenology can be understood as the virtuous mean between relativism and rationalism; whereby the former reduces truth to mere subjective appearances, whilst the latter states that truth is not involved in appearances at all. Phenomenology resists

both ends, as it claims that my experience is a relational and personal encounter of something real and truthful.

In relation to all this, one of the main key questions I work on is what it means to truly be an individual. A square is not an individual as such, since its being a square is shared by all other squares. It certainly has a meaningful structure, which distinguishes it from other meaningful structures. However, it lacks the full determinateness required for being independent. Unlike a square, or a tree, the human being is a creature of interiority. What this entails is that one is not merely an instance of the human kind but more fundamentally, is an unrepeatable and unique person. This is also why a forest is not a community of trees. As human beings, we not only belong to a certain species, but we are individuals and moreover, persons in communion. The essence of that individuality is ultimately, interior and, hence hidden from view. This means that it is our interiority that truly individualizes us as the essential difference in each one of us. What this entails is that each individual is not merely united with other individuals on an exterior level, as an empirical phenomenon, but, more fundamentally, as Michel Henry maintains, "through all one's affective modes—sympathy, pity, love, hate, resentment, solitude. And first of all, one is with the other in the silent being-with"³ – as an interior community where *cor ad cor loquitur* [heart speaks to heart].

However, through my research, it became clearer that interiority has had quite a hard time during the past century, gaining a very negative connotation. It has often been misconstrued as a highly abstract concept with absolutely no footing in our ordinary life. An even more prevalent view adopts, what I call, a 'sick' version of interiority, which equates it to being narcissistic and hence, completely absorbed in oneself and shut off from the world and others. However, a healthy and deeper sense of interiority is one where the interior life is connected to our concrete and practical lives – to the extent that it informs every aspect of it, such as talking, reading, walking, and all our actions – and moreover, has a profound impact on how we relate with others. Ultimately, a 'sick' version of interiority leads to a flight from a true and healthy interior life that is open to encounter.

¹ Husserl, E. (1970). *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. (D, Carr, Trans.). Northern University Press, p. 137. (Original work published 1954)

² O'Connor, F. (1970) *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*. (S. & R.Fitzgerald, Eds). Farrar, Straus and Giroux, p. 35.

³ Henry M. (2017). *From Communism to Capitalism: Theory of a Catastrophe* (S. Davidson, Trans.). Bloomsbury Publishing, p.102. (Original work published 2001)



A healthy interior life has as its mark a personal uniqueness and hence, is the enduring source of our individual life. As Edith Stein claims, “human life is a spiritual, personal, internal life that discloses itself to fellow humans and that is ever renewed from these sources; and lastly, a life that is freely determined by the I.”⁴ Hence, we are a genuine and authentic individual when we get in touch with our individual and personal interiority. It is from this center that our ways of encounters take a deeper and more significant meaning. This means that we, as creatures of interiority, cannot be reduced to exterior traits since interiority lies deeper than the visible. In turn, exteriority grows in proportion to the expansion of our interiority.

⁴ Stein, E. (2002). *Finite and Eternal Being: An Attempt at an Ascent to the Meaning of Being* (K.F. Reinhardt, Trans.) ICS Publications, p. 501. (Original work published 1935/6)

⁵ Stein, E. (2014). *Self-Portrait in Letters: Letters to Roman Ingarden*. (H.C. Hunt, Trans.). ICS Publications, pp. 259–260.

It follows then that the true reality exists in the depths of the invisible, where individual human beings truly encounter one another. It is when we live outside of the true understanding of an interior life that we end up being narcissists, closed in ourselves, in turn ending up lost in the transient world. Instead of a community of individuals living out of the depths, we end up living as mere sentient beings leading a superficial existence. As Stein beautifully writes in one of her letters to her friend:

An infinite world opens up something entirely new when you once begin to live the interior instead of the exterior life. All prior realities become transparent; the genuine sustaining and motivating strengths become perceptible. Previous conflicts become trivial! The individual comes to understand a life filled with passion and blessedness that those living a worldly life do not know and cannot grasp, something that from the

*outside appears as the most uneventful day in a totally inconspicuous human existence. And how strange it appears when you live among those who see only the superficial and never notice anything else in the world around them.*⁵

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My Research in Experiential Phenomenology

by Clive Zammit



PHOTO © John Wood; Clive Zammit

In this reflection I propose that a prolonged meditative encounter with the night sky may afford a phenomenological experience which challenges the common-sensical assumption that the sense of sight requires an object of vision in order to function. Furthermore, drawing on my own experiments in experiential phenomenology, I suggest that the phenomenological experience resulting from peering into the night sky may offer unique opportunities for a philosophical engagement with ‘the question of Being.’ Should this be substantiated, it would raise concerns regarding the effects of increasing light pollution on the possibility of philosophical reflection.

i. **You can’t see nothing**

No, this is not a case of bad grammar. Nor is it the case of a double negative employed with the intention of making a

positive. By “You can’t see nothing,” I mean that as long as one sees, one must be seeing something. Seeing nothing is not “the seeing of nothing,” but the negation of seeing itself.

Prima facie, or dare I say, at first sight, one would readily accept that “you can’t see nothing,” is empirically correct. In order for sight to function there must be a surface from which light is reflected. When we shine a torch into the night, we see the things which the light beam strikes upon. If one shines a light into a perfect void, one does not see nothing. Nothing cannot be seen because sight cannot function in a perfect void.

In this short reflection I will propose that a prolonged meditative encounter with the night sky may afford a phenomenological experience which seems to challenge this otherwise common-sensical position. In addition, a

phenomenological analysis of such an experience may also offer opportunities for a philosophical engagement with the archaic problem of 'the question of Being.' This attempt at a first-person phenomenological exercise reflects my approach to philosophy which pays tribute to the 20th century continental tradition and its preference for a methodology which includes embodied and immersed engagements with the subject of study. Such experiments are designed and implemented in order to complement and nourish the more traditional approach of basing philosophical arguments on abstract thought, and the occasional thought experiment.

Sight requires an object to be seen, an object which acts as an obstacle to light and therefore a terminus or limit for sight itself. An object which is perfectly transparent, and which presents no obstacle to light, is just not visible. Anyone who has had the misfortune of walking straight into a large glass door, will have no doubt that this is true. There are two necessary conditions for sight to function. Firstly, that there is light and additionally, that there is an object to be seen. Both these conditions are necessary, and neither is sufficient on its own. Anything that can be seen is only visible as far as it is an obstacle to light, which therefore also acts as a screen to what may lie beyond what is seen.

This also holds true for experience in general, irrespective of which physical senses or mental processes an experience may involve. One does not just see, feel, hear, taste or smell. One sees, feels, hears, tastes or smells something, and that something acts as a terminus or structuring parameter for the experience. Likewise, having a thought, a memory, or an imagination, requires that something must be thought, remembered, or imagined. Experience, of whatever sort, necessarily requires an intentional content. And that content, to borrow a Heideggerian term, 'enframes' the experience in the sense that it makes it possible while at the same time limits it by defining its parameters.

The necessity of an intentional content for any experience further implies that an experiential event also involves transitivity. An experiential event is constituted of at least two components: the subject having the experience, (the experiencer who is the seat of the experience), and the object of experience, (the intentional content or that which is experienced.) In the case of a mental event such as a thought or a memory, the intentional content may only exist in the mind of the experiencer, but nevertheless these two facets of any experience, a mind, and the content of the experience, remain distinct. This is also true when the mental event happens to be reflexive. If I think about myself, there

is still a thinker as well as the content of my thought, which in this case would be myself.

The relation between the experiencer and the experience itself raises other deeper philosophical questions. While avoiding the metaphysical conundrum of whether the experiencing subject is the sum total of its experiences or whether subjectivity is at all possible in the total absence of experience, it is fairly safe to assume that experience is a predominant, if not a necessary factor in the foundation and the shaping of subjectivity.

So far, this seems reasonably straightforward. Things, however, start to get murky when one reflects on, or better still, when one actually experiences gazing into a void, if such an experience is at all possible. While we accept that "seeing nothing is impossible" may be a reasonable proposition, we must, at the same time remain aware that this does not necessarily imply that peering into a void is itself impossible, or that it would not itself constitute an experiential event. On the contrary, precisely because "you cannot see nothing," peering into a void may in fact give rise to a very rich, and possibly unique, phenomenological experience.

But if peering into the void does not result in the experience of sight, what sort of phenomenological experience would it give rise to? What would peering into the void feel like? Would peering into an enclosed void, such as a darkened chamber, be different from peering into an infinitely receding, limitless void?

Drawing on my own experiments in experiential phenomenology, I would suggest that the night sky presents an opportunity for phenomenological experiences which may offer ways for engaging with such questions. The set-up of these experiments consists in bivouacking on clear nights in remote locations with minimal light pollution. During these experiments, meditative breathing exercises are employed in order to sharpen and maintain focus on the experiential phenomena being investigated. Experiments, or as I prefer to call them, experiential forays, are conducted in different locations with altitudes varying from sea level to over four thousand meters. These locations are generally accessed by long distance hiking, and it may therefore be the case that prior physical exertion acts as a contributing factor to the resulting reflective analysis.

ii. Phenomenological reflection

The darkness of night uncovers the infinite depth of the sky.

During the day, existence presents itself as a collection of objects and experiences set against a structured background

of space and time. Even in the emptiest of spaces, an open sea, an endless desert or a perfectly cloudless sky, the horizon or the blue dome of the sky itself, present barriers, or limits to the senses. Experience is therefore defined by limits and finitude. An experiential finitude which seems impossible to break through, is continually suggested by our everyday experiences.

At night, the finitude of our perceptual experiences is lifted. If we allow ourselves the luxury of gazing meditatively into the night sky, we get the opportunity to witness the infinity of the stars set into the unbounded receding void. Unlike the blue dome of the daytime sky, the night sky does not present a limit against which our senses can rebound. Rather than presenting a limit or a screen, the stars which stud the void actually guide and propel our senses further into the infinity of space. Gazing into the star-studded sky, our senses recede into a palpable void, creating the sensation that the experiencing subject is suspended among the stars.

When gazing into the infinite void between the stars, the structuring parameters on which the senses normally rebound are missing. This lack of rebound erodes the dichotomy between the seer and the seen, that is, between the experiencing subject and the object of experience. Phenomenologically, this presents a unique and unusual experience in which seeing is limited and challenged, while at the same time sharpened and enhanced by the very fact that nothing is seen. This results in an uncanny experience of enhanced seeing while actually seeing nothing. This absence of an object of sight within an experience of enhanced seeing, doubles back on the seer, undermining the experiential foundation which grounds subjectivity itself. The experience of gazing into the void is not just a unique experience of seeing nothing. It is also an experience whose lack of experiential content has a diminishing effect on the subject of experience. As both the subject and the object of experience melt away, the experiencing itself becomes prominent. In place of the experience of the seeing of an object by a subject, what emerges is the non-subjective experience of witnessing a non-dual realm of being and non-being.

But why then would peering into the void of the night sky provide such a unique experience in this regard? Would not sitting in a completely darkened chamber have the same effect?

The stars studding the void in the night sky make an essential difference as they provide an anchor which stops the self from spiraling down a vortex into complete dissolution.

Descriptions by subjects who have experienced the complete silence within specially designed anechoic chambers give strong evidence of the subject-eroding effects of the phenomenological experience of sensory deprivation. When gazing into the night sky, the contrast between the stars and the void, stops the self from being sucked into the abyss of complete dissolution. While the subject and object of experience may lose their dual substantiality, the phenomenological experience itself is accentuated. This partial dissolution of the self into the void between the stars allows an otherwise impossible engagement with the non-dual realm of being and non-being.

iii. The question of being; and beyond

At the inception of what came to be known as the Western philosophical tradition, Parmenides set us straight by defining two paths which our thoughts can run along. The one and only path that can lead to truth is that which recognizes that Being is one and unchanging. Pure reason dictates that what is, is, and cannot be. What is not, is not and cannot be. How can what is not, come into being? How can what is, turn into non-being? Non-being, according to Parmenides cannot even be thought, let alone, known. Any thinking or consideration of non-being is guaranteed to send us off on the path of error and untruth. Non-being was thus placed outside the bounds of philosophy very early on, at the inception of tradition. Even though Plato famously alludes to a realm "beyond Being," (*epekeina tês ousias*), (R.509b8), to a very large extent, the tradition has followed Parmenides in keeping its thinking safely within the realm of being.

One may say that it took Western philosophy over two millennia to train its sights squarely on the question of being and to investigate those liminal realms where being and non-being may be engaged in a play of concealing and revealing. In the opening pages of *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger reminds us that while the incipient thinkers of the tradition were motivated by the perplexities raised by the question of being, this most fundamental of philosophical questions, seems to have been largely forgotten. Heidegger stresses that the realm of substance has dominated and limited the whole tradition of Western thought, which he characterizes as a metaphysics of presence.

In this short reflection, I have suggested that the night sky opens up a potentially unique experiential gateway in which the void between the stars becomes a passage – and challenges or threatens to disrupt the clean dichotomy between seeing and not seeing, and consequently between



PHOTO © John Wood; Clive Zammit

being and non-being. If evidence suggested by my very limited experiments in experiential phenomenology can be supported with further research, it may turn out that a prolonged and focused experience of gazing into a clear night sky may nourish a re-awakening of the philosophically fundamental question of being, and possibly also provide a unique access to, or an opportunity for the experience – of a ‘beyond being’. Finally, this would raise further urgent questions regarding the consequences for philosophical thought and reflection, of the dimming of the night sky through the ever-spreading flood of light pollution.

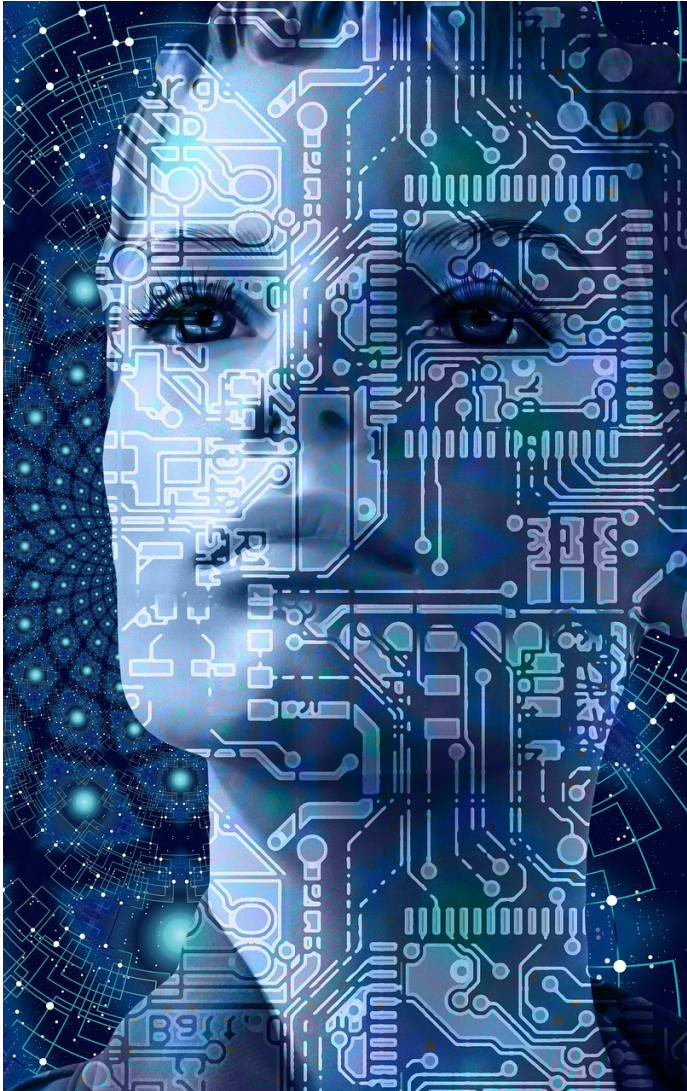
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My Research in Hypertextuality: A Critique of Unilinearity

By Dominic Garcia



My main interest centers on a new form of philosophical hermeneutics which broadens the Gadamerian notion of 'fusion of horizons' to include a multiplicity of horizons by means of a digital technology of my own conceptual creation. This concept could not have materialized without the consistent collaboration with Dr Sandro Spina, a senior lecturer within the faculty of ICT (Department of Computer Science) at the University of Malta. Throughout the last five years we have been improving the functionality of the software. I am particularly interested in understanding how discourse ethics could eventually be transformed within the context of hypertextual writing- a theme which I explore in my book publication: *Rethinking Ethics Through Hypertext*

(Emerald Publishing Group UK, 2020). Other areas of interest that are also closely related to this new form of philosophical understanding are social justice, freedom of discursive expression, posthumanism and transhumanism.

Oftentimes hypertext has been employed as a technology to write fictional narratives for the enjoyment of the writer and the amusement of the reader. Without dismissing the importance of such fictional narratives, I would like to dedicate this space to describe the use of a technology that may present us with another way of doing ethics, without being limited to categorizing events of an ethical nature as either 'right' or 'wrong', 'good' or 'bad'. Hypertextethics is a word I coined to encourage the reader to rethink ethics or, to borrow from Habermas' notion of discourse ethics, the process of doing ethics (Edgar, 2006, p. 45), with the additional advantage of a comprehensively robust form of hypertextual technology.

When taking into account the popularity of ethics, or rather discourse ethics, amongst philosophers, hypertextual discursive expression might not readily be considered as a technology that can revolutionize the interpretation of ethical events and actions. Nonetheless, I shall here share my reflections on what may be a new process of doing ethics in the future. I intend to provide a broad overview on the notion of hypertextual discursive expression, especially when compared with unilinear forms of discursive expression. In this limited space, I will, though briefly, assume the role of modern-day herald affirming, as it were, that hypertextual discursive expression may become vital in any undertaking that seeks to rethink ethical deliberations and even consider, perhaps, the possibility of there being new forms of judgements.

As far as Habermas' notion of discourse ethics is concerned, I am not fully persuaded to subscribe to it as he is not ready to embrace 'particular values,' that is, values embodying merely particular interests. (Habermas, 1983/1990a, p. 103). My project departs from discourse ethics' formalistic slant. I aim, instead, to present an alternative view on discourse ethics which embraces diversity while also enabling particularistic values and desires to possess an equally communicative force.

When speaking of formalistic discourse within the context of ethics, one is often oblivious of the technology that makes this possible. I am here referring to the unilinear writing style, its chief characteristic being that of serving, creating, and perpetuating chronological and orderly discursive expression. Unilinearity might have arisen as a desirable technique of communication, mastered to somehow chronicle, albeit imperfectly, the varied nature of human experience. This indicates, therefore, that although it has so far stood the test of time it is also impeding the writer, hampering efforts to exhaustively disclose all intentions and desires. It might, in fact, reduce the individual's leverage to adequately convey a message.

Other intrinsic qualities of unilinear writing are its seductive and teleological nature. It is seductive in that it lures the user to derive one finite conclusion for when, as readers or writers, we automatically pursue a writing path, we must perforce confine ourselves to a particular standpoint by selecting one single conclusion, thus focusing on this and this alone, instead of considering a multiplicity of innumerable possibilities (Garcia, 2020, p. 2). In addition, unilinear writing has a teleological aspect to it. This characteristic, so tightly embedded in its shape and form, has embodied the essence of writing since time immemorial.

Unilinear writing is also connected to metaphysical understanding in that it is in search of a final and absolute truth. The unilinear infrastructure of language can be compared to the traditional metaphysical idiom of the Platonic style – specifically as the mode providing the only means to 'truth.' What can therefore be said of metaphysics is that it mainly adopts this dominant mode of traditional discourse that favors an absolute 'truth' and is itself the hallmark of traditional unilinear writing. The reason for this is that unilinearity dominates all thought processes, influencing us to view the world in hierarchical terms. This traditional format may clearly privilege a particular way of reasoning to the detriment of a more pluralistic interpretative one.

Although the ever-present unilinear mode of discourse may be regarded as optimal since it works well for both writers and readers in areas like the natural sciences, it may not prove as reliable in others. Cases in point are those disciplines which involve the process of doing ethics. The unilinear style so heavily dictates the ins and outs of discursive expression that instead of acting as an emancipatory medium, it serves to cut our discourse short, confining it to a predictably staid trajectory. Because we learnt to express ourselves in this manner on entering school, its use has inevitably become

second nature to us to the extent that we know of no other discursive style by means of which to express ourselves.

I recently created a software (called *hypertextethics*) that is specifically designed to transform this castigative mode of writing. In line with Stiegler's notion of technics, this software is not an alien technology that is found and explored but is, instead, closer to the self, almost approximating it, given that it is lodged in the mind in the sense that *hypertextethics* is the ability of the mind made manifest through the digital medium. I am exploring, accordingly, that aspect of hypertext that is more akin to the mind (Garcia, 2020, p.19) and am presently using this software with the vulnerable, especially those who believe that their narrative had not been made exhaustive owing to the flawed nature of formalistic expression. My type of hypertext is therefore more inclined to overlap with the Lyotardian notion of paralogies.

My project is just a vision of a new beginning – possibly making a small contribution to a positive genesis of posthumanism. It seeks to somewhat rectify the drawbacks of unilinearity's unquestionable dominance. It considers hypertextuality as an alternative to the long-standing technique of unilinearity. I am here using hypertext as an epistemological technological tool in order to reconstruct the traditional way of doing ethics. The type of hypertext that I am exploring and working with is called *read-only, non-hierarchical, exploratory, network hypertext* (Garcia, 2020, p. 101). My intention is to go beyond the customary way of judging actions in which facile assessments of 'right' or 'wrong,' 'good' or 'bad' are standard practice. I believe that judging in this either/or style creates a society of exclusion and creates beings while forgetting all about who, as the Heideggerian notion so aptly illustrates, being(s) are. Borrowing as I do from the Heideggerian position, I am focusing more on authentic humane understanding giving priority to the situated character of the individual rather than imposing a method of classifying and categorizing the individual (Garcia, 2021, p. 367).

I believe that hypertextuality will allow for a sense of an authentic humanity which was lost through the absolutization of *beings*. Turning away from the unilinearization of writing, hypertextuality will set the stage for an unrestricted self- an emancipated *Dasein* that should allow one to look at him/herself in his/her totality. Unilinearity, as a tool, creates a space in which forgetfulness is key by virtue of the fact that it excludes any forms of plurality in discourse. Hypertextual discursive expression, by contrast, allows a writer to



explore his/her new human self via a newly discovered enriched state of being, unhampered by the scaffoldings of unilinearity which may have contributed to the creation of the Enlightenment notion of Humanism. Hypertextuality would serve as a platform for the creation of a parrhesiastic speaker (Foucault 1983) with a hypertextual technological device encouraging the speaker to take over his/her own self and be truthful to him/herself and *other* (Garcia 2020, p.86). In this manner, it is possible to explore humanity beyond the Enlightenment description of humanism, thus fostering a move towards the posthuman – that which is more explorative of the self and *other*. Unilinearity creates a meritocratic discursive path by dismissing the other paragraphs (discourses) that might not mesh with the rest chronologically. This will undoubtedly have an incalculably significant effect on the process of understanding and interpreting texts that describe events and actions of an ethical nature.

With this in mind, it is fair to presume that unilinear writing may inadvertently be creating a text which may be deemed violent in the writer's regard because the writer has de facto subscribed to chronologizing discursive expression in an attempt to emancipate him/herself. It may therefore be the case that the individual may think that what is unilinearly expressed is emancipative. Since the deceptive nature of unilinearity remains widely unacknowledged, it undeniably undermines the idea of justice so much so that it may easily become parasitic of justice itself. Hypertextuality, insignificant as it may seem, may become the post humanistic way of doing justice. By offering the appropriate technology, it will free us from the rigidity of a traditional unilinear technique that has dominated the process of deliberation for so long, detracting from the profundity of exhaustive understanding. Hypertextuality allows for a plurality of texts, including texts

that may, at face value, appear irrelevant but which are anything but. They deserve our attention not least because, to a greater or lesser extent, each one may prove relevant, in its own special way, to actions and events of an ethical nature.

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- Dominic Garcia is a teacher of philosophy within the Department of Education, Malta. He has earned his PhD (Newcastle University) in philosophy with his research in hypertextual writing with special reference to discourse ethics. He also conducts voluntary work at the Rise Foundation where he teaches philosophy to offenders who are nearing the end of their prison term.*

The Truth in History

By Joe Friggieri

Trust in the authority of experts is essential for the transmission and acquisition of historical knowledge, in other words, for the teaching and learning of history. None of us were there when Napoleon lost the battle of Waterloo, yet we all know he did because historians tell us so, and historians base their claims on evidence and so can be relied upon to tell the truth. When historians tell us that Giordano Bruno was burnt alive in Rome for his writings, we take their word for it that this was something that really happened, even though we were not there, in 1600, in Campo dei Fiori, to witness the event.

And yet, doubts about the status of history as a reliable source of knowledge capable of delivering objective truths about the past, have been raised by a number of philosophers and historiographers. A familiar argument put forward by the objectors starts with the idea that since the past is not something we can perceive, historians can only “construct” it on the basis of the evidence they happen to be working with in the present- the documents or texts on which they base their story. Not only is that evidence necessarily partial and quite often unreliable, but historians themselves must make their own selection from the sources in order to create a narrative of what, in their opinion, might have happened. What they select depends to a large extent on their own subjective preferences, prejudices, or ideological biases. Conflicting interpretations necessarily follow. The possibility of historical truth and the chances of arriving at it become, with every step in the story, more and more remote.



This is a complex argument, running together a number of important insights with several gratuitous assumptions and leading to a false conclusion. It depends for its plausibility on a dramatic heightening of the constraints within which

historians go about their business and a playing down of what they actually manage to achieve.

The historians who write history books have usually been trained in the rational evaluation of evidence and are experts in their field. So, they are well qualified and equipped to come up with the very best explanations of the evidence that relates to that field... [Their] patterns of reasoning are absolutely vital in enabling them to decide which descriptions, interpretations and explanations are worthy of belief, and which are not. Every practising historian has to consider the implications of their data as rationally as they can. (McCullagh, 2004, pp. 16–17).

This does not mean that their conclusions are always correct. But the presumption of truth must be in their favor.

Responsible historians will present only descriptions of the past which they have good reasons for thinking correct. That means there is normally abundant evidence for them, evidence whose implications can scarcely be disputed. In that case it is reasonable to believe them to be true, even though it remains logically possible... that one day an even better account will be found. (McCullagh, 2004, p. 17).

As regards the alleged unreliability of the sources, it is not at all obvious that such unreliability extends to the vast majority of documents that historians have managed to retrieve and on which they have based their accounts. It is also not the case that, as a general rule, the trustworthiness or otherwise of the documents cannot be ascertained. Of course, sometimes even the best historians get it wrong, but that is only because most of the time they manage to get it right. In the mid-1980s, when Hugh Trevor-Roper “authenticated” the “Hitler Diaries” for the London Times, the case created an uproar because nobody expected such an eminent historian to be taken in in that way. The episode became news because it was an exception. The “diaries” were exposed as forgeries by simple testing of the age of the paper on which they were written, which dated from the 1950s. Once they were so exposed, they stopped being considered as throwing light on that part of the history of the 20th century to which they pretended to belong. They could no longer be considered as forming part of that history, though of course they now form part of the history of forgeries or fakes. Trevor-Roper’s mistake could only be declared such because there was a background of truth and objectivity against which his decisions could be judged. A hoax is a false show, a ploy invented in order to deceive. To conclude that all documents cannot be trusted because some are produced with the intention to deceive is just as absurd as thinking that all Cretans are liars because some are.

The second objection that needs to be met if the notion of historical truth and objectivity is to be adequately defended and secured against its critics concerns selectivity. It is clear that in writing about the past, historians have to select the events that will form part of their story. As Patrick Gardiner (1995, p. 365) has pointed out, “a historian whose account aimed to include every conceivable constituent of a particular stretch of the past would be comparable in some respects to Lewis Carroll’s imaginary cartographer, whose ideal map was one that exactly reproduced, both in scale and detail, the piece of country it was meant to chart.”

Selection is essential but not arbitrary. Faced with a plethora of facts, the historian will choose to concentrate on those which, in his or her view, deserve to be accorded greater importance. This involves a process of evaluation leading to judgement, but there is no reason to assume that the evaluations need necessarily be biased, prejudiced, or dictated by ideology, or that the judgement be clouded by personal grudges or political agendas. Rather than manipulating the evidence, historians may be called on occasion to suspend their own preconceptions, to alter or

modify their point of view, in order to give a fuller, fairer, and more accurate account of the past in light of the discovery of new facts or of a better reading of those already available.

Although historical narrative and literary fiction can be compared in some ways, it would be false to conclude, as some have done, that there are no differences between them. Historical narratives are answerable to criteria of truth (such as support by factual evidence, reference to people and events in the real world, chronological consistency, and inference to the best explanation) that do not apply to works of fiction. Such criteria constrain the range of interpretations that can be “imposed” upon the past and militate against the claim that any kind of “emplotment” of events, however arbitrary, can count as history.

Gordon Graham (1997, p. 125) drew the distinction as follows:

The difference between history and fiction is this. While the historian, with the benefit of hindsight, discovers events to be significantly related and assembles evidence to persuade us of this conclusion, the novelist with imagination makes the events relevant, and uses dénouement to direct the mind of the reader into seeing a significant relation between them.

The last weapon in the objectors’ arsenal concerns interpretation. Against the doubters, one must show that the fact that there are multiple interpretations of the same historical event, movement, or change cannot be taken as proof that such interpretations lack objectivity. Two points need to be made. First, multiple interpretations need not be conflicting. In seeking to explain the significance of major historical transformations or upheavals—a kind of exercise historians engage in all the time—it is rarely ever the case that they offer just one interpretation, but almost always several, from different perspectives.

A. C. Grayling (2007, pp. 34-35), for instance, described three ways of viewing the Reformation initiated by Luther’s act of protest against the Church of Rome:

One is to see it as a chiefly religious event motivated by rejection of Roman practices and a desire for a more biblical Christianity. A second is to see it as a political event, in which a variety of temporal and clerical powers saw the upswelling of religious protest as an opportunity to escape the taxes and interference of the papacy. A third is to see it as an intellectual revolution, aiming for liberty in the kingdom of the mind to free science and art from the proscriptions and censorship of dogmatic orthodoxy.



These three ways of looking at the Reformation can all be supported with reference to the social, political, and religious realities of Luther's times; but the descriptions are complementary, rather than conflicting. Grayling (2007, p. 35) added the following: "Unquestionably, the Reformation was all three, and each of the three fed into the others in complex and reciprocal ways," even though the "underlying religious inspiration was crucial."

Still, even where there is a genuine conflict of interpretations - and this is the second point - practising historians are motivated by a desire to tell the truth. Faced by a number of genuinely conflicting historical interpretations, we may still not be in a position to decide between them. On the other hand, we may feel that one historian has made a stronger case than the other. The point is that we have no way of reaching that conclusion except by weighing the evidence on either side. It is only on the basis of the evidence that the credibility of a historical description can be tested.

Nobody needs deny that the interest of historians plays some role in determining what they devote their attention to in constructing their narrative. In addition, nobody need deny the importance of perspective or point of view. But perspective is always on something, and to view something from a certain perspective by no means implies that whatever it is that is being viewed or considered from that perspective is somehow "unreal" or even indeterminate.

The fact that the past is interpreted differently by different people living in different ages does nothing to show that

truth is relative. To quote an example from Bernard Williams, there is no way in which the German invasion of Belgium in 1914 could have happened "for" some cultures and not for others. "What is relative," Williams explains (2002, pp. 258-259), "is the interest that selectively forms a narrative and puts some part of the past into shape." But selection of itself, as we have seen, does not produce an unfair or biased history.

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The Animal/Human Relation

By Niki Young



My philosophical interests broadly concern the twenty-first century realist and materialist movements that emerged as a reaction to the previous dominance of various implicit and explicit forms of idealism and transcendentalism pervading continental thought. In this short essay, I deal with one aspect of this contemporary turn to the real, namely the question of animal ontology, and I shall do this by relating Graham Harman's notion of "onto-taxonomy" to Matthew Calarco's analysis of human/animal relations.

Philosophy has, until recently, and for the most part, worked within the paradigm of onto-taxonomy. If Martin Heidegger's term "*onto-theology*" critically referred to placing one privileged being at the basis of Being (most conspicuously God)¹, then Graham Harman's "onto-taxonomy" denotes the assumed a-priori distinction and classification – or taxonomy – between two or more different categories of existents². Nowhere has this onto-taxonomical tendency been more prevalent than in the violent institution of a binary opposition between man and animal. In fact, it may well be argued that the "question of the animal" is to be understood as the

fundamental question of philosophy, especially if one takes seriously – as I do – Derrida's remark that "one understands a philosopher only by heeding closely what he means to demonstrate, and in reality, fails to demonstrate, concerning the limit between human and animal"³.

The Western philosophical tradition has largely installed a deep ontological chasm separating man from animal and has characterized the latter in terms of a fundamental "lack" or deficiency in order to account for this separation. The animal, for instance, was said to lack language, rationality, morality, politics, shame, and so forth. To cite just a few representative examples, in the *Timaeus*, Plato gives a vivid (yet almost comical) account of how animals devolved from men via a process of gradual degradation, while Aristotle's *Politics* affirmed that animals lacked rationality and language, and that they existed solely "for the sake of humans" so as to supply them with food and clothing. Perhaps most notoriously, Renée Descartes regarded the animal as a complex *automaton* or machine incapable of feeling pain, while Kant denied them the "autonomy" required for intrinsic

¹ See Heidegger, M. (2002). *Identity and Difference*. (J. Stambaugh, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.

² See Harman, G. (2016). *Dante's Broken Hammer: The Ethics, Aesthetics and Metaphysics of Love*. Repeater Books; Young, N. (2022). De-Anthropocentrism and Onto-Taxonomy: An Ecological View. *International Comparative Literature*, 5(2), 39-57

³ Derrida, J. (2008). *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. (D. Wills, Trans.). Fordham University Press, p. 106.

moral worth. More recently, Heidegger claimed that man (or, more specifically, *Dasein*) was separated from the animal by an “abyss,” while Levinas – at least for the most part – claimed that the animal did not possess the “ethical face.” Two things are worth noting before I proceed further. First, I do not wish to denigrate these thinkers, nor reject their views altogether due to a simple antagonism towards animals, for I recognize that their discourse on animals is heterogeneous and complex, thereby requiring way more space than this short article would allow for. Second, and to be sure, I also recognize that there were also notable exceptions to this prevalent opinion; Diogenes of Sinope, St Francis of Assisi, Giordano Bruno, Jeremy Bentham, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Jacques Derrida come to mind. In spite of this, the anthropocentric devaluation of the animal remained, at least until recently, the rule.

Our present time is however especially exciting for those interested in the philosophy of animals, in that we are currently attesting to the process of dismantling the “anthropological machine”⁴ which has for so long established and maintained the distinction between humans and animals

via the exaltation of what is allegedly “proper” to humans. This shift in thinking is in large part due both to emerging research into the remarkable complex cognitive abilities and skills exhibited by different animal species, as well as to the institution of new concepts and ways of thinking championed by those working within philosophy and, more specifically, the fledging and academically diverse field of animal studies. Following a distinction originally made by Matthew Calarco in *Thinking Through Animals*⁵, the most pressing question regarding animals facing us today would perhaps not be to understand where the alleged single limit separating man from animal lies (since there is no such thing), but whether the human/animal relation is to be understood in terms of identity, difference or indistinction. Let us briefly consider each of these approaches outlined by Calarco.

Identity theorists are mainly influenced by Charles Darwin, whose theory of evolution by natural selection had decisively shown that there was no rupture separating humans from other animals. Following this fundamental discovery, the identity approach championed by thinkers such as Peter Singer and Paola Cavalieri postulates a fundamental



⁴ See Agamben, G. (2004). *The Open: Man and Animal*. (K. Attell, Trans.). Stanford University Press.

⁵ Calarco, M. (2015). *Thinking Through Animals: Identity, Difference, Indistinction*. Stanford University Press.

continuity between human beings and animals. In so doing, this approach challenges contemporary “speciesism” through the argument that animals and humans share common interests (such as that of not being harmed), and that they are therefore like us in *ethically* pertinent ways. The main problem for such an approach is that animal interests are channeled and evaluated through a human lens, thereby successfully challenging speciesism, but at the expense of remaining within the bounds of anthropocentrism by thinking about how animals might be understood to be “like us humans.”



In contrast to identity approaches, difference approaches emphasize the existence of a multifarious number of *singular* different existence. Jacques Derrida, for instance, argued against the reductive notion of *the “Animal”* understood as a single, continuous, and homogeneous group of beings in the following manner: “Confined within this catch-all concept, within this vast encampment of the animal, in this general singular, within the strict enclosure of this definite article (“the Animal” and not “animals) [...] are *all the living things* that man does not recognize as his fellows, his neighbors, his brothers”⁶. Taking this a step further, the difference approach also rejects the humanist vision of the “essence” of Man, emphasizing instead that each and every human “other” is in fact also itself a *singularity* which is constituted and maintained through an intricate and irreducible web of historical, cultural, economic, linguistic relations. Thus, if there is no such thing as “The Human” and “The Animal” in the general singular, it follows that there cannot be a single and decisive barrier separating “Human” from “Animal.” The main concern with this approach is its reluctance to give up on the problematic question of identifying what is “proper” to humans, since they claim that doing away with the thought of this difference altogether might in the end risk flattening out all differences rather than multiplying them.

In contrast to both the identity and difference approaches, the indistinction approach adopted by thinkers such as Donna Haraway, Giorgio Agamben, Graham Harman, and Calarco himself refuse the attempt to understand human/animal relation in terms of identity or difference, arguing that such a discourse is obsolete. For instance, Haraway claims that instead of pondering differences and identities between humans and animals, we should rather lay emphasis on the “pleasure of connection of human and other living creatures” prior to the thought of separation or continuity⁷. Relatedly, Giorgio Agamben asserts that Western politics is founded on an “anthropogenetic” process which

seeks to separate animal life (*zōē*) from human political life (*bios*). He nevertheless argues that the twentieth century critique of humanism should allow us to realize just how contingent the notion of the “proper of man” is, and that we should therefore affirm the indistinction of human and animal life prior to their separation.

While each of these approaches presents a positive advancement to the extent that they do not subscribe to the human/animal binary, the way forward for thinking through animals might very well involve the attempt to think about the more fundamental common productive ground of being and relating such as the one championed by the indistinction approach. This approach, I believe, can only be achieved if one properly thinks through the common ground that connects not only individual animals and humans, but also the various living “and” non-living beings (I place the word “and” in quotation marks since my favored approach also implies the lack of a clear dividing line between living and non-living beings), hence my interest in the contemporary revival of metaphysics in continental thought.

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⁶ Derrida, J. (2008). *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, p. 34.

⁷ Haraway, D.J. (2015). *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. Routledge, pp. 151-152.

The Philosophy of Creativity

By Sandra M. Dingli



I am a Professor at The Edward de Bono Institute for Creative Thinking and Innovation at the University of Malta. I set up the Institute in collaboration with Professor Edward de Bono in October 1992 and my publications include *Creativity and Strategic Innovation Management* (2017) with M. Goodman as co-author and a chapter on 'Thinking Outside the Box: Lateral Thinking as an Educational Innovation' in *The Routledge Companion to Creativity* (2008) edited by T. Rickards, M. Runco and S. Moger. I enjoy the opportunities which new technology offers in today's 'flat' world, especially when this involves networking and international collaboration. My research interests include creativity, innovation management, foresight, innovation and digital technology and the philosophy of artificial intelligence.

What is creativity? How does creativity come about? Is it possible to nurture creativity and to improve one's creative potential? Does creativity only pertain to the arts, or is it a more multi-faceted concept? What specifically does creativity consist of, particularly if one were to adopt a reductionist

approach? This article first introduces the topic of creativity, followed by a discussion of the views of various philosophers. It concludes with a summary and some reflections.

Although many people consider creativity to belong to the creative arts, which are mainly composed of literature, music, and theatre, there are countless areas to which creativity may be applied. Way back in 1961, Rhodes recognized the fact that creativity may be shaped by four separate types of influence. A person may be considered to be creative, mainly due to the fact that they either produced something extraordinary or because they tend to come up with ideas that are original, surprising and add value which was not previously present. A creative product (or service) is something which is tangible, and which is produced as a result of an original thought. Process, the third element which Rhodes (1961) recognized, is either the thinking or actualization process that goes on in a person's brain when they come up with a novel idea. This generally involves idea generation (which does not necessarily mean a stroke of

inspiration), followed by communication of the idea selected and its subsequent evaluation, sometimes leading to actualization. Process could also refer to the method or route taken in order for a product or service to be either manufactured or offered to prospective or current clients. In other words, this could be the manufacturing process for a tangible product or the process behind digital transactions such as online shopping or online banking. The fourth element is 'press' which really means context or environment. The context may either be favorable, in which case it would nurture creative persons with novel ideas, or it may be disadvantageous or negative, such as in the case of deprivation or challenges which one attempts to overcome.

Creativity began to be recognized as an academic discipline following J.P. Guilford's (1897 – 1987) presidential address to the *American Psychological Association* in 1950, published in the *American Psychologist* later that same year. Creativity, in his view, included divergent thinking (the ability to generate numerous solutions or possibilities), convergent thinking (narrowing down and selecting the best solution or possibility) and the ability to restructure problems in a novel manner, where creative individuals could generate innovative solutions. In his view, creative persons were capable of both divergent and convergent thinking and of generating innovative solutions to problems they were faced with.

Philosophy of creativity

Does the concept of creativity imply the production of something new and original or does it involve the combination of already existing ideas and concepts to come up with a novel idea? Philosophical ideas tend to hinge on both sides of this debate and philosophers have expressed various opinions related to creativity.

Plato (c.428-347 BCE)

Plato's obsession with truth and its revelation by means of dialogues in *The Republic* led him to view creativity as something that was mystical and divinely inspired, grounded in eternal forms, rather than a merely human skill. In his view, creative works, such as those generated by poets and artists, were simply imitations or representations of reality. His concern was that false representations of reality could lead people away from the truth and he banned poets and artists from his ideal society. Therefore, creative ideas or products could only be truly good if they were based on eternal forms which exist independently from the physical world. In this regard, the physical world in which we live is

simply a shadow or image of the ideal realm of forms, as is evident from his well-known allegory of the cave where the persons in the cave are only capable of seeing shadows and not the true reality. Ideal forms are timeless and unchanging, they transcend time and space, while the physical world encompasses constant change and imperfection.

Aristotle (384 – 322 BCE)

Aristotle's views, mainly presented in the *Poetics* and *Metaphysics*, offer a sharp contrast to those of Plato. In the *Poetics* he was mainly concerned with dramatic poetry and theatre (as an analysis of tragedy). He claims that history deals with

particulars, while tragedy deals with universals that evoke emotion and some form of catharsis. Therefore, poetry (which we may take to include tragedy) is more philosophical than history. The former deals with universals and it presents the observer with future possibilities, while the latter merely records events as they happen. Creativity, in his view, brings into being something that did not previously exist, it is an essential part of human nature and closely linked to reason. The concept of '*telos*' (purpose, final goal)



played an important role in Aristotle's philosophy. This is linked to creative works which, he claimed, not only revealed something about the nature of reality but were created with a specific purpose.

Immanuel Kant (1704 – 1824)

Immanuel Kant linked creativity to art and aesthetics in his *Critique of Judgement*. In his view, humans have a unique capacity for imagination and for producing something novel and original. Artistic creations are first conceived in the mind, following which an artwork is created. Harmony, beauty, autonomy, and genius play a key role in Kant's thinking. Although the Kantian artist is a rule-breaker, an artwork may be considered to be beautiful due to its harmonious combination of form and content, and this arises from creative genius. Autonomy is manifested through creative acts where one's unique perspective is conveyed.

Fredrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900)

Creativity was a powerful force through which humans flourished, according to Fredrich Nietzsche whose *Übermensch* (superman) embodies the highest possible form of creativity. One attribute of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* is courage, through which convention, tradition and society's constraints are challenged and overcome. Nietzsche's *Übermensch* does not merely follow or obey set rules or laws. Rather, the *Übermensch* lives according to their own rules and creates a more profound, authentic, and meaningful way of life.

Arthur Koestler (1905 – 1983)

Arthur Koestler's *The Act of Creation* (1964) describes the processes underlying creativity in science and art. Koestler claims that creativity comes about through a process of what he calls 'bisociation', where two unrelated ideas are combined, resulting in novelty and surprise. This applies to all topics, regardless of whether they pertain to the arts, sciences or to everyday life.

Margaret Boden (b.1936)

In *The Creative Mind: Myths and Mechanisms* (1990, 2004), Margaret Boden claims that there are cases where we can acknowledge artificial intelligence to be creative and this enables us to learn more about human creativity. Boden's definition of creativity is probably one of the more widely accepted, and she describes it as:

Creativity is the ability to come up with ideas or artefacts that are new, surprising, and valuable. "Ideas," here, includes concepts, poems, musical compositions, scientific theories, cooking recipes, choreography, jokes ... and so on, and on.

"Artefacts" include paintings, sculpture, steam-engines, vacuum cleaners, pottery, origami, penny-whistles ... and you can name many more' (2004, p.1).

Boden further states that:

creativity enters into virtually every aspect of life. It's not a special 'faculty,' but an aspect of human intelligence in general. In other words, it's grounded in everyday abilities such as conceptual thinking, perception, memory, and reflective self-criticism. So it isn't confined to a tiny elite: every one of us is creative, to a degree' (2004, p.1).

Boden draws a distinction between psychological creativity (where the idea is new to the person who comes up with it) and historical creativity (where no one else has had that idea). She further claims that creativity may come about either through the combination of familiar ideas, as Koestler had claimed, alternatively, it may come about through exploration or through the transformation of conceptual space (meaning structured styles of thought). She further argues that computers may be programmed to generate creative ideas using all three methods, that is, combining ideas, exploring, or transforming conceptual space. One example she provides is that of AARON, conceived by Harold Cohen. This is an AI art generating program that is capable of exploring conceptual space, capable of drawing and coloring, and whose art is exhibited in various art galleries worldwide. It would be interesting to hear Boden's views on more recent AI programs such as the AI chatbot ChatGPT, launched in November 2022 by Sam Altman, the founder of OpenAI. ChatGPT may be used to generate conversations and to create content. Google, the well-known search engine, has launched its own AI chatbot, Bard, to rival Chat GPT. At the moment, Bard is being Beta Tested (February 2023), so it is not yet available for public use. Whether these AI chatbots will eventually be capable of exhibiting creativity remains to be seen.

Edward de Bono (1933 – 2021)

Edward de Bono was a prolific writer with over 85 books published. He dedicated most of his life to advocating for the teaching of thinking and claimed that creativity is not something we are born with, but it is a skill which, like any other skill, may be developed with practice. de Bono is the inventor of the term 'lateral thinking' which he contrasts with vertical thinking. While the latter relies only on logic, lateral thinking, which allows one to follow a systematic process to generate ideas, provides specific methods which enable one to create 'new patterns' rather than remaining 'stuck' in habitual ways of thinking. de Bono devised various other

creativity and thinking tools which are simple and easy to use. His techniques have been adopted by educational institutions, organizations, and individuals worldwide. His publications are replete with examples of how individuals or organizations used his techniques to generate original ideas and achieve success.

Philosophy of science

Other trailblazers who published their work on this and other related topics include the philosophers of science who include Karl Popper, Thomas Kuhn (who came up with the concept of paradigm shifts) and Paul Feyerabend. All three discuss the methods that scientists use and the conclusions they draw and all three proposed different ways in which they considered science to develop and progress.

Conclusion

This brief discussion on the philosophy of creativity raises a number of questions and reveals the complexity of the topic under discussion. To begin with, there is no consensus on one definition of creativity, although Boden's views are broadly accepted as creativity undeniably involves originality, surprise, and positive value. However, this view disregards the so-called 'dark side of creativity.' Original ideas may be used in destructive or socially unacceptable ways. The war machine, for example, has undeniably created a fascinating amount of innovative technology including stealth aircraft, which cannot be detected by radar, and various types of unmanned vehicles. Will AI be enabled to take decisions on the battlefield in the future? Will these decisions exhibit creativity? Can we apply the notion of creativity to AI? What about the creativity exhibited by some criminals?

This is why it is relevant to include the attribute of positive value to something or someone considered to be creative, although there are borderline cases, such as the invention of nuclear fission, which produced the destructive atom bomb, but which generates clean energy, even though radioactive waste is produced which is difficult to store or to dispose of and any leakages or accidents could be disastrous. Both convergent thinking and divergent thinking are required for creativity to occur as ideas are generally first generated, then evaluated and later communicated. Established patterns of thinking in the brain need to be applied in both a logical and lateral manner.

Is creativity a skill, as de Bono claims it is, and can it be taught? What is the link between creativity and intelligence? Are persons born creative or can creativity be nurtured? Is creativity something that is 'divinely inspired,' as Plato claimed it is?

These and other questions remain to be addressed. Whether sufficiently acceptable answers will emerge is another matter. After all, those who look towards philosophy to have their questions answered tend to remain disappointed as philosophy, including the philosophy of creativity, raises more questions than it answers.

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"There is no doubt that creativity is the most important human resource of all. Without creativity, there would be no progress, and we would be forever repeating the same patterns."

EDWARD DE BONO

The Immersive Absurd Gamer

By Duncan Sant



The cartesian dualistic principle of thought and extension, the spiritual and the physical, body and mind has rippled through the minds of thinkers ever since Descartes postulated the issue. Over time the interplay between the two concepts has been approached in varied ways either by denying one part absolutely or by showing that both concepts are simply a façade of each other. The advent of technology rekindled the divide, yet it embedded it in tangible, less elusive understanding. I am here referring to the hardware/software interplay.

The gamer, the player, the person engaging a software to enter a world designed for them, becomes active in a reality that is aptly called virtual. The ontology of such a world stands between that which is purely physical and almost within that transient substance of thought. Scientifically speaking, we can explain the physical properties of the virtuality of a game projected on a screen, just as we can neurologically explain the physical properties of thought. Thus, my first assertion is that the duality is mirrored in the technological sphere.

Another parallel I want to draw attention to, is Albert Camus's absurdist understanding of human experience. Camus understood that living in an essentially chaotic universe, order is an elusive characteristic that any subject seeks and expects but one that ultimately is not present. The universe is indifferent to everything and all things since it lacks a Mind or

an awareness of its contents, including life. He highlights that "One must follow and understand this fatal game that leads from lucidity in the face of existence to flight from light."¹ Humanity seeks the comfort of meaning and structural order yet being true to our plight, we must, as it were, look into the abyss. For Camus, absurdity originates as a disparity or a gap between expectancy and reality:

*"It's absurd" means "It's impossible" but also "It's contradictory." If I see a man armed only with a sword attack a group of machine guns, I shall consider his act to be absurd. But it is so solely by virtue of the disproportion between his intention and the reality he will encounter, of the contradiction I notice between his true strength and the aim he has in view."*²

The absurdity highlighted above is not something found just in specific situations but in the totality of human existence. Faced with this philosophically unnerving state, people take one of two paths which both include a kind of suicide. In the first option, one simply perceives the futility of life in the grand scheme of things, which quite literally leads to bringing about death before the unnecessary suffering that lies between the present and the end. Camus writes that "Dying voluntarily implies that you have recognized, even instinctively, the ridiculous character of that habit, the absence of any profound reason for living, the insane

¹ Camus, A. (1955). *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. (J, O'Brien, Trans.). Retrieved from: <https://dhspriority.org/kenny/PhilTexts/Camus/Myth%20of%20Sisyphus-.pdf>

² Ibid. p. 21

character of that daily agitation, and the uselessness of suffering.”³

The alternative to the severe choice of suicide is another kind of suicide, one in which what is killed off instead of the body is the mind. This takes the form of a leap of faith that some do as a way of dealing with this existential angst of a world devoid of meaning. Camus identifies this as an escape from the absurd struggle by giving up reason for faith. This faith most commonly belongs to a religious sphere, wherein someone trusts that there is a reconciliation for this struggle in God or a divine grand plan. Yet he highlights that this encompasses within it all knowledge and ideas that we assume to be certain, when in truth, there is no philosophical certainty to be found. A blind and absolute belief in science without acknowledging its limits, is an example of the abandonment of reason as a belief in God, heaven, and hell.

Both forms of suicide are an existential escape that ought not be taken because the absence of natural meaning inherent in the cosmos does not leave the thinker cursed and despaired. This presents to us the Absurdist approach. In the relation between human existence and the reality that contains it, the divorce between the two entities that necessitates such a condition, translates to the essence of Absurdism. Persisting in existing in this state, and not giving in to either kind of suicide requires “a total absence of hope (which has nothing to do with despair), a continual rejection (which must not be confused with renunciation), and a conscious dissatisfaction (which must not be compared to immature unrest).”⁴

The absurdist believes that life can be lived to its fullness precisely because there is no meaning in it. This philosophical perspective entails a central feature of perpetual revolt. Knowing that we are existing in a meaningless universe, we have to yet push on and not give in to obscurity. It sharpens our sense of existence “just as danger provides man the unique opportunity of seizing awareness, so metaphysical revolt extends awareness to the whole of experience.”⁵ Revolt arms us to defiantly resist the otherwise crushing fate of meaninglessness.

Accompanying revolt, is a second condition which we empower ourselves, quasi-paradoxically, through the loss of power that is brought about by death. Just like a slave that is given a freedom from responsibility due to his enslavement, “Death, too, has patrician hands which, while crushing, also liberate.”⁶ Since that which lies beyond death is nothingness, everything that is, is within this universe. Such

an insight empowers the absurd hero to live with burning determination.

The triad of conditions is unified by the passionate experience to be found within the world. A life lived with passion is the “purest of joys, which is feeling, and feeling on this earth. The present and the succession of presents before a constantly conscious soul is the ideal of the absurd man.”⁷

Camus goes on to explore four lifestyles that embody these absurdist values namely the seducer, who pursues the passions of the moment; the actor, who compresses the passions of hundreds of lives into a stage career; the conqueror, or rebel, whose political struggle focuses his energies; and the artist, who creates entire worlds.

I propose to qualify the immersed gamer as embodying the absurdist perspective. An immersed gamer in the act of engaging a game is revolting as a form of escape while knowing that it is not an actual breaking from the human absurd condition. The gamer understands that there is no meaning in any real sense, yet the act of immersion is an experience worth living through.

The gamer exercises freedom in immersing oneself which leads one to understand that experiences come in many forms. The virtual experiences are as valid as any other form of the already established physical and perhaps even the spiritual types.

The gamer’s passion adds to the intense joy of living by having more experiences, as diverse as there are games, through which one immersively embodies and identifies with the protagonist/s of the narrative and experiences the story as if the gamer has been to another virtual universe within which emotions, decisions, thought, and action all interplay. When the gamer disconnects from the immersion and returns to the physical, surely in body but particularly in mind, the gamer carries that experience so vividly that it is almost indistinguishable from a physical one.

In the absurdist perspective, the immersed gamer is akin to the absurd hero, the *Sisyphean* struggle through life, encompassing the same values, and continuing existing to the full potential of what life can offer. One must imagine the gamer happy.

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³ *ibid.* p. 4

⁴ *ibid.* p. 22

⁵ *ibid.* p. 36.

⁶ *ibid.* p. 39

⁷ *ibid.* p. 42

Iris Murdoch and the Ethics of Unselfing

by Robert Govus



Iris Murdoch does not endorse a positive and optimistic view of humanity. In fact, it is quite evident that she rather holds a negative view, and this is partially in agreement with Freud where the belief is that human beings are intrinsically 'egoistic.' In her publication, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* [henceforth MGM] she writes that human beings are "blinded by the wishes and desires of [their] ... own egos" [p. 317]. This actually sets the stage for her moral philosophy because for Murdoch the point of life is to fight what she calls "the fat relentless ego" [*The Sovereignty of Good* (SG), p. 52]. This is not something that had never been said before, Plato through the 'Allegory of the Cave' said nothing different, but she makes this process central to her philosophy, specifically her moral vision. What I would like to present in this article, is Iris Murdoch's understanding of what the virtuous life is and how one becomes so. In other words, why and how one needs to fight their own ego by "unselfing."

In order to understand better what Murdoch means by unselfing and why it is paramount to her moral vision, we first need to establish what she understands this term to be. Basically, unselfing is the rejection of the desires of the ego. In her seminal essay "On God and Good" she writes: "Objectivity and unselfishness are not natural to human beings" [SG p. 51] as they are "naturally selfish" [MGM p. 98].

In other words, what she is implying is that both 'objectivity' and 'unselfishness' are necessary prerequisites, though challenging, where the moral life is concerned, as through the exercise of these two one's quality of consciousness improves as a result, as we will be seeing later. The moral life is demanding, and moral progress takes time and effort.

Very much in the same vein as her favorite philosopher Plato, Murdoch also uses allegories to explain herself better and she does so, specifically to explain what unselfing is and what its benefits are, by providing us with what has now become popularly known as the M & D Paradigm which is taken from her essay "The Idea of Perfection".

Murdoch presents us with two women: a mother-in-law [M] and her daughter-in-law [D]. What we know about M is that she "feels hostility" [SG p. 17] towards D. We are given reasons why M might feel the ways she does such as D's accent is something which M dislikes apart from the fact that she is also bothered by the way D dresses. In addition, and this is a stronger objection, M believes that "her son has married beneath him" [SG p. 17]. What Murdoch is doing here is setting the stage for her moral drama and what we need to take from this is that M is not harboring good feelings towards D and being a "correct person" [SG p. 17] herself, M knows that this is not morally proper, despite the fact that she still behaves beautifully towards D. D's objective existence is simply reduced to M's perception of her. This is where the moral journey begins, this is where the process of 'unselfing' commences because M needs to be able to see D for who D actually is and not for who she thinks or feels she is. So, one aspect of unselfing is the shift of one's focus from the self unto another, be it a person or an object, it does not matter as long as it is not the self. In the light of the Murdochian paradigm, the shift is from M's attachment to her interpretation of D to eventually seeing her for who she is. In fact, another way of describing unselfing is the ability to see as clearly and disinterestedly as we possibly can. For this to happen, the ego needs to be downsized.

As we continue reading, Murdoch provides us with further essential information. Time passes and D for some reason or other becomes absent from M's life. She might have emigrated with her husband or even died. What the reason

is we do not know, but what this fact implies is very important. The change that will eventually take place in M is not initiated by D. The change that takes place comes from M's own mind. We already know that M is a "correct person" but now Murdoch discloses more information. She tells us that M is also "an intelligent and well-intentioned person, capable of self-criticism, capable of giving careful and just attention to an object which confronts her" [SG p. 17] and because of such characteristic traits, she has no problem admitting even to herself, that she might not have seen D objectively and now she wants to do so.

At this stage, one might ask: how is attending any different from loving? Actually, they are the same and Murdoch could not have worded it better when she said: "Love is the extreme realization that something other the oneself is real." This is precisely what M did.

As I have said already, Murdoch makes it noticeably clear that this "moral pilgrimage" [the shift from selfishness to unselfishness] is not for the feeble hearted. This task is deceptively easy because it is challenging even though not impossible. As human beings, we tend to look at the world in a way that enables us to protect and even flatter ourselves. In other words, we see the world as being there for us and our preoccupations. However, where others are concerned, we tend to make light of their suffering, and more often than not this happens due to the fact that we do not even see them in the first place. We do not recognize their objective existence; we forget that they can still exist independently of us and our perceptions of them. If we are ever criticized, we tend to dilute it so that the ego does not have to deal with the pain inflicted as a consequence. So basically, we tend to live in a world which we 'create' for ourselves rather than the world as it objectively is. This can be linked to M again before her moral process in seeing D lovingly and justly.

Eva Maria Durringer, in her paper *Iris Murdoch: Understanding Others* differentiates between understanding others and being understanding. When Iris Murdoch talks about the "moral pilgrimage" that one needs to undertake in order to become a better person, it is the shift from the former to the latter. It is the person who is "being understanding" that she refers to as being virtuous. Durringer provides us with two examples to enable us to tell one from the other as they can be frequently mistaken. A psychologist is someone who has been trained in understanding other people. Even though not necessarily so, the psychologist can be both distant and cold towards their client and still be able to help and assist. It is not required from the psychologist to

be anything more than that. On the other hand, Durringer uses a helpline volunteer as an example, in order to help us see what 'being understanding' entails. She writes: "being good at gaining knowledge of another person's mind is not sufficient for an understanding attitude." It takes more than that, it is what differentiates 'understanding others' from 'being understanding.' Going back to the helpline volunteer, previously mentioned, it is not about diagnosing someone's else problems [an intellectual activity] but it is more about how one 'approaches' others [a moral activity]. In other words, it is about the way one listens to another, it is about the way one is accepting of and emphatic towards another. Ultimately, it is about how M sees D and according to Murdoch anything less than seeing her "justly or lovingly" [SG p. 23] is still in need of more moral work and effort.

Once again, all this boils down to 'attention' and its quality. The object of attention in being understanding towards other people and their problems sometimes demands of me that despite the fact that they are alien to me, I can still relate to their problems as if I might have lived something similar. For example, having experienced the death of a friend might make it easier for me to understand another who experienced the same fate. However similar the experiences are or can be, will not determine how they affect other people. So, I have to constantly be conscious of the fact that their outlook of the world, their emotional biography, even their way of thinking are things that I will never entirely comprehend even with utmost familiarity and good will. I have to admit that there will always be parts of a person that I will never be able to understand and for this reason, others must always be approached with an honest and humble acknowledgement of "how hard it is to gain even a little knowledge" [Durringer] about other people.

As Murdoch puts it, any external object of attention should "lead[s] me away from myself towards something alien to me, something which my consciousness cannot take over, swallow up, deny or make unreal" [SG p. 89]. This is what happens when one unselfs. In 'being understanding' I do not necessarily need to 'understand others.' I do not need to be a particular professional in order to embark on the "moral pilgrimage." Being understanding is more about character and less about intellect. This is exactly what M had to do and accomplished successfully.

Now that M has been brought back into the picture, let us see the results from her 'unselfing' and seeing D for who D really is other than anything else. Whereas before M saw D as vulgar, now Murdoch tells us she sees her "refreshingly



simple” [SG]. Instead of seeing her as undignified, M now sees D as “spontaneous,” D is no longer “noisy but gay ... not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful.” From all this we can conclude that the shift took place inside M’s mind rather than outside it. What the exercise of willed attention produced is not an entirely different reality as it has always been there, but a clearer vision of that very same reality. Using Plato’s ‘Allegory of the Cave’ we can say that M’s moral progress has allowed her to move from the dark world of shadows to the bright world of the sun. Just like the sun, D always was D, but M was not able to see her as the D that she always was due to her being chained to her own ego. The only way she could come to see D was to have those chains broken and move out from the world of opinion to the world of knowledge: from her biased views of D to who D really and truly is.

In this article, I wished to focus on Iris Murdoch’s moral philosophy specifically linked to her concept of “unselfing.” Apart from the fact, that I wished to explain what it is, I also wanted to show why one ought to do this and how one does it. In addition, I wanted to mention some of the benefits that one enjoys in “unselfing.” Murdoch held a negative view regarding the human condition, and it is for this reason that she presents us with her moral vision. Life has “no external telos” she says which implies that it

might have an internal one. That internal telos might be the calling to becoming better people. The path that she suggests can surely enable us to reach such goal. I would like to end my article by quoting Murdoch as I believe that it sums everything up so perfectly: “the good [better] man is liberated from selfish fantasy, can see himself as others see him, imagine the needs of other people, love unselfishly, lucidly envisage and desire what is truly valuable” [MGM p. 331].

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Tightroping Between Love and the Limit-Experience

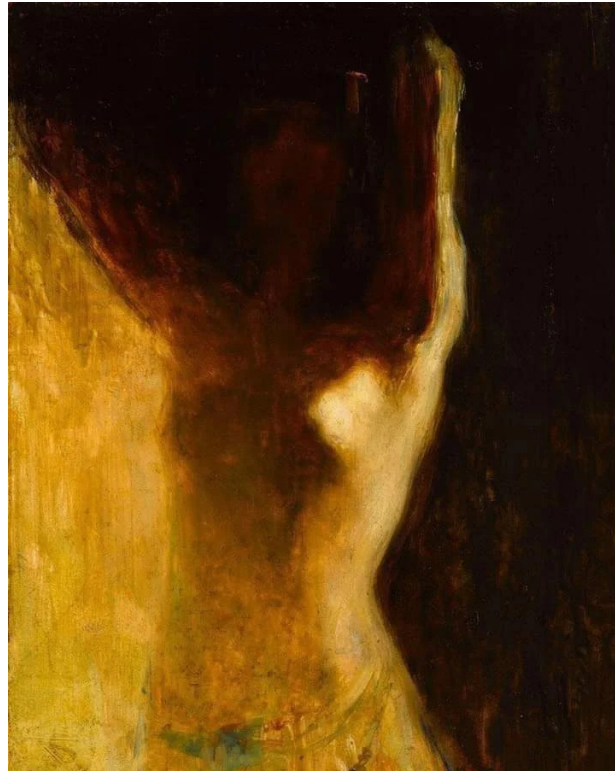
By David Vella

I. Defining the limit-experience and the stranger

Experiences of the limit and the stranger have been among the most prevalent themes in various branches of twentieth and twenty-first century philosophy such as poststructuralism and deconstruction, along with existential, ethical, and hermeneutic phenomenology. These two phenomena (or quasi-phenomena) are also often implicated in some form of relationship, proximity, or juxtaposition with one another – and the reason for this is not coincidental but has to do with their peculiar characters that are both infinitely different and yet uncannily similar.

In my view, many thinkers such as Emanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, and John D. Caputo have only explored this relationship on a preliminary level. My current research aims to focus on this relationship at length while drawing out its full implications by way of phenomenological ethics.¹

Limit-experiences involve the irruption of the intractably unknown into our constitutive worldview. They are an *anonymous something* that breaks down all conditions of knowledge. In pervading our self-reality, they are suffered as a continual incapacity to take control of ourselves, to be ourselves. What Maurice Blanchot calls ‘neuter,’ Jacques Lacan calls ‘the Real’ and ‘Other,’ Jacques Derrida and John D. Caputo call ‘khora,’ and Mark C. Taylor calls ‘altarity,’ invoke a subjugation to a completely foreign outside that is so foreign it resists, deprives, undermines any form of comprehension and self-reconciliation.



The limit-experiences to be investigated here mostly involve some species of anguish and sorrow rather than ineffable joy. There is a much higher possibility that these dismantle the walls that build our sense of reality more severely than the others, with likelier long-term consequences. Furthermore, spells of despair, disorientation, trauma, ennui, depression, insomnia, and so on might be closer in kind to the event of the stranger than jubilant moments of intensity. In fact, one of the significant ways Blanchot conceives the limit-experience in works such as *The Writing of the Disaster* (1980) and *The Step Not Beyond* (1992), is through the

infliction of a severe obsession: an insistent yet strangely inaccessible thought that constantly ruptures my thoughts and contaminates my quotidian desires. Exterior to my selfhood, this foreign thought, intimate to my consciousness, marks a trace of implacable emptiness in my reflections, perceptions, intentions. To submit to the thought, or a suffering that is similar in Levinas’s works, the ‘there is,’ is to lose my relationship with the world as its beings and objects and places degrade into mere appearance. They show themselves as mere facticity, lacking in all possibility and promise: exhibits of an ‘*exteriority without interiority*’ (Massie, p. 48).

The stranger, the pillar of Levinas’s philosophy, attests to an event of hospitality, where my faith and love of another opens me to them. As Richard Kearney and Kascha Semonovitch show in their essay, ‘At the Threshold’ (2011), my welcome reveals the stranger as occupying a threshold.

¹ In this comparative study, the stranger will be examined especially in light of Richard Kearney’s diacritical hermeneutic ethics owing to its prominence in the field of contemporary phenomenological ethics.

Insofar as I see them here and now in their flesh and blood, insofar as I can relate with them, understand what they are saying to me, they appear as the face of the *foreigner*. But insofar as I cannot see them as who they are, that is, a singular selfhood, a unique consciousness of themselves and their world, a source of intentionality, they are that face that is turned away from me, the face of the other. In *The God Who May Be* (2001), Kearney calls these knowable and unknowable sides to the stranger, the 'person' and 'persona'. In its irreducible difference, the stranger's persona subverts me as cognitive authority.

II. The limit-experience and stranger as infinitely different

It seems incontrovertible that the limit-experience and the stranger represent two opposing phenomena. While the limit-experience is suffered as my disempowerment tout court, the disempowerment suffered by the stranger's otherness to me is, as Kearney points out, the prerequisite for my *receptivity* to what that otherness is to communicate to me. It involves a necessary tribulation where my ego and its possibles are disabled so I can finally listen or touch upon the immediate plight that besets the individual before me. Here, my egotistic impotence prefigures my egoless openness to other potential ways of seeing the world, of being in the world, that the stranger evokes in me. My primary incapacity is transfigured into a new kind of capacity entrusted to me by the other. I am no longer for-me but for-him, for-her, and this re-empowers me with possibles that would have been inconceivable for my acquisitive self.

The stranger is an event marked by a continuous givingness of possible ways of being in the world. The limit-experience is marked by a continuous withdrawal of all possibles of meaning. In connection to what he calls 'khora,' Caputo in fact characterizes this experience via Derrida as a *destinerrance*: an irremediable wandering without purpose, gratification, or reassurance; the state of being lost in perpetual uncertainty and confusion. By contrast, the stranger inaugurates a journey that is perhaps pierced with distress, but a journey nonetheless toward a goal: my loving and hopeful response to the plea of the other. The stranger concerns me to the very depths. Khora is existence's blind unconcern to my depths.

In their difference, either phenomenon provokes in us the conviction of its own singular character. In their respective uniqueness, neither one can be compared or measured by any criteria. Each constitutes its own unique authority. To experience one of them, therefore, can easily invalidate the 'reality' or 'truthfulness' of the other. An aspect of the behaviour shown between the two phenomena can be said to amount to a reciprocal repulsion. Our exposure to one disqualifies the other from any influence.

III. The limit-experience and stranger as unity-in-difference: The chiasm

There are yet certain general similarities between the two phenomena in question. Neither one of them strictly speaking 'takes place' within the realm of being, if by 'being' we understand the order of presence and signifiers. They arrive from outside being and are therefore marked by its deprivation and dispossession. Whereas the limit-experience is an endless retreat from being, however, the stranger advances possibilities of being.

More than events that take us by surprise, the limit-experience and stranger also capture, in my view, a common *way of being in the world* that would have been affected by the events themselves and help open us to their arrival. We are here zeroing on a mindset that would entail a psychosomatic affirmation to be as vulnerable as possible to the world around us; a perpetual consent to be unreservedly susceptible to what is other in our quotidian and not-so-quotidian experiences. This mindset would occur in the manner of a willing surrender to the irreducible not-us in our environment to let it act upon us at will. Intrinsic to this state of being is an abdication of our status as cognitive master to become a hostage to the emergence of the outside.

As events that point toward a way of being in the world, both the limit-experience and the stranger thus refer us to alterity through which they share a kinship. At the same time, however, this same alterity, in arriving from different 'sources' outside being, is the premise for their dissociation. If they converge in nature, they also at the same time diverge. The ambivalent simultaneity at play here can be effectively captured through what Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968) calls 'chiasm'.

The chiasm in Merleau-Ponty's sense is a structure of mediation that is found at work in any number of ontological relationships and at different levels of complexity, including the relationship between self and world, self and other, fact and idea, past and present, and mind and body. It is characterized by a *reversibility* and a *unity-in-difference* between two dissimilar parties. The two parties encroach upon one another, blurring their distinctiveness while yet retaining that distinctiveness.

IV. The call to take the leap

The relationship between the limit-experience and the stranger is likewise chiasmic in disclosing an overlap that yet does not negate their irreconcilable separateness. We can describe this 'impossible' synchronicity as a *continuity*. Undergoing one phenomenon can lead to the call of the other, where the term 'call' is here a liberal adaptation of Caputo's term as explored in such works as *The Weakness*

of God (2006), *The Insistence of God* (2013), and *Specters of God* (2002). While given to the limit-experience, I can hear the call of the stranger beckoning me out of my sphere of existence toward another sphere that is founded on compassion and hope for a more just society. Conversely, while given to the stranger, I can also hear the call of the limit-experience, seducing me to despair, self-destruction, resignation, anguish, indecision ... Two different calls that by virtue of their discordant nature *interrupt* my present existential condition.

Either call takes me by surprise, like a thief in the night. A call can be inspired from a person, a place, an idea, a narrative, the divine, or 'a bit of indigestion' (Prayers, 12). It can come *through* these sites, but it comes *from* I do not know where, perhaps nowhere, perhaps no-thing at all. If it calls from without me, it also calls from within me, or perhaps from somewhere in between. Caputo describes it as quiet and insistent. It shares the structural character of what he calls a 'specter', 'a phenomenon that neither is nor is not but in either case cannot be dismissed. A specter wavers between being and nothing, is almost there but not quite, is almost nothing but then again nothing that can be ignored' (Specters, 3). The call does not really exist; it haunts existence.

We respond to a call with fear and fascination in that it awakens in us what has long been repressed in our unconscious. To hear a call is to be thrust into what Sigmund Freud has termed the 'uncanny,' as we are exposed to an unbearably intimate drive, for which reason we have hidden it from others in some forgotten past but even eventually from ourselves. By giving ourselves to a call, we are giving in to an old and long-familiar part of us we have long kept in the dark. We are thereby afflicted by the sense of not-being-at-home with ourselves and our world. We become, according to Julia Kristeva, 'strangers to ourselves' (Strangers, 170-92).

In our welcome to either call, we let our conscious defenses break down to be delivered to a consciousness that is not ours to own and direct. This depersonalized awareness of existence is egoless in that it deprives us or relieves us from the insatiable need to possess, control, and satisfy ourselves. We let go as being *for-ourselves* and we are seized instead by an attentiveness that is *for-otherness*. Our state of being transitions to an existential receptivity to the workings of the foreign.

The fact that both calls can consign us to an impersonal selfhood throws further light on why the two phenomena can intertwine. To suffer ourselves as divested of our ego in one phenomenon can well *predispose* us to hearing the call of the other one. Suffering ourselves as for-otherness in the event of the stranger is always in a sense an affective-cognitive preparation or readiness to be submitted to the for-otherness of the limit-experience, and vice versa.

V. The decision to take the leap

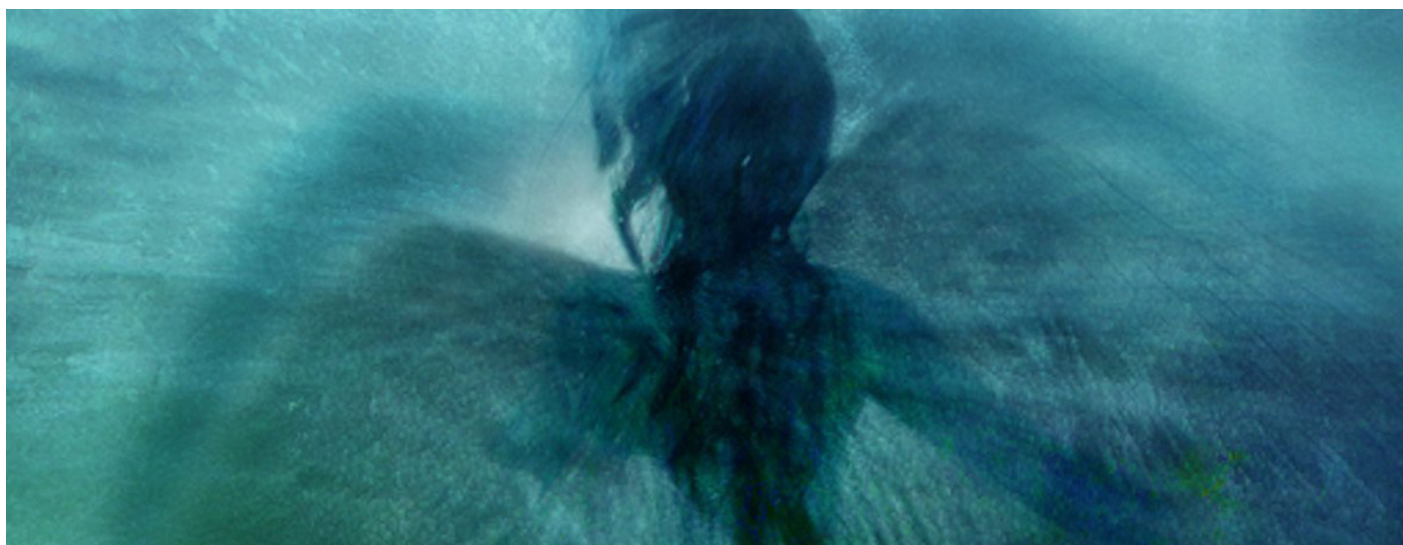
In several instances, especially concerning the limit-experience, the call can be too insistent for me to resist it. On many other occasions, however, and in different degrees, a decision is required of me to affirm or reject it. My affirmation is more in the mode of a responsiveness – an acceptance or welcome to what solicits me.

Above all, my decision is taken in circumstances of undecidability. If I am being called to adopt a sphere of existence that is radically different from the one I currently dwell in, then, to an extent, I am ultimately uncertain as to *where* my decision will take me, what its future will bring. I am indeed being asked to take Søren Kierkegaard's 'qualitative leap': a traversal to a way of being that is discontinuous in nature to mine (Fragments, 89-110). As such, the road ahead is factually unknown. Undecidability in my decision also stems from my doubts as to its *authenticity*. Am I being fair to the call in my response? Am I welcoming it without reservations and judgements? Or am I, unconsciously perhaps, misinterpreting it or using it for my own gratifying ends?

If what the call is leading me toward is finally unforeseeable and unimaginable, I nonetheless still have a vague notion concerning the *nature* of that call itself. On a basic and pre-reflective level, I would still be able to distinguish whether the call comes from my compassion for others or the abyssal site of the limit-experience. Whereas the limit-experience is a *something else*, the stranger is a *someone else*. Whereas one solicits me through what is perhaps a perverse desire to submit myself to the formless void, to death, the other solicits me through a desire to care, to have faith and hope for what Derrida would call a 'democracy' or 'justice-to-come', Caputo's 'kingdom of God', or Kearney's 'eschatological kingdom'.

My decision cannot but be *hermeneutical* by nature. Based on my intuitive reading of the call, I can thus refuse to welcome it, or, even more significantly, consent to welcome it but as interpreted *through* the sphere of existence I currently dwell in. In such situations, the limit-experience can be embraced but as a suffering for the stranger, that is, as part of the sacrifice we are willing to commit to, in our journey of succor.

Conversely, the stranger can be perceived and endured as part of the limit-experience, whereby their alterity becomes virtually indistinguishable from the alterity of that desolated state of being. The stranger's intimate 'who' is here merged – or more precisely, *confused* – with the anonymous 'what' of *khora* or *neuter* ... In such cases, their otherness is hyperbolized to such a degree that they cease to have, what Treanor would call, any 'similitude' to us. Beholding them through such extreme



unfamiliarity blocks us from any meaningful access and interaction with them. The stranger would retreat to the status of an alien, potentially assuming the unmerited roles of a persecutor and/or a scapegoat.²

Approaching the stranger through the limit-experience can also reduce them to a source of relief from the suffering inflicted by this way of being. Here, their alterity is dismissed in a self-gratifying objectification intended as an escape from our distress. It is evident that interpretations imposed upon the other in such scenarios distort the authenticity of our ethical encounter, possibly degenerating into the fetishization or idolization of the person/s in question.

Mapping out the phenomenological relationship between the limit-experience and the stranger as a chiasm *safeguards* the distinction between these two phenomena. It also provides what is likelier to be a plausible and effective theoretical and practical explanation as to how and why they can coincide with one another, while again, safeguarding this coincidence from their confusion and its consequences, a side to their interaction which is also coherently explained.

A cohesive picture of the various ways the two phenomena interact is thus presented that accounts for the structural vulnerability of the stranger to the limit-experience while illustrating the latter's importance in its motivational role to have faith and care for the stranger, hence granting it a practical and constructive ethical aspect that is often denied it.

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² Various philosophers with a poststructuralist and deconstructionist bend, who tend to grant the limit-experience a central role in their thought, can sometimes be guilty of this form of obfuscation in their ethical visions.

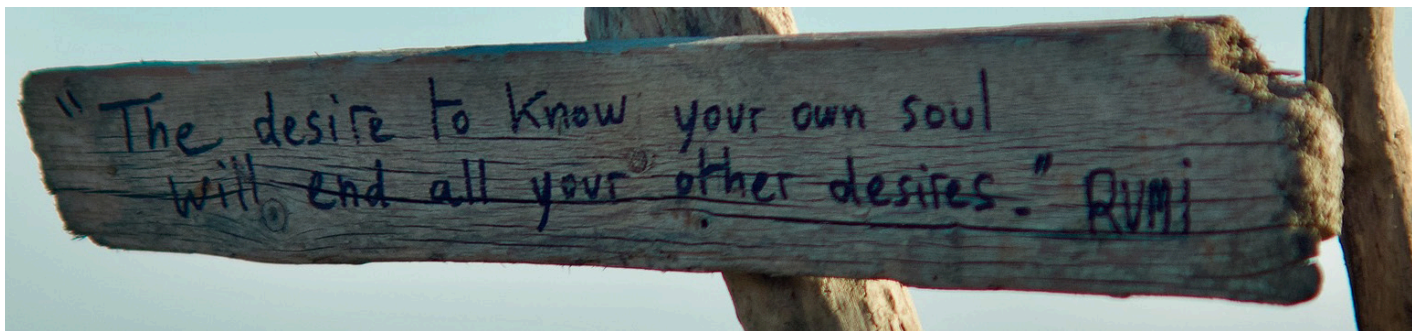
The Matters of Philosophy and Why it Matters

by Keith Pisani

In my fifteen years as a teacher of philosophy in a postsecondary institution, I have often been asked the question: 'why should one study philosophy?' The reasons for asking this question can be various, ranging from inquiring about the kind of employment students in philosophy can find once they graduate to inquiring about the value of philosophy in general. In this article, I want to reflect on the latter, hoping to have time and space to tackle the former sometime in the near future.

and if we want to be taken seriously when we speak about the value of philosophy, we need to take the question of the *matters* of philosophy seriously. In other words, we need to address the question, 'what is philosophy?'

I have to confess that until a few years ago, I used to find this question disquieting, and as a teacher of philosophy who, at the beginning of each academic year, is confronted with students who know very little about the subject they



A quick look at the 'Why study Philosophy?' section of various postsecondary and tertiary institutions reveals an interesting pattern. By studying philosophy, prospective students are told they will acquire general problem-solving skills, critical thinking, writing and communication skills, logical and analytical skills, and the like. The value of studying philosophy, it seems, lies in the generic skills students acquire. These are all desirable skills; after all, who does not want to be able to solve problems, think critically, communicate effectively, and be logical? While I believe there is some truth in some of these promises, and while I understand the desire to align one's discourse with the current dominant discourse on education, this way of presenting the value of philosophy might suggest that the content of philosophy, or perhaps the issues dealt with by philosophers, are of secondary or little importance (if any). If these generic skills are all that matter, and if at least one discipline imparts the (more or less) same skills and offers students something more, then philosophy risks becoming redundant.

The question of the value of philosophy cannot be separated from the question of what philosophy is about. If we want to take the question of the value of philosophy seriously

choose to study, giving some form of an answer to this question is imperative. I found this question disquieting because giving a definition or a general characterization of philosophy that does justice to the various branches of philosophy seems to be next to impossible. This is so, I argue, for two main reasons.

The first reason is that the meaning of philosophy and the meaning of philosopher have changed throughout the centuries. While certain issues, such as the nature of knowledge, the question of justice, and questions related to the good life, have kept attracting the interest of philosophers, the domain of philosophical inquiry has morphed and shrunk. Perhaps the main cause for this is the branching out of specialized disciplines from philosophy (physics, psychology, and counselling to mention a few) and their eventual detachment from philosophy in the latter two or three centuries. Similarly, whereas in the past, the title of philosopher was attributed to inquirers in general (for example, Galileo considered himself a philosopher), today, we have specialists such as physicists and psychologists who see their work as unrelated to philosophy.

The second reason is that notwithstanding the shrinking of philosophy and the differentiation of disciplines and their eventual separation from philosophy, the areas of study that are usually considered to be the province of philosophers are still considerably heterogeneous, with some having very little in common with others (think for example of critical theory and ontology). What philosophy is, is, in large part, the result of historical contingency and tradition.

Today, the way I go about introducing philosophy to my students is by describing, rather generally and sketchily, what the 'main branches'¹ of philosophy are about. I also tell my students that in my view, the term philosophy is more of an umbrella term that keeps various branches of inquiry together, not necessarily because they share specific characteristics (some, of course, do), but rather due to the story of philosophy philosophers and historians of philosophy narrate about the intellectual activity of their discipline.

If the above characterization of philosophy is correct, then how should we go about the question concerning the value of philosophy? I believe there is only one possible way forward: the question 'why philosophy matters?' should be broken down into many questions about why specific branches and even specific inquiries in philosophy matter. The standard answer that philosophy matters because one acquires a generic skills set – when taken on its own – is unsatisfying. Don't students studying other disciplines also learn to think critically, think logically, and solve problems? I am confident some do, and if they do not, they surely should. Does philosophical inquiry about justice and the good life (broadly construed) matter only because of the skills one acquires? Don't they (also) matter because justice and the good life matter to us human beings? To claim that inquiries into these fundamental issues matter only because of the skills students acquire in the process is to unwittingly claim that any topic of inquiry is good as any other as long as the promised skills are developed. If generic skills are all that matter, then philosophical inquiry about the existence of numbers would be functionally equivalent to philosophical inquiry about justice. Do the study of logic, political theory, and ontology matter for the same reasons? They obviously do not.

The reason why I am raising these issues is not because I think skills are unimportant. Skills are undoubtedly essential. But talk about skills should not replace talk about content.



Moreover, talk about skills should be more contextualized and nuanced (maybe some studies showing how and in what ways the study of specific branches contributes to acquiring particular skills would be helpful). Nor am I trying to suggest that the study of philosophy should be crudely instrumentalized. Different inquiries can be valuable for various, sometimes incommensurable, reasons. On the contrary, I am arguing that philosophers and philosophy educators should stop being reductionist in their appraisal of the discipline. Philosophers and philosophy educators need to be more self-reflexive about the discipline so precious to them.

The heterogeneity of branches and inquiries in philosophy implies that any value the study of philosophy has depends on the kind of inquiries one pursues. Consequently, different inquiries, branches, and even different programs of study can be valuable for different reasons. This also implies that the value of an intellectual inquiry, whether philosophical or otherwise, depends on the choices we make. There is no mechanical input-output formula when it comes to the enjoyment of the return of our intellectual labor. While we do not always reap what we sow, we certainly cannot reap what we do not sow. To someone asking me, 'why does philosophy matter?' today, I reply: 'it depends on the branch, on the inquiry, and on what matters to you as a person.'

Keith Pisani is a full-time teacher of philosophy at St. Aloysius College Sixth Form. He also lectures on Critical Theory and Politics and Public Policy at the University of Malta.

¹ What makes these branches 'main branches' is, as I said above, history and tradition and the fact that philosophers nowadays still feel it is worth pursuing research within these branches.

Interview with a Philosopher

Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek



Ian Rizzo interviews Professor Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek, a Polish utilitarian philosopher from the University of Lodz ahead of the Annual Philosophy Lecture, *The Good Life in Ancient and Current Philosophy*, to be organized by the Philosophy Sharing Foundation in Malta on the 1st of June 2023 at the Grand Hotel Excelsior. She was invited last year by the Foundation to deliver a talk with Peter Singer on Utilitarianism, which was held at the German-Maltese Circle on the 30th of May 2022. Katarzyna has published articles in Polish and English on utilitarianism, bioethics, and philosophy for children. She works on well-being, happiness, and pleasure. With Peter Singer, she has co-authored *The Point of View of the Universe: Sidgwick and Contemporary Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 2014), and *Utilitarianism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2017), and co-edited the new edition of John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism* (The Norton Library, 2022).

1. *I have come to know you through the Oxford book 'Utilitarianism – A Very Short Introduction' that you co-wrote with Peter Singer. It was in fact, Peter Singer, who initially proposed a joint talk on utilitarianism in Malta. When I met you both in person, I was struck by how much you had in common regarding your philosophical beliefs on utilitarianism, animal ethics and effective altruism - apart of course from the mutual intellectual respect you held towards each other. Could I ask you to elaborate further on this philosophical relationship? Being younger, how has Peter Singer been an influence on your philosophical views? And in what way do you think you have reshaped some of his views while collaborating with him?*

I am honored to say that Peter Singer has been my greatest teacher for the last 20 years, after I met him at a conference of the International Society for Utilitarian Studies. I was a young PhD student just beginning my career, starting my work on Henry Sidgwick's philosophy. How lucky I was that Sidgwick has been Peter's favorite philosopher! There are very few people working on this greatest 19th century utilitarian because his major work: *The Methods of Ethics* is really difficult to read and understand. So, I guess, I was some kind of a madcap to be willing to write my doctorate on him. With the help of the internet, I was able to get some assistance from Peter and after some time we wrote an article together on one of the aspects of Sidgwick's philosophy, then another for *Ethics*, and next our collaboration developed into books – *The Point of View of the Universe*, then *Utilitarianism: A Very Short Introduction* and, most recently, a new edition of J. S. Mill's *Utilitarianism*. Much of what I can do in philosophy I owe to Peter. But I also have had some influence on Peter, as I convinced him that Sidgwick was right to embrace hedonism rather than some kind of desire-based theory or preferentialism. So, Peter has become what we call a classical utilitarian.

2. *I wish to refer to the recent collapse of FTX crypto currency exchange. Don't you think that the co-founder Sam Bankman-Fried who has been a strong contributor to the effective altruism movement highlights the limitations in pursuing a strictly utilitarian approach to ethics? Can we really trust people with extreme wealth because they declare themselves to be committed to doing good in the world?*

The case saddened many of us connected with the effective altruism movement. There is not much doubt, I believe, that when we help others in some way, we should do it as



Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek with Peter Singer in Mdina during their last visit to Malta in May 2022 to deliver a joint talk on utilitarianism organized by the Philosophy Sharing Foundation.

effectively as we can. But in practice, this does not mean that we should always follow the utilitarian principle of maximizing utility. Derek Parfit, a deceased Oxford philosopher and one of the most important philosophers of the 20th century, once called utilitarianism a self-effacing theory. That means that to achieve the best consequences, we should sometimes follow non-consequentialist rules. In the case you mentioned that might have meant, that it would have been better if Sam Bankman-Fried followed the law and acted according to the generally accepted moral rules. I might not know extremely rich people, but money spoils us – this is a common-sense truth, and we need to be particularly careful. The more there is at stake, the more transparent we should be. I do hope that this case will not put too big a shadow on the effective altruism community, which does so much good in so many ways.

3. I understand from the bio-note in your publications that you have published some articles on philosophy for children. Do you agree that the teaching of philosophy to children should be compulsory and commence from an early age like language and mathematics? Could such learning at any early age pose some problems with faith-related teachings? What would be the philosophical subjects that can be taught to children and in what way?

Absolutely. I do believe that teaching philosophy – that is teaching constructing logical arguments – would be highly beneficial to our kids and society. Philosophy has always helped us to understand the world as a whole, not only its parts. It gives us a broader view. Plus, we do need to learn to talk with one another and to convince each other using arguments rather than manipulation. I am skeptical about our governments introducing such a subject though. It may not be in the best interest of the government to have wise citizens.

4. I also gather that bioethics is an area of interest in your works. As a philosopher who has been born and brought up in Poland, do you find some difficulty in expressing openly views on a subject that can potentially contradict fundamental Catholic tenets – particularly the one that every life is sacred?

I can observe a growing discrepancy between the official position of the Catholic church in Poland and the public opinion. We can see a huge withdrawal from the church, especially in the younger generation. The church is gradually but steadily losing its authority, especially after the pedophile scandals, interference in public policy and lately, tightening the abortion law. So, my liberal views are rather in accordance with the majority of Poles. I do not feel I cannot express my opinion.

5. The Philosophy Sharing Foundation was very happy to invite you for the annual philosophy lecture, more so when considering that you will be the first female philosopher to address our annual lecture. Do you think this reflects the past historical trend that men remain predominant in philosophy, even though nowadays more female students are reading philosophy? How can this gap between prominent male and female philosophers be narrowed?

First of all, thank you so much for inviting me! This is a privilege to be talking soon to a Maltese audience. Women have fought for their rights the hard way. They have been able to study, vote and work side by side with men for only a bit more than a century. I believe the presence of women in

science and research is one of the most key areas of progress we have achieved in the last century. In philosophy, the number of women scholars has grown fast during the last few decades. There are so many wonderful women philosophers – Judith Thompson, Frances Kamm, Martha Nussbaum, and younger ones like Ruth Chang or Sharon Street among them.

6. In the next annual philosophy lecture, you will be talking about the good life from the perspective of ancient and current philosophy. How can philosophy provide hope and consolation when life offers so much pain and grief as we battle loneliness, ageing, infirmity, and death?

To begin with a lighter note – we all know beyond any doubt that we will end up in death, so why worry? I believe strongly in the power of philosophical consolation. A simple observation shows that most of us enjoy life and want to continue it. We have not decided about our coming into existence, but we are able to make a decision about its end. And fortunately, very few (though still too many) decide to end it prematurely. Most of us also believe that on the whole we are happy and have a good life. This is quite amazing because even people who have come through traumas and live during wartime, still think of their lives as “quite happy.” We have a natural drive to live. But as a philosopher I want to find our good reason for continuing our lives beyond that natural drive. You enumerated pain and grief, but it is seldom that our lives are more painful than joyful. What happens, I believe, is that we do not pay proper attention to our pleasures or joys of life. We focus more on suffering. That may have an evolutionary justification – we have to survive first, so happiness is more like an addition than necessity. But one of my main aims at present is to make people aware of how pleasurable their lives usually are, and how many things we should be thankful for and can appreciate. That positivity can also give us power to help others in need. So, it is not only concentrating on our own goodness but on the good for others as well.

7. But how can we honestly enjoy a good life when human history – both past and present - has always been overshadowed by sustained oppression, inequalities, or war? And what use is it to have a good life when thinking of certain modern threats such as climate change and AI?

There have always been war and peace, death and life, hatred, and love. A constant fight between the good and the evil. I cannot think of a reason for giving up, once we are in the world. We have only one life and I would like to live



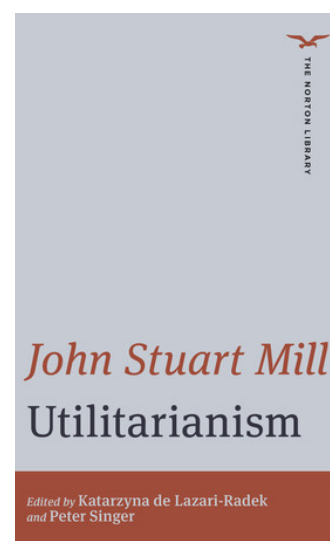
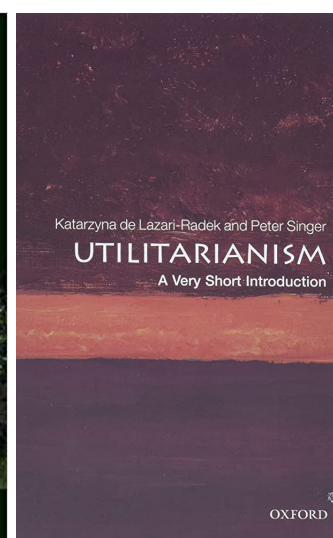
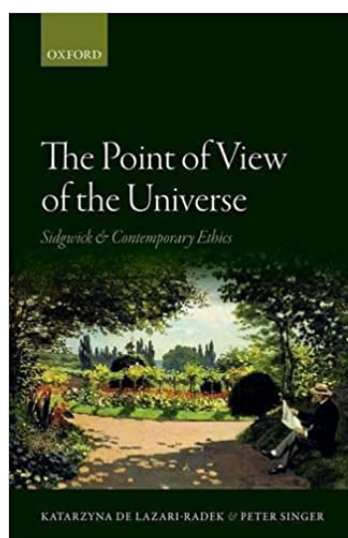
it as well and as happily as I can. It would be a real pity to waste it. So, I always try to concentrate on positives. Which for me means that I need to maximize both my pleasure and that of others. Yes, there are huge threats – both climate change and AI influence seem inevitable. We have obligations towards our children and grandchildren. But again, since we already exist, why not spend our life fighting for the good rather than be overcome by worry and fear?

8. *Don't you therefore see a conflicted choice between a happy life dedicated to the satisfaction of pleasure, one that is relieved of existential anxieties and a meaningful life that assumes the burden of responsibility and sacrifice? In which case, where do you lean?*

I definitely believe the conflict is not as tragic as you are presenting it. We experience much pleasure in helping others, that is the first thing. The other is that I cannot find anything meaningful in suffering. Really. It is a quite awful Christian idea that suffering plays a role in salvation. Of course, we will suffer, as we are humans, animals that feel pain, but it plays only an instrumental purpose, not any deeper sense. We should consciously fight against suffering and pain in the world.

9. *I understand the points you raised that we must focus on increasing happiness for ourselves and others. And I tend to agree. But should not happiness be conscious of life struggles and focus too on empathy, compassion, and activism to make the world a better place. Otherwise, I worry that a narrow focus on happiness could easily lead to greed, indifference or even an illusion of life. What do you think on this?*

Every person, including a hedonist like me, should be conscious of what life looks like. And it is impossible to live without at least some struggles and suffering. Happiness should not be understood as a life without problems but rather one in which you can solve them in the best possible way. I am a utilitarian hedonist, which means that I try to care for the good of others impartially. Rational compassion is a necessary element in motivation to action that would make the world a better place for everyone- one in which there is less pain and suffering and more enjoyment and happiness. I believe it should be a common goal of all humanity.



The Other Sides of the Conservative Edmund Burke

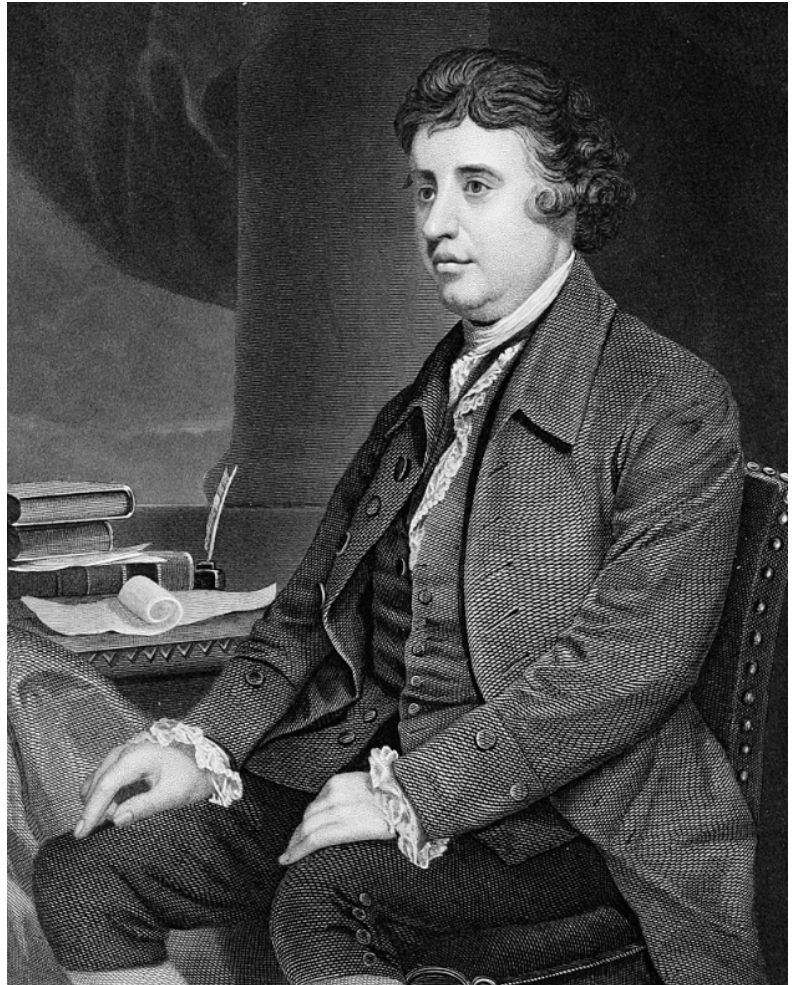
By Matt Qvortrup

“A true lawgiver ought to have a heart full of sensibility. He ought to love and respect his kind, and to fear himself” (*Reflections on the Revolution in France*). Has anyone ever written more tender political philosophy than the Irish born, British politician and aesthetic critic Edmund Burke (1729-1797)? Hardly.

He is best known for his eloquent denunciation of the anarchy that followed in the wake of the French Revolution 1789 – but his most interesting writings date from decades before. Born in Ireland to (secretly) Catholic parents, he was educated at the Protestant *Trinity College*, Dublin before he went to London to pass the bar. But instead of devoting himself to the study of common law at the *Middle Temple* (one of the four inns where barristers are trained), he wrote about aesthetics and irked out a living as the editor of *The Annual Register* – a literary periodical. It was during these years that he fraternized with prominent people like the celebrated Shakespearean actor David Garrick (1717–1779) and the critic and lexicographer Samuel Johnson (1709-1784). The latter, who did not suffer fools gladly, was effusive in his praise for the young Irishman, “I love his knowledge, his genius, his diffusion, and affluence of conversation” (Boswell, *The Life of Johnson*, p. 485).

To some, there are many Edmund Burkes. The most famous is the celebrated conservative who espoused moderation and urged that, “the useful parts are kept,” and that the essence of good statecraft is “at once to preserve and reform” (*Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 210). Yet, there was also another Burke, a young man who was a critic and a philosopher of aesthetics with few rivals. These two are often treated as if they were different. In fact, Burke was always a writer who was driven by emotion – irrespective of whether he was penning essays on art or when he was excoriating the government for misrule in India and America.

He caught the political bug in the mid-1760s. He became private secretary for Charles Watson-Wentworth, 2nd



Marquess of Rockingham, and was elected as an MP in the ‘rotten borough’ of Wendover. Like other electoral districts of this type, **it** had a very small electorate and could be used by a patron to gain unrepresentative influence within the House of Commons. Burke soon afterwards moved to Bristol. After a decade, he lost his seat partly because of his support for the rights of Catholics. (The Irish-born Burke’s mother was a Catholic and his father might have been so in secret).

Burke had not always been wise – but he was principled. While in Bristol, he also acted as a spokesperson for the colony of New York – something that was not popular in the West Country. And, in a well-known speech Burke famously said, “Your Representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion” (*Speech to the Electors at Bristol at the Conclusion of the Poll*, *Collected Works I*, p. 446).

After his defeat in Bristol, he moved to Malton, in Yorkshire in 1880. He remained there until his retirement from parliament in 1794. It was while an MP there that he briefly served in the junior ministerial office of Paymaster for the Forces. He was not a very successful politician. He was often a champion of lost causes – he was behind the unsuccessful impeachment of Warren Hastings the corrupt former governor of Bengal. Burke led the charge, calling the governor a “ravenous vulture devouring the carcasses of the dead” (quoted in Piers Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire: 1781–1998*, p. 35). But Hastings was not found guilty – and Burke was on the losing side yet again. Just as he had been when he urged conciliation with the rebellious colonies in America, and when he criticized the French Revolution.

But much as the latter marked the rhetorical highlight of his career, his contribution as a philosopher was established three decades before. Had Burke been but an aesthete, chances are that he would have been considered as one of the greatest philosophers of art. The reason for this rests on his *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, a treatise published in 1758 but probably composed as early as 1753.

We have, Burke argued fundamentally, two basic instincts, ‘self-preservation’ and ‘society.’ The latter of these give rise to sympathy, by which we are put into the place of another man “(*Sublime and the Beautiful*, p. 53), and that which inspire “us with sentiments of tenderness and affection” (*Sublime and the Beautiful*, p. 52). These thoughts are not substantially different from the ideas that his contemporary Adam Smith wrote about in his *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). Except Burke wrote his book before the Scotsman. (Burke in fact reviewed Smith’s book and called it “this excellent work,” Edmund Burke, review of Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, *Annual Register* 2 (1759): p. 484).

While Burke might be described as a pioneer as regards sympathy, he is more than this. His aim is not to understand human relations, but aesthetic feelings. And we associate the beautiful with what inspires these feelings.

Profound though these thoughts are, it was his pioneering account of ‘the sublime’ that revolutionized aesthetic theory – not least as Burke drew important political (sic!) implications of his theory of art. The Sublime, in Burke’s understanding, grows out of our instinct for self-preservation – but also from our fascination with danger. Thus, the sublime is, “whatever is in any sort terrible,” but which, “at certain distance and with certain modifications... are delightful” (*Sublime and the Beautiful*, p. 51).

The Russian ruler **Ivan IV** (1530–1584) is often known as Ivan the Terrible. But his suffix in Grozny – does not only mean someone cruel but also signifies ‘magnificent,’ ‘majestic’ and ‘awesome.’ The reason for this digression is that Burke directly links the use of the word sublime to tyrants and dictators. For, argues Burke, despots use this feeling to subdue the people. For, “the sublime is built upon terror” (*Sublime and the Beautiful*, p. 60), and Burke considered it a fact that “no passion so effectively robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear” (*Sublime and the Beautiful*, p. 53). For fear being “an apprehension of pain or death it operates in a manner that resembles actual pain.” Which, in turn, explains why successful demagogues who use credible scare-tactics are so irrationally successful, “for where the chances for equal degrees of suffering or enjoyment are in any sort equal, the idea of suffering must always be prevalent” (*Sublime and the Beautiful*, p. 55). That is, to appeal to the awe of the sublime is “always inflicted by a power in some way superior (*Sublime and the Beautiful*, p. 56). And all this, of course, has implications for political life, for these tactics are used by “those governments, which are founded upon the passions of men, and principle the passion of fear” (*Sublime and the Beautiful*, p. 54). At the risk of extrapolating a bit too much, Burke unlocked the secret to understanding the electoral success of would-be despots and populist leaders in centuries after he wrote.

To say that this book was well-regarded is an understatement. None other than Immanuel Kant wrote in *Critique of Judgment*, that Burke’s “exposition of aesthetic judgment may be the first step towards accumulating material for a higher investigation,” and that Burke deserved to “be called the foremost author” in aesthetic theory (*Critique of Judgment*, pp. 130-132). It was not just on the continent that Burke was praised and admired.

Certainly, a progressive liberal like Hazlitt would strongly disagree with the Burke who criticized the French Revolution’s excesses.

But for liberals – and indeed libertarians – Burke’s first book *A Vindication of Natural Society* (1756) suggests that he had more radical ideas than even his later revolutionary critics like Thomas Paine (1736-1809). His book *The Rights of Man* (1791) was intended to refute Burke. In fact, Paine was far less radical than Burke had been.

Admittedly, Burke claimed that *Vindication* – which had been published anonymously – was a parody of the work by the radical Viscount Bolingbroke (1678-1751). Perhaps so. But

the book was certainly eloquent and presents one of the most powerful attacks on organized state power.

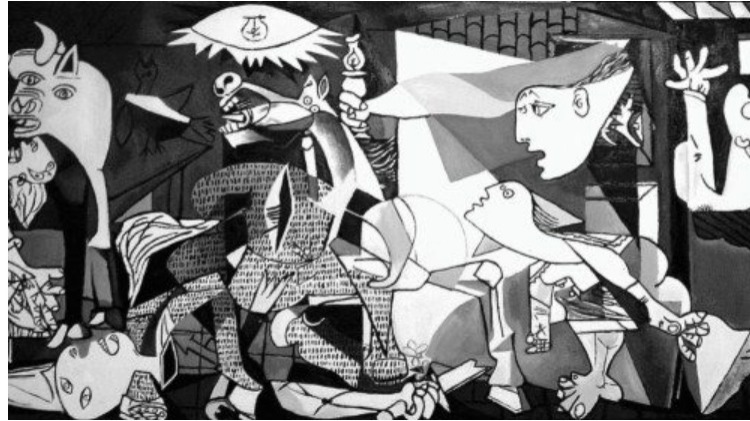
“War is Mass Murder, Conscription is Slavery, and Taxation is Robbery,” wrote the American libertarian activist and writer Murrey Rothbart (*For a New Liberty*, 1973, p. 28). Radical stuff, but not far away from Burke *anno* 1756. The Irish-born soon to become a politician pulled no punches. The cause of war was not ‘natural society,’ rather, the author of *Vindication* wrote, “I charge the whole of these effects [war and destruction] on political society” (*Vindication*, p. 151). Burke was against tyrants, but he did not restrict his criticism to despots alone. He even lashed out at republics like Venice and Genoa, and he concluded that, “an irregular state of nature is preferable to ...a government” (*Vindication*, p. 25).

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) would have disagreed. But then again, the two were also polar opposite in matters of economics. Whereas Hobbes had envisaged a large measure of social welfare, Edmund Burke would have none of it.

Those who see Burke as somewhat less of an apologist for the free market are gravely mistaken. In fact, he came very close to being a libertarian. In his late work *Thoughts on the Details of Scarcity* from 1795, he was clear that, “traders are to be left to their free course...[and] the more money they make”, and the “richer they are...the more largely the deal, the better for both [traders] and the consumer” (*Scarcity*, p. 275). Politicians, had a “restless desire of governing too much” (*Scarcity*, p. 279). And this is the problem with the state, “or while “it is in the power of government to prevent much evil, it can do very little positively good” (*Scarcity*, p. 269).

Burke not surprisingly opposed welfare provisions, “whenever it happens that a man can claim nothing according to the rules of commerce and the principles of justice...he comes under the jurisdiction of mercy. In that province the magistrate has nothing at all to do: his interference is a violation of the property it is in his office to protect” (*Scarcity*, p. 275). It is hard to think of any philosopher who was more uncompromisingly libertarian.

This did not mean that Burke was not charitable. The man who cherished – and in part invented- the idea of the ‘Sympathy,’ was clear that, “Charity to the poor is a direct and obligatory



duty upon all Christians” (*Scarcity*, p. 275). But Burke – like many other libertarians – did not see it as necessary to provide social welfare. The market would take care of things, for he wrote:

It is in the interest of the farmer [or the capitalist] that his work should be done with effect... and cannot be unless

the labourer is well fed, and otherwise found with such necessities...of life, according to his habitudes, as may keep the body in full force, and the mind gay and cheerful (*Scarcity*, p. 272)

So, Burke was a good deal more libertarian, and rather more anarchistic than his image as godfather of Conservatism may suggest.

He was a good deal more democratic than his later denunciations of the French Revolution would have us believe. The later Burke described it “an absurd theory,” that the subjects – or citizens- could exercise power, “the body of the people have no share in it [governing] and could “not choose their own governors” (*Reflections*, p. 169). The young MP speaking in 1770 was of the view that, “in all disputes between them [the people] and their rulers, presumption is at least upon par in favour of the people” (*Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, p. 82).

We do not have to agree with Burke to recognize his stature as a political thinker. The critic William Hazlitt – a generation after the French Revolution– lamented Burke’s increasingly conservative politics yet acknowledged that he “enriched every subject to which he applied himself” (William Hazlitt, ‘The Character of Mr. Burke,’ *Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, 1932, vii, p. 301).

True. And the fact that Burke was a humble man with an open mind makes him even more attractive. He admitted that he was fallible man and he admitted that “If I am wrong, it is not for want of pains to know what is right” (Speech on Mr. Fox’s East India Bill, December 1773).

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The Anti-Midas: How Does Philosophy View the Sense of Touch?

By Neb Kujundzic



Of all the human senses, touch has been nearly excluded from philosophy. This is true of all known philosophical traditions. Ironically, one has to use a bunch of visual paradigms to refer to this exclusion: it appears philosophy has always had a blind spot for touch. Yet touch can be many things to humanity: reassuring, threatening, inviting, flirtatious, forbidding, calming, surprising, to name but a few. It seems there is no shortage of either behavioral or phenomenological modifiers that may be added to touch. At the same time, as I already suggested, there is a great explanatory gap when it comes to the sense of touch. Namely, we can do many great things with touch yet our understanding of the sense of touch continues to be poor. Why?

To begin with, the so called active or “haptic” sense of touch is very difficult to define and individuate. A part of

the difficulty is that the human skin is not necessarily the only organ that produces or houses touch. Furthermore, it appears that in contrast to the other senses, touch does not have its own primary modality or in other words, its proper phenomenological foundation. For example, while we can speak of color and sound when it comes to vision and hearing, touch seems to be based on multiple modalities: texture, temperature, solidity, etc. Think of the self-diagnosis that people often perform as an illustration of the latter point: no other sense can come even close when we identify a swelling or body heat, and especially a source of pain in our bodies.

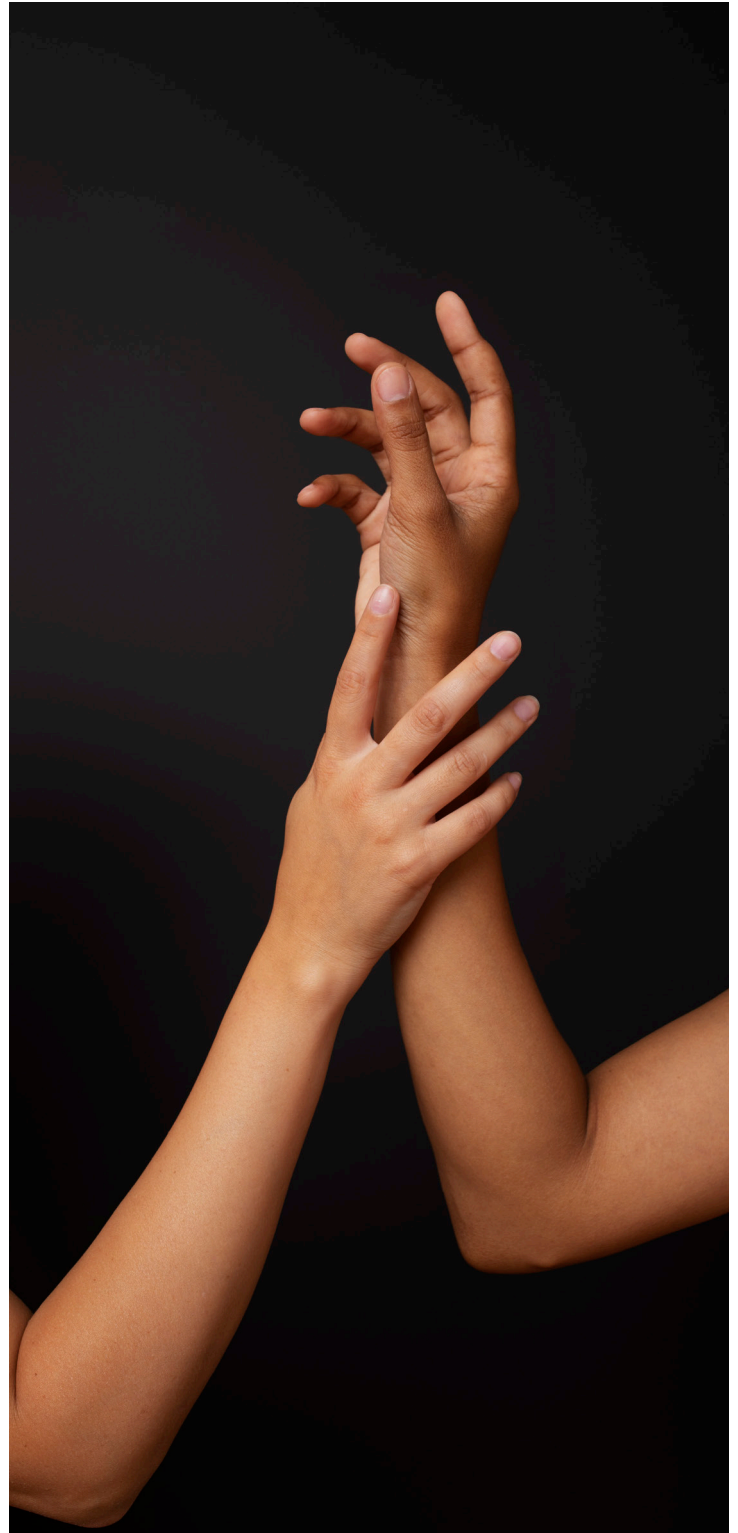
There is some hope that this explanatory gap may be bridged in the near future since some of the significant future inventions in interactive technology, including smartphone technology, seem to be increasingly centered around haptics. Furthermore, I would like to suggest that transformations of the human experience of touch taking place in today’s societies have been accelerated with the global lockdowns and quarantines of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is no doubt that human relationships are drastically changing in the wake of events related to the pandemic. The pandemic has challenged humanity in many respects; I furthermore suggest the absence of human proximity during the lockdowns and quarantines, and especially the absence of body-to-body contact, will necessitate a more careful inquiry into the phenomenon of touch.

There are some examples of notable philosophers throughout the history of philosophy who remarked on touch or used tactile metaphors. I shall refer to Aristotle only, even though I am sure there may be many more instances of the philosophical exploration of touch. As an important side note, I should recognize that I work primarily in what might be loosely labelled the “mainstream analytic” tradition of philosophy. Within feminist philosophy, there has been a lot more interest in the body and the multitude of aspects of human corporeality that include its social, political, cultural, ethical, and other dimensions. Furthermore, the feminist tradition of philosophy is well aware that touch is almost certainly the most primordial of the senses, if nothing

else, since it enables attachment at the earliest stages of human development. And finally, in the scientific community, and especially in medical research, the benefits of touch are well evidenced and abundant. For example, a recent US federal lawsuit against solitary confinement referred to growing scientific evidence that touch can have a calming influence on people in addition to its ability to reduce stress hormones and to lead to increased levels of trust and cooperation among people.

Whilst he was the first philosopher to explore the sense of touch, Aristotle wrote primarily on the phenomenon of tickling in Book 35 of his *Problems*. Aristotle writes the following on touch: “Why do we shudder more when someone else touches us than when we touch ourselves? Is it because the touch of a part of someone else has more power to produce sensation than that of a part of oneself, since that which is connected by growth with the sense organ is imperceptible?” (Aristotle 1984: Book 35). I suggest there are some notable counter examples to Aristotle’s view of touch, most notably the case of masturbation.

Richard Kearney, in his recent book titled *Touch*, proposes a new term which is perhaps necessary to capture some key technological trends in the 21st century: excarnation. In Kearney’s terminology, excarnation is a process of gradual and systemic replacement of flesh with the image. Could we go so far to maintain that in this replacement, Plato’s ancient dichotomy between simulacra and reality appears to be radically reversed? In other words, is it possible to say that in the wake of excarnation, simulacra increasingly provide the foundation of truth and knowledge? Kearney explores another corollary of the nearly instantaneous speed of 21st century communication, and the availability of various means of simulated and mediated experiences including virtual reality. Instead of bringing people closer, the multitude of means to simulate and mediate reality, using various channels of rapid communication, appears to paradoxically distance and alienate people. In a similar fashion Linda Haller, in her book “*Erotic Morality: The Role of Touch in Moral Agency*,” explores the technologically enabled distance between individuals that creates an environment in which people increasingly look at the world through a screen. In Haller’s words: “The glass between us and the world divorces the inside from the outside and accentuates the distance between the observer and that which is observed while



also increasing the distance between private and public life” (Holler, p.88).

Touch, an essentially holistic and largely non-localized sense, or something considered “imperceptible” to use Aristotle’s vocabulary, can be brought to the intentional forefront and is capable of replacing most other senses (most notably vision and hearing) in several manners. Consider visually impaired people using a cane to navigate their environments. Isn’t

it the case that touch is capable of simulating one's grasp of spatial configurations in this example. Or consider the Braille writing system. Finally, consider some extraordinary circumstances, including natural disasters, injury, or imprisonment, in which our senses of vision and hearing become compromised or entirely impaired. The latter two senses are typically considered more essential as they provide the basis of our means of communicating and representing the world. In their absence, touch may be used to simulate some of the aforementioned means of communicating and representing.

Near touch, especially from a phenomenological point of view, can be laden with intentions and implications. A sense of close proximity can imply many complex interpersonal, cultural, political, hierarchical, and other nuances. I think of an example from the popular culture: the well-known hit song "Don't Stand So Close to Me" by the rock band the Police, released in 1980. This

song explored some controversial themes, namely the taboo of the student-teacher relationship, including power, guilt, and inappropriate attraction. Overall, a sense of appropriate proximity appears to be culturally relative. In proxemics, the field of study of interpersonal space, it is well known for example that the scope of proximity correlates often with population density.

In conclusion, I would like to argue that the following three developments ought to be expected in the near future: 1) the explanatory gap I sketched in this presentation should be closed 2) the current technological interest in haptics should inform and invigorate the research around the sense of touch and 3) the sense of touch should take its proper place in philosophy and cognitive science.



Even more importantly, the sense of touch ought to be more fully integrated in future models of ethics. For several millennia, this sense has been virtually excluded from philosophy and ethics. Yet this sense offers a plethora of resources for humanity. We need to listen to the voices that have remained largely marginalized in mainstream ethics literature. I shall offer one significant example. It is useful

to come back to Linda Holler and her book "Erotic Morality." This is how she characterizes mindful touch, a holistic and transformed sense of touch: "Make the time and space to be, to breathe, to feel, to stay in mindful touch with the consequences of our actions" (Holler, p.208).

Allow me to close by listing some of the virtues of this model of ethics, based on and empowered by touch: connectedness, presentness, empathy, respect, and ultimately care for our fellow human beings and indeed for the whole planet.

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A New Holism

By Thomas O. Scarborough



My new metaphysics, published last year, has a marked emphasis on holism. This stands out, too, in various reviews of my work. At the same time, my own emphasis, since then, has tended even more towards holism—and has led me to new thoughts about the nature of holism itself.

There is a very obvious defect in our definition of holism. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as ‘the theory that parts of a whole are in intimate interconnection.’¹ Alternatively, the Collins English Dictionary defines it as ‘the belief that everything in nature is connected in some way.’²

Whichever dictionary one chooses, the definitions are much the same. Holism is the view that, within a given context—often the broadest possible context—everything connects.

The problem with these definitions is that they mostly refer to the whole as a connection of parts. Is one then truly speaking of a whole? To connect is to ‘bring together or into contact.’³ This is not the kind of whole that represents a union, fusion, or coalescence. Rather, the whole remains separated into pieces—and these pieces are generally not related in the most intimate way.

Holism as fusion

But suppose that we conceive of the whole as a fusion, a union, a coalescence, beyond the existence of any parts. There are strong indications that this may be the case.

One most easily sees it in our concept of *causation*. Causation is problematic—and this means that the notion of ‘things’ is

¹ *Oxford Languages*, (2023). Oxford University Press. <https://www.google.com/search?q=holism>

² *Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, (2023). HarperCollins. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/holism>

³ *Oxford Languages*, (2023). Oxford University Press. <https://www.google.com/search?q=connect>

problematic because things are the *cause* of things—whether we speak of beings, objects, events, or any which kind of ‘things.’

The philosophers Anna Marmodoro and Erasmus Mayr, echoing Hume, note that there is ‘no genuinely singularist causation’.⁴ Bertrand Russell put it this way: ‘If the inference from cause to effect is to be indubitable, it seems that the cause can hardly stop short of the whole universe.’⁵ Ernst Mach wrote simply, ‘There is no cause nor effect in nature.’⁶

Causation is a human illusion—and so are the ‘things’ on which causation rests. While we cannot do without the illusion, it is nonetheless unfounded.

There is another way of putting this. According to the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, until language is born, ‘no shape is intrinsically determinate.’⁷ Consider, too, metaphysician Brian Cronin: ‘Data is undifferentiated, unquestioned, preconceptual, unnamed’.⁸ That is, there are no parts, until we conceive of them. This is reminiscent of the Chinese philosopher Laozi: ‘The nameless is the inception of the myriad things.’⁹

If this is true, then the fragmentation of our reality into a profusion of things that connect is ultimately a mistake. Reality is deeper than that. Science writer Kitty Ferguson asked, ‘Is nature’s reality deeper than mathematics itself?’ And mathematics, it is said, deals with entities. The linguists Wilhelm Kamlah and Paul Lorenzen wrote, ‘We differentiate objects in the world, but not the world itself, as an object, from other objects.’¹⁰

I myself would add a weaker argument, yet nonetheless significant. I consider that we falsely individuate things. I throw a stone in the air and catch it in my hand. How shall I individuate this stone? Some would say, by its outline—which is often determined by the sight of the eyes. Others would refer to its volume, or substance, or some other thing which is intrinsic to the stone.

But when I feel it, it is warm. Where does its warmth end? And it has a gravitational pull, be it ever so slight. Where does its pull end? High above me? In outer space? At the edges of the universe? Are these its true boundaries? Objects are far more closely related to the universe than we typically realize.

In short, every description of the world, every theory, every equation (and so on), breaks up the whole into parts. It represents a fragmenting, a crumbling, a taking apart of the whole. As soon as we seek to describe the world, or theorize about it, or reduce it to mathematical objects, we drop to a level which is fundamentally different to the whole.

Derivative principles

From this simple observation, we may derive various principles. We shall confine ourselves here to five:

1. When we move from entities, objects, events, and so on — to true holism, and back again — in both directions, we make a *quantum jump*. When we move from the unconditioned into the condition of things, holism collapses. When we move from the condition of things into the unconditioned, entities, objects, and events vanish. It is so to speak, the difference between the chrysalis and the butterfly.¹¹

2. As soon as we drop to a level below the whole, our descriptions, theories, and equations become incapable of taking the whole into account. With this, we immediately lose the ability to completely describe our world. Suppose that we select and define *x*. In doing so, we immediately discard NOT(*x*). With this, we enter a realm of incomplete thinking.

3. If our descriptions, theories, and equations are incapable of taking the whole into account, then no use of rational means will address our problems completely. This is especially so when we are dealing with open systems—if all of our systems are not open anyway. The poet John Dryden famously asked, ‘How can the less the greater comprehend? Or finite reason reach infinity?’¹²

⁴ Marmodoro, A., & Mayr, E. (2019). *Metaphysics*. Oxford University Press, p. 132.

⁵ Russell, B. (2014). *Our Knowledge of the External World*. Routledge, p. 229.

⁶ Mach, E. (1988). *The Science of Mechanics* (T.J. McCormack, Trans.). Open Court, p. 483. (Original work published 1883)

⁷ De Saussure, F. (1986). *Course in General Linguistics* (R. Harris, Trans.). Open Court, p. 110. (Original work published 1916)

⁸ Cronin, B. (2022). *A Worldview of Everything*. Pickwick Publications, p. 481. <https://www.amazon.com/Worldview-Everything-Contemporary-First-Philosophy-ebook/dp/BOBPYQX6PG>

⁹ Laozi, (2008). *Daodejing*. (E. Ryden, Trans.). Oxford University Press, p. 5. (Original work ca. 400 B.C.E.)

¹⁰ Kamlah, W., & Lorenzen, P. (1984). *Logical Propaedeutic* (H. Robinson, Trans.). University Press of America, p. 40. (Original work published 1973)

¹¹ Buber, M. (2000). *I and Thou*. (R. Smith, Trans.). NY: Simon & Schuster, p. 31. (Original work published 1923)

¹² Dryden, J. (1777). *The Poetical Works of John Dryden*. Apollo, p. 162.

4. When we drop to a level below the whole, we must decide which subset of the whole we shall choose—which description, theory, or equation, and within which bounds to serve our particular ends. In the words of the philosopher Simon Blackburn, ‘We select particular facts as the essential ones.’¹³ This turns every use of ‘things’ into value judgments. Objectivity now becomes illusory.

5. With descriptions (and so on) representing a loss of the ability to completely describe our world, we often have a situation of a loss of control, with unwanted, even catastrophic consequences. The risk now arises that, in order to regain control, we exert ever greater effort—often developing totalizing tendencies as we do. No thought or act will ever return us to the whole. It is paradise lost.

The meaning of holism

There are myriad areas to which we may now apply such principles. These five examples are merely illustrative of how a new holism may affect our view of various aspects of life.

1. Every element of *language* may now be seen as a narrowing of one’s focus, from the entire universe to something which is smaller than the whole. Language is not merely about constructing words, sentences, paragraphs, and so on, but about reducing the whole. For example, ‘The planet is blue’ reduces our focus from the whole, to a single location, and a single time, and a single characteristic.

2. Consciousness, if this is something that has to do with the whole, cannot be adequately explained in terms of descriptions, theories, or equations. While these may have various kinds of explanatory power, they will not explain consciousness itself—if, that is, consciousness is an open system. This now becomes a key question: What kind of a system is consciousness? Closed or open?

3. *Science*—even physical science, sometimes called ‘hard science’—now becomes subjective. Certain sciences become uncertain. The question is no longer whether physical science is accurate or not, but rather what its descriptions (and so on) leave out, and for what reasons. This means that, if we should believe that physical science delivers certainties, we put ourselves in a dangerous place.

4. If we view the *environment* as a closed system, we may harbor thoughts of engineering it, controlling it, or managing it. If, however, it is an open system, then as soon as we seek to apply our reason to it, we drop to a level which is fundamentally different to the whole—and in so doing, we lose control. The only real solution for the environment then is ‘hands off.’

5. *Ethics* can only be grounded within the context of the whole, not in partial or fragmented rules. As soon as something partial becomes the goal of our behavior, our sense of ethics becomes distorted. A common example is the profit motive. In isolation, this distorts environmental ethics, human rights, social wellbeing, and so much more. So does every ethic which is less than the whole.

A personal aspect

In isolation, all these areas represent a drop to a level which is fundamentally different to the whole. This has consequences. As soon as we drop below the whole then, as in the biblical story, ‘the eyes of [us are] opened, and [we] know that [we] are naked.’¹⁴

While we receive great power through our fragmentation of reality, this comes with the loss of our ability to completely describe our world, and with this, the erosion of control.

There is a personal aspect, too. Where fragmented reason melts away, there we find that the holistic qualities of life emerge that we so greatly value and deeply desire: among them love, beauty, wisdom, generosity, and purpose—and everything besides which represents a suspension of reason and particulars.

Yet apply our reason to the holistic qualities of life, and those qualities disappear. Analysis dissolves our every dream.

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¹³ Blackburn, S. (2005). *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*. Oxford University Press, p. 129.

¹⁴ Green, J. (1986). *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible*. Sovereign Grace, Gen 3:7.

Technology and the Future of Feminism

By Stephen G. O’Kane



Amongst the many themes discussed by contributors to SHARE Issue 18 (Nov 2022) on the future of feminism, there is, I feel, one major omission. The expanding technologies of artificial intelligence (AI) and gene editing are sure to make a huge impact on the lives of women (and men), and also on the arguments about sex and gender. It is probable that the influence of AI will be felt most on gender, but that of gene editing may extend into biological sex itself. What happens in that regard is likely to turn, at least in part, on ethical considerations. Already technology has played a key role in facilitating women developing careers outside the home – and working within it – whilst shrinking the scope for masculine physical strength in more affluent parts of the world. Males are frequently office workers, now sometimes working from home.

The definition of AI given by Ed Burns (Techtarget.com/Enterprise AI) is interesting: ‘Artificial intelligence is the simulation of human intelligence processes by machines, especially computer systems. Specific applications of AI include expert systems, natural language processing, speech recognition, and machine vision.’ This shows the machine is already playing a diverse range of roles, moving up the skills ladder. But the machine has no gender, unless – as in the case of chatbots like ‘Alexa’ – it is programmed to act a

gender. There is no theoretical limit to the range of genders or character stereotypes a machine can act but acting remains the point. Simulation is acting taken to its limits. The theme of acting is rather neglected here, as in debates of the World Economic Forum (cf. Pascale Fung, ‘This is why AI has a gender problem,’ webforum.org June 30, 2019) about whether shortage of female engineers – and venture capitalists in the area of AI – leads to gender stereotyping of machine applications. But even as far as such a problem arises, the role of gender is essentially imaginary. In that sense, feminist critique of gender roles and stereotypes is endorsed by the role of machines. Moreover, the case of machine implants or replacements like prosthetic limbs or heart pacemakers makes no difference since gender is then imputed to the human being only.

AI in particular, is becoming ubiquitous, so that women, and men will be involved with AIs in whatever they do. At present AI applications are all Artificial Narrow Intelligence (ANI) which are particular systems addressing particular problems. (‘Intelligence’ in this context is generally understood in terms of capacity for problem solving.) Although that limits their role, the capacity of machines to ‘learn’ is developing all the time, including the ability of systems to mimic human speech for instance. But the issues around control of machines, and

their capacity to take over human activities and roles, would become far more extensive if AI develops into Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) – which at present still does not exist. It has been pointed out (The Conversation 9 January 2023) that current AI systems are bound to reflect data – researchers do not yet know how to build human values such as truth and fairness (or any others) into algorithms. Feminists have every reason to develop their views on which values should receive priority in advance of progress in that direction.

The future place of gene editing is more speculative, not least because understanding of how genes interact with one another is still very limited. The very definition of gene editing hints at that point: ‘Gene editing is performed using enzymes, particularly nucleases that have been engineered to target a specific DNA sequence, where they introduce cuts into the DNA strands, enabling the removal of existing DNA and the insertion of replacement DNA.’ The World Health Organization (WHO 2021) explains that ‘somatic’ (not heritable) gene editing is already used successfully for treatment of HIV, sickle-cell disease and transthyretin amyloidosis and shows promise for treatment of a variety of cancers. Thus far, the treatment of disease such as in these instances or hemophilia and cystic fibrosis is likely to be among the relatively simple cases where a single gene is involved (sometimes through modifying the behavior and resistance of infections). The therapeutic applications are relatively uncontroversial, but any future capacity to alter human genomes, except for treating disease, would be controversial in the extreme. The WHO (2023) is already warning about challenges like ‘rogue clinics, medical travel, as well as the reporting of illegal, unregistered, unethical, or unsafe research, and other activities including offer of unproven so-called therapeutic interventions.’ The very possibility of such problems draws attention to the philosophical point here, which is that *technical feasibility* is of the essence. Simply to insist on regulation of research and therapies means accepting that gene editing (of humans) has come into the realm of ethical and legal decision (i.e., social, and political choice) whether to permit the alterations under whatever conditions, or to forbid them. That point is highlighted by the very possibility



of illicit activity attempting to circumvent whatever restrictions or regulations might be internationally agreed. Before gene editing techniques became feasible the ethical challenges simply did not arise.

This kind of ethical conundrum promises to become highly relevant for any feminism. For instance, as understanding of the interactions between genes develops, the question emerges as to how legitimate it would be to turn the arguments of Simone de Beauvoir on gender and ‘becoming’ a woman (under socially prescribed terms) into a demand for women to be entitled

to employ gene editing for their own purposes? Behind any such question lurks the more basic one of whether there is such a thing as a specifically feminist ethic, and if so, what it consists of. In these conditions the long-standing feminist theme that ‘the personal is political’ acquires a new relevance.

The applications of gene editing will probably remain more specialized than those of AI, but gene editing has the potential to intensify gender fluidity more directly – already problematic for those feminists who wish to protect women-only spaces. It is likely to impact fashion and appearance(s) in particular. At the very least it will render questions around gender more complex, even if it does not reach the level (anticipated by some science fiction writers) of making gender, or even sex, a consumer choice.

I am in no way competent to make predictions about the timing of growing sophistication in AI and gene editing technologies or when the most difficult philosophical and ethical problems might emerge. But both technologies are already present and growing in importance. I would maintain that no consideration of the future of feminism can be complete without taking account of them.

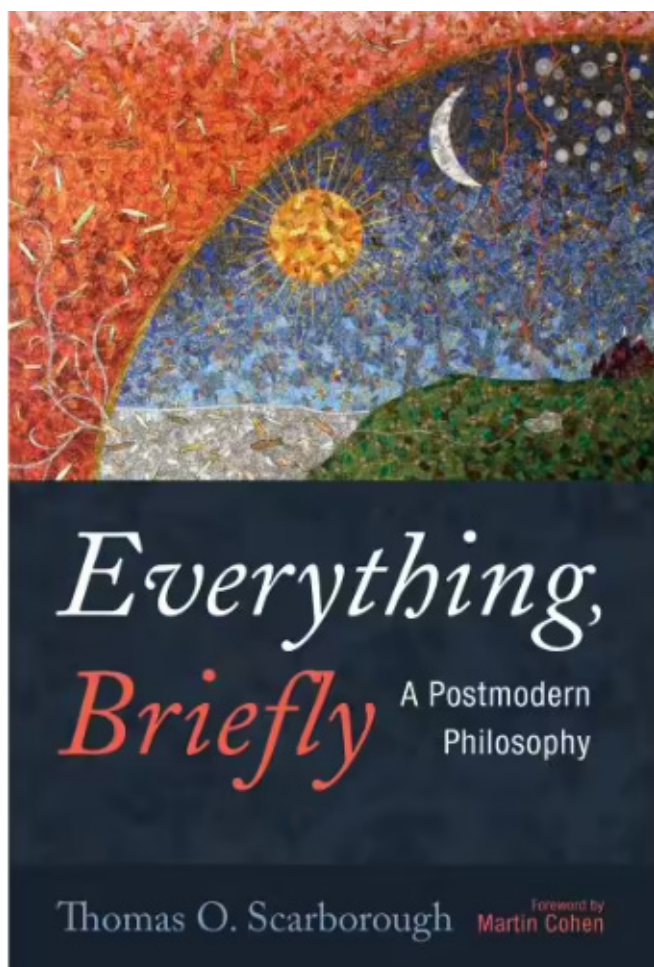
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Everything, Briefly A Postmodern Philosophy

By Thomas O. Scarborough

Published by Wipf & Stock, 2022, 380 pages

Reviewed by Ian Rizzo



The answers to the question as to what is real have long been conflicting and divisive since the early ages of philosophy. This conflict has vividly manifested itself in the clash between Plato's theories of forms and Aristotle's pragmatism and rambled on with the divisive debate between the rationalists (magnifying the role of unaided reason) and the empiricists (magnifying the role of experience).

In his publication, *Everything, Briefly: A Postmodern Philosophy*, Thomas O. Scarborough attempts to find a unifying solution that reconciles all the divergent views in philosophy. He views the universe as a boundless expanse supported by seamless interwoven webs of relationships that reach far beyond what our finite minds can decipher. His philosophy on relationships is quite plausible when

observing the complex relationship behaviors of our natural ecosystems as well as human constructions such as the global financial system and the internet. To a certain extent, even the mysterious connection between the mind and the body parts of all living organisms underlines the importance of the interaction between the individual parts and the sum of the greater whole to which they relate.

To gain an understanding of reality, Scarborough insists that we must continuously trace relationships in a boundless world. As the ultimate interpreter of reality, it is the mind which can assist us in this tracing of relationships by translating and reconstituting what we observe or feel through our senses. The mind holds a conceptual model of the expected arrangement of the world and when this deviates from the perceived reality it motivates us to act and express our emotions. Further than that, our minds must communicate these conceptual models with the minds of others to determine whether to modify or hold onto them.

But apart from the mind, humanity enjoys an added advantage over animals when it comes to perceive reality. This is language which couples a boundless universe with the infinite productivity of words and allows one to arrange them freely in expressing relationships beyond bounded views.

However, as Scarborough aptly points out, we have inherited our language and our thinking minds from previous generations and tend to anchor them within the bounded past. His appeal lies in the call to liberate our minds and to make free use of language when we come to discern the relationships of the universe and the interconnectedness that comes from every direction.

With this valuable insight, Scarborough devises ten ethical maxims that propose (i) expansive and holistic thinking, (ii) embracement of existing relations in the world, (iii) a balance of all things, (iv) finding relations that lie beyond the obvious, (v) knowledge of oneself, (vi) guidance by a deep sense of

inadequacy, (vii) avoidance of totalizing tendencies, (viii) starting from one's own position, (ix) avoidance of stable centers and (x) avoidance of fixity. The more you think about these ten ethical maxims, the more you realize how conflicting theories on ethics could converge on a more integrated viewpoint.

Scarborough then moves on to apply these ten ethical maxims across the public domain. Using the philosophy of relations as his basis, Scarborough redefines alternative concepts that are easily taken for granted. Democracy is seen as healthy when representatives of the people trace relations through all of society. Likewise, economics should prioritize the relationship of the economy with human beings over that of goods and services. Crime could be tackled more effectively if society assists criminals to develop in their minds a new understanding of the world. And when it comes to nature, our built environments should relate to, rather than replace the natural environment. Climate change has clearly shown that nature can never be mastered.

Scarborough's solution to reconcile divergent views takes a post-modernist stance when he argues, convincingly, that Hume's is-ought distinction (between facts and norms) and causal theories present obstacles to tracing relationships in a boundless world. As with the post-modernist views, Scarborough maintains that science and mathematics, for all their claims to being objective and factual, are in effect subjective when they scope reality and establish individual parameters and assumptions to support their theories. The perils of ignoring interconnectedness are evident from the undesirable effects and unintended consequences that resulted from major scientific experiments. The fixation on efficiency both from the scientific and economic viewpoints has contributed to dehumanization, boredom, and powerlessness. Historians are likewise being game to subjectivity when they screen out certain facts in their analysis.

Scarborough's embrace of post-modernism, risks though, undermining the philosophy of integrated relationships that he passionately espouses from the beginning of his writings. For the greatest criticism of post-modernism, lies in the justification of doubts against any attempts to portray objective truths detached from feelings and narrative identity. We must not forget that the scepticism expressed against state institutions by a substantial segment of the populace in the democratic West, has fueled the rise of populism in recent decades. That a substantial part of Republican voters in the United States believed that the last presidential election has been fraudulent on no substantial evidence is a

worrying concern to any democratic society. And in Brazil, a similar incident replicated itself in the presidential elections held in October 2022. The rise of social media in recent decades have no doubt facilitated the portrayal of different versions of reality.

But the biggest flaw in portraying science and mathematics as an imperfect fit with reality lies in the fact, that one cannot avoid certain scoping and assumptions to make sense of the infinite expanse of relationships under study. Furthermore, it cannot be denied that human obsession with measurement since the early ages of civilizations, led to significant advances in knowledge and exponential growth in technological progress. Measurement always requires quantitative analysis to explain, predict and control subjective experiences.

Critics of Scarborough's post-modernist stance could thereby easily label him as biased when he concludes his book with the view that religion serves a vital component of metaphysics to address transcendent themes lying beyond the realm of scientific comprehension. As a clergyman, though, he approaches the subject of religion with an open-minded view. He avoids falling into the trap of faith to address abstract concepts such as God, death, and the meaning of life, while stressing the importance of the philosophy of relations to make religion based more on reason than dogma. Although atheists, agnostics, reductionists, and materialists will not agree with him that religion is more important than science, they might concede that meaning in life would be richer when they embrace wider relationships.

Whether Scarborough will be successful in reconciling divergent views and incorporating them into a harmonious whole remains a moot point, as universal historical experience clearly indicates that disagreement and conflict are something inevitable in the human condition. But Scarborough's greatest contribution in his book lies in the way humanity can potentially view divisive issues in a different light after liberating opposing relationships from certain bounded viewpoints. There is an interesting reference in the book toward Eastern thinking that views opposites not as contrasting poles but as emerging from a single origin. If only humanity could give more attention to the philosophy of relations, many fundamental interpretations of realities would be radically reshaped while disagreements and conflicts would appear so trivial once awareness of that beautiful universal harmonious whole is reached.

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Xi Tfiisser Tkun Bniedem ? *(What Does it Mean to be Human?)*

By Kurt Borg and Robert Farrugia (Eds.)

Published by Horizon, 2023, 280 pages

Reviewed By Luke Fenech

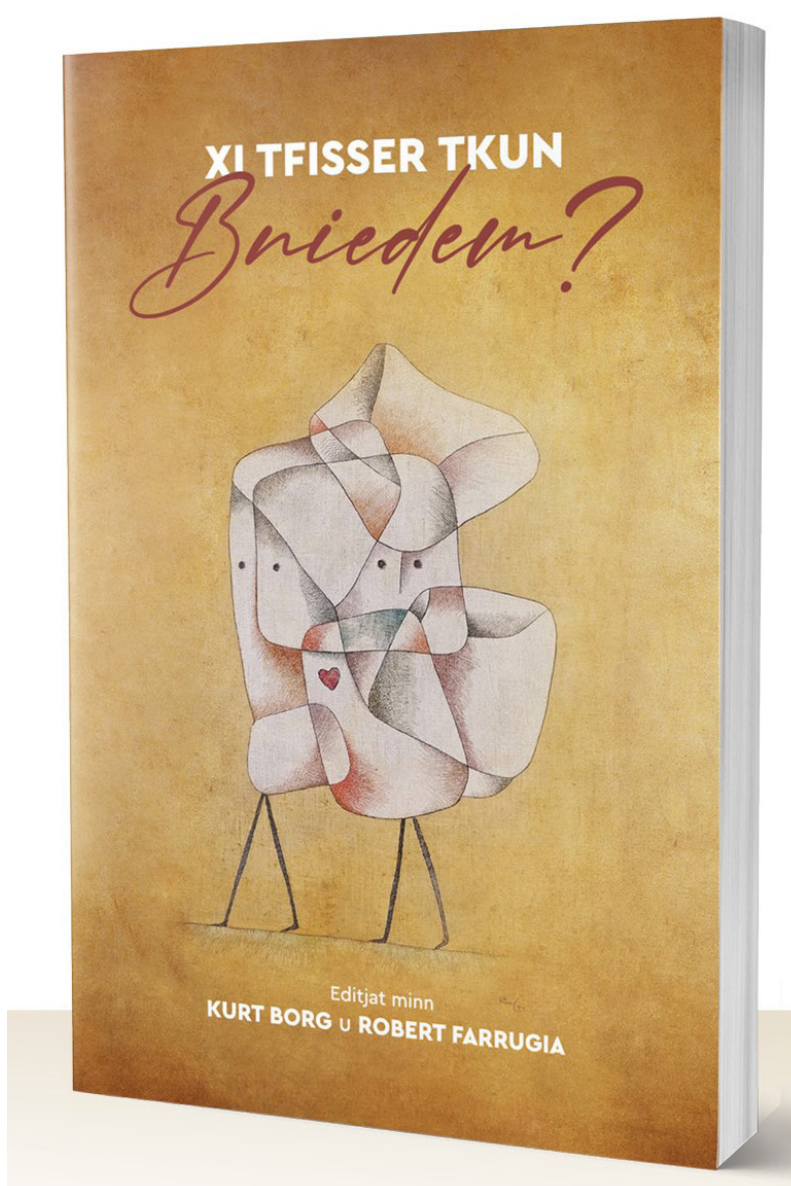
To holistically unpack the human requires an interdisciplinary approach, an approach which tries to unravel the complexities and socio-political associations that each of us holds. Borg and Farrugia have done this task in a pertinent manner, engaging in dialogue within the different facets of “what does it mean to be human.” From disability to literature, geography, spirituality, and alterity, this book positions itself eclectically when it comes to discussing the question concerning the intricacy and meaning of the human condition.

The contemporary era that we are living in also pushes humans to be eclectic, to be in touch with the several issues (socio-political or not) that the person experiences. Alas, the accelerated lifestyle associated with modernity conversely hinders the opportunity for humans to reflect on their existential being. As Borg notes, the question “what does it mean to be human?” challenges

accelerationism by ‘returning humanity’ to the human, whilst acknowledging that not every human being is being treated like one. The sense of alienation and atomism that masks

modern societies, as Borg continues, results in several problems of mental health and crises in democracy, which further creates divisions and polarizations between humans (p. 15-16). Once more, critically engaging the question of “what does it mean to be human?” helps the reader to assess their interactions with the world, both on a personal and political level. Moreover, the merge of the personal and the political in the eleven conversations Borg and Farrugia present invites the reader to challenge how we identify as human; to contemplate the respective themes in a time where deliberate contemplation is often at the periphery of one’s mind. Notions of

alienation and acceleration bring to mind the concept of



finitude, the innate and unending human condition. Borg reminds us of our finitude from the preliminary, linking the question of “what does it mean to be human” with the recognition of our limitations and humility (p. 14). In a previous article¹, Borg (2022) notes that one ought to:

...realize our finitude and fragility. This reveals the value of our limited time, which should prompt us to ensure that this time is being used in the way that we are actively and freely choosing, and not how it is dictated to us by exploitative structures (p. 20).

Farrugia also elaborates on finitude at the start of the text. He refers to the “building blocks of life” that humans use to build relationships, families, and societies, “buildings” which are both important and fragile to what makes us human. Farrugia continues that the man who ‘builds’ and is ‘built’ with the “blocks of life” is not afraid of his finitude; rather, he is afraid of evil, self-centeredness and hatred, abhorring everything that does damage to life. He concludes that any kind of “building” which is not ‘built’ on love will eventually collapse and be worthless: without love, we die; but with love, which never dies, we live (p. 23). Farrugia here highlights the human condition of finitude and its relation to “love” – “which never dies.” Moreover, is love eternal for humans? Is the human fully autonomous to reject or embrace *love*? Such queries further unravel the question of “what does it mean to be human,” inviting the reader to holistically contemplate their spirituality, alterity, and personhood – three from the eleven conversations in this text.

The text is structured on themes (or conversations) involving eleven academics from different fields, each sharing a similar inquiry on the question of “what does it mean to be human.” Furthermore, the respective discipline and position of each academic provide a multidisciplinary perspective on how each conversation examines the prevalent question. Borg and Farrugia provided a transcript of each conversation together with annotations and recommendations to give the subject a tool, rather than just a text. Such a “tool” opens the subject towards dialogue, both with oneself and others.

Although the question “what does it mean to be human” is thoroughly engaged in the text, the subject is left to wonder and elaborate on the specific questions that Borg and Farrugia tailored to each academic. For instance, the conversation on “mental health” (p. 75-100) entailed the following question:

... Would it be fair to say that sometimes, certain discourse on mental health emphasizes the individual, instead of the socio-political conditions that lead people to be stressed or anxious? I mean, in this sense, do we need to politicize the discourse of mental health (p. 91)?

This turn to the political, broadens the existing conversation on mental health; consequently, the subject extends their interaction of “what does it mean to be human,” in this case, from the personal to the political. Going beyond the personal is what makes this text critical, in my view, urging the subject to extend the dialogue to different facets of humanity.

On another note, the nonchronological structure of the text provides the reader with the liberty in choosing which conversation to be engaged with. For example, if the reader is experiencing a form of disability, and, given the circumstances, is going through a few existential queries, the second conversation titled “Disability” is ready to be read and immersed. Moreover, another reader who does not necessarily bear a disability can still engage oneself in the same conversation, yet from a different perspective. Whichever scenario, both readers will find themselves a pertinent reflection on disability in this case, serving as a bridge for future inquiries and meditations.

Besides, if the reader has more room to engage with the academics’ answers, the questions probed by Borg and Farrugia are there to be duly explored by the reader, and thus, not presented in a be-all and end-all fashion. Thus, this makes the text more apt when contemplating what it means to be human.

Borg and Farrugia have done an important service by publishing *Xi Tffisser Tkun Bniedem?* From the distinguished choice of academics to the annotations and narrative structure, this text is optimal for every human who would like to converse with the self through the insightful conversations decorating this work – to broaden and rethink one’s understanding of humanity.

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¹ Borg, Kurt, 2022, *The Time of Our Life is a Political Matter*, SHARE, (17), p. 18-20.

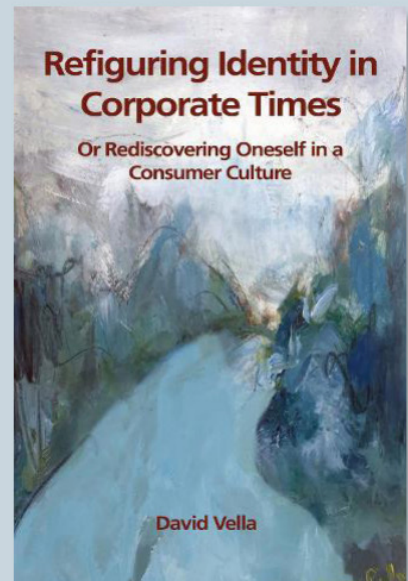
SOCIETY & CULTURE

Refiguring Identity in Corporate Times

Or Rediscovering Oneself in a Consumer Culture

David Vella

This key reading in Identity Studies provides insight into the psychology and behaviour endorsed by consumer culture.



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Refiguring Identity in Corporate Times is aimed as a response to the narcissistic life-strategies promoted by the marketplace. It introduces an identity model that ensures a more inclusive, ethical, and authentic way of living ones own life-script. We live in a culture that requires us to create our own self-interpretation. Claiming to assist us in this mission are self-professed experts and the public media that offer life strategies for adoption, to which it is all too easy to conform to in hyper-capitalized and consumerist societies. Among the most popular are fashion, entrepreneurship, travel, fitness, and self-spirituality, which are designed by corporate companies for instant appeal and feelgood results, expressing the consumerist religion of hedonistic narcissism and status. The possibility of an alternative identity for todays society that is based on the experience of conscience, sees our self-realization as intimately related to care for others and the advancement of political and civic institutions. To aspire for this identity model is to move from the distorted values of commercial

life-strategies to five virtues. The virtues enable us to attune to what is singularly foreign in any experience, signalling ways how our worldview can become more inclusive, ethical, and insightful in its comprehension of existence. This key reading

in Identity Studies provides insight into the psychology and behaviour endorsed by consumer culture; charts out a new understanding of virtue ethics; and promotes life-choices that steers consumers away from conformity in its capacity to stimulate the creation of a personal and authentic vision of life that involves others and societal institutions.

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