In the context of a dialogue with Carole Pateman\(^1\) and intersectionality frameworks, Charles Mills has grouped himself with those who would render more complex the account of women as historically subordinated by virtue of European legal traditions such as the *feme covert* status denying them an independent legal identity. To factor the histories of colonialism, slavery, and race hierarchies, is to reconsider the analysis of women’s subordination and exclusion from the public and political sphere by virtue of sex. It is also to reconsider some of the conventions of white feminism’s historical rights claims, among them, the depiction of the family and home as spaces in which women have primarily been confined to a subordinated and limiting domestic role. This depiction, as has been emphasized by a number of intersectionality theorists, occludes the different status and meaning of home and family under the conditions of colonization and slavery. For example, bell hooks opens *Ain’t I a woman* by distinguishing the specific forms of violence to which female slaves were exposed in the United States, and also by emphasizing slaves’ lack of legal freedom to marry, lack of parental rights, lack of secure private domestic spaces in which to enjoy intimacy and family bonds, exposure to sexual violence, dispossession of children, and the regulation of de facto unions.\(^2\) While this isn’t to forget, as hooks emphasizes, that in their domestic unions, enslaved women were also subject to gender subordination,\(^3\) patriarchal domination might not be the only or best means of understanding the forms of both power and resistance most salient to the home. In the context of
slavery and its aftermath, the home, it has been argued, might more importantly be understood as offering a precious and precarious space of refuge. Thus Mills mentions Hazel Carby’s preferred emphasis that in this sense, domestic spaces, home, and family, could also be spaces of “political and cultural resistance to racism.” It has been argued that such multiple meanings are obfuscated if the family is understood only in terms of the “sexual contract” elaborated by Carole Pateman in her eponymous book.

Since the publication of The Sexual Contract, gender inequality has come to be widely reconceived in feminist theory as inseparable from the concurrent axes of subordination with which it intersects, most obviously those relating to race, class, and sexuality. According to an intersectional framework, race and gender cannot be seen as constituting either discrete or analogous systems: whether of power, subordination, discrimination, or standpoint. The rejection of both analogical and additive understandings of subordination has stimulated a range of alternative metaphors for understanding intersection differently (among them, intersecting “axes” of identity or experience, Crenshaw’s traffic intersections, Ann Garry’s roundabouts and multi-altitudinal flows, Spelman’s repudiation of the “tootsie roll” approach, Lugones’ fusion, curdle-separation emulsions, Mills’ sub-contractors). Pateman and Mills have modified their approaches accordingly. According to this revision, “one cannot speak of the [sexual and racial] ‘contracts’ in isolation, since they rewrite each other.”

As emphasized in the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectional frameworks have most importantly aimed to counteract the systematic marginalization of women of color within accounts of subordination and discrimination. They have also become the context for a widespread interest in the way that multiple forms of subordination may serve concurrently, in the words of Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble, “as background for one another, and ... often find their most powerful articulation through one another.” For example, to demonstrate the limitations of an “additive” understanding of subordination Charles Mills turns to a discussion of intersections of gender, power and domination in colonial India by Mary Procida, who points out that a British woman’s legal and social subordination to her husband did not only serve to deprive her of power and authority. To the extent that the marriage eroded her independent legal and social identity, it attached her to that of her spouse, and so delivered a subordinating relation over others by virtue of colonial privilege:
Husband and wife, together, embodied status and authority... Their family business ... was literally the business of empire... Anglo-Indian women’s political power stemmed ... from their ... personal, social, and marital connections with imperial officials ... in the greater imperial family of British India.\textsuperscript{11}

An analysis that saw the relevant forms of subordination as separable would be inadequate to understand the British woman as a combination of subordination to others by virtue of sex, and subordination over others by virtue of colonialism, for that additive understanding would fail to demonstrate how (according to a formulation used by Jasbir Puar in another context): “one form of oppression might sustain or even create the conditions of possibility for the other.”\textsuperscript{12} In the example from Procida, legal subordination to their husbands’ affiliated colonial British women with their husbands’ colonial authority.\textsuperscript{13}

Such analyses have given rise to a theoretical climate in which the need to analyze multiple forms of subordination concurrently, and in terms of their inter-, or intra-action, is not contentious. The following paper concerns a point on which there is less agreement: just how multiplying should such an analysis aim to be?

I. AVERTING EXCESS

A wariness of theorizing in terms of too many axes of subordination or difference has emerged with the viewpoint that such excess could jeopardize the aim of representing inequality and subordination.\textsuperscript{14} In Contract and Domination Charles Mills agrees with Mary Maynard’s caution about too many forms of difference: “it becomes impossible to analyze them in terms of inequality or power.”\textsuperscript{15} Whereas Mills gives reasons to avoid excessively abundant or extreme theorizing of intersectionality,\textsuperscript{16} Jasbir Puar could be situated at the opposite pole to such cautions. In a sense, she describes the risks of theorizing with too few forms of difference. She adopts a theoretical attention to Deleuzian assemblages and affective flows, precisely to understand the forms of identity and power relating to gender, sex, and race in more fragmentary ways. Puar makes clear her long-standing commitment to intersectional analysis.\textsuperscript{17} But despite its proliferation of figures such as axes, roundabouts, fluids, and multi-velocities, she sees intersectional analysis as having tended, nonetheless, to bind itself to representational, and identity-based forms of analysis.\textsuperscript{18} It has been capable, she argues, of reinstating the “additive” approach to sex and race it works to avoid. (This might most obviously
be seen if sex and race subordination are separated by the theorist so as to show how these subordinations intersect. Those who take a more intensely multiplying approach need not, as she underlines, be understood as moving away from intersectionality theory. Indeed the intersectional proliferation about which Mills is concerned is already lurking in the fact that intersectional frameworks are variously concerned with subordination, power, identity, experience, standpoint, context, heritage, solidarity, discrimination, and its litigation. An interrogation of how these dimensions intersect could be added to analyses of the intersections of sex, gender, race, disability, class, sexuality, generational privilege, culture, education, and wealth.

But as we next consider some of the further ways of understanding intersection indicated by Puar and others, it is helpful to recall that the debate also turns on what the criterion for a more or less satisfactory intersectionality framework should be. For Crenshaw, most obviously, that criterion has always been clear: intersectional frameworks should aim to counteract the erasure of Black women she has shown is produced by the analytic separation of gender and race.

II. ABUNDANCE IN CRITIQUE

I aim next to bring into the conversation a point made, but then taken in a new direction, by Puar: that a consideration of Foucault from an intersectional perspective could redirect analysis to a different problem of intersection. In observing of Foucault’s analyses that “unlike intersectional theorizing . . . the entities that intersect are the body (not the subject, let us remember) and population,” Puar has, among her interventions, not just multiplied the fields of intersection, but has also reconsidered what, exactly, can be understood to intersect.

Her intervention could also allow further reflection on whether intersectionality supposes likeness of forms of power. Consider Mills’ “Intersecting Contracts” essay, in which he establishes the view that race subordination will tend to “trump” gender subordination. To be clear, Mills does not take race subordination to be like gender subordination: on his view the former is more recent, datable, associated with historical facts and material events such as invasion, colonization, subjugation, the appropriation of lands and peoples. Still, it could be said that this comparison of race and gender nonetheless supposes them to be similar types of power (the form of power characterized as subordination).

By contrast, I want to tarry a while longer at the door opened by Puar for a re-
thinking of Foucault amidst her discussion. It seems to me that this door (opened through a brief moment of proximity between Foucault and intersectionality frameworks) might allow a further reflection on an additional intersectionality: that of forms of power. (Such reflection is only enhanced by the recollection that intersectional frameworks have long considered a range of overlapping phenomena: among them subordination, discrimination, exploitation, experience, location, subjectivity, identity, standpoint, proximity. As such, is not clear that the same understandings of power are always being supposed.)

III. THE IDENTITARIAN FOUCAULT

This would also be to add to a direction in Foucault scholarship emphasizing the more fragmentary dimensions of his understanding of power, as in contributions to South Atlantic Quarterly’s special issue Future Foucault.24 By contrast, in fact, despite briefly opening up this type of analysis by directing reflection towards the alternative kind of intersectionality suggested by Foucault’s account of the intersection of bodies and population, Puar considers Foucault’s potential too limited. She affiliates herself with the Deleuzian terminology of the assemblage which she takes to be better adapted to analyzing abundance in lateral affective relations.25 And because she will finally prefer other models over what she takes to be the historically, genealogically, and subject-bound analyses of disciplinary identities, the possibility (also broached in her own work) that Foucault’s texts could be mined for further and different potential is short-circuited by what Puar considers to be the identitarian impulse in his work also: the “predominance of subjecthood,” “identitarian interpellation”, and in particular, the analytic focus on the “primacy and singularity of the disciplinary subject.”26

In consequence, the characterizations of both Foucault and intersectionality are rendered by depicting their limits “in the final count,” one might say. Puar certainly acknowledges intentions and projects at odds with that final account: for example, the unanimity with which intersectionality frameworks aim to avoid “tootsie-roll” modeling. But she argues these frameworks nonetheless separate these precisely to show their interaction or intra-action. Similarly, Puar hardly fails to perceive Foucault’s repudiation of a “prior” subject or identity in his multiple accounts of subjectivation. But she still finds in Foucault’s analyses an excessive dominance by the emergence of the disciplinary subject. If both forms of analysis can finally be assigned the label of “identitarian,” her assessments are fully cognizant of, and (moreover) sympathetic to, the alternative aims and in-
novations of both. Of course, Foucault and intersectionality would finally count as identitarian, because Puar is, finally, preferring theoretical models offering a greater complexity in intersections. As I will go on to explore, Puar may have been too quick to dismiss the potential available from the encounter between Foucault and intersectional frameworks she briefly invites.

IV. ABUNDANCE OF CRITIQUE, ABUNDANCE IN CRITIQUE

My point here is not to compare the accounts of power as subordination mentioned by Mills, for example, with the well-known contribution by Foucauldian works such as *Discipline and Punish* and *History of Sexuality*: alternative models of power as productive rather than primarily repressive. For Foucault’s work also explored a different kind of multiplicity, emerging particularly in his College de France lectures. Foucault commented a number of times that the models of power under his consideration were not best understood as replacing each other in a linear or chronological development. As he argues in *Security, Territory, Population*:

> There is not the legal age, the disciplinary age, and then the age of security. Mechanisms of security do not replace disciplinary mechanisms, which would have replaced jurido-legal mechanisms. In reality you have a series of complex edifices in which, of course, the techniques themselves change and are perfected, or anyway become more complicated, but in which what above all changes is the dominant characteristic, or more exactly, the system of correlation between juridico-legal mechanisms, disciplinary mechanisms, and mechanisms of security.27

Under these conditions, what happens to abundance of critique? Despite also making more positive mention of Foucauldian resources, in the course of associating analysis of the assemblage with an abundance of affect, Puar doesn’t take Foucault’s work to offer the most promising resources for abundance in critique.

Instead, Foucault is more prone to being reduced to a stylized and limited position such as the theorist of disciplinary power. To the ends of that account, we are that much less likely to be offered the more variable and capacious Foucault, whose concepts of power are multiple, intersecting, sometimes complementary, sometimes auto-resistant, concurrently coalescing and decoalescing. One way of putting this is that Puar, while not an identititarian when it comes to the theorization of subjects, is, to the interests of favoring better theories of the assemblage,
somewhat more identitarian when it comes to characterizing the capacities of philosophers such as Foucault. The contours and confines of Foucault’s work are crystallized to the ends of designating the limits of their theses and commitments.28

In fact, Puar’s brilliant readings could allow us to query the demarcation of Foucault primarily as the identitarian theorist of disciplines, for the move beyond Foucault need not take place at the expense of minimizing our archive of his resources. I turn now to the suggestion that amidst a multiplicity of critique far exceeding his accounts of the disciplinary, Foucault offered a range of explanatory terms and principles better characterized as an abundance of critique. We will also encounter here the Foucault favored by recent theorists of a “future” Foucault.29

Since I opened both with comments about intersectionality and about a more intersectional understanding of family spaces, I turn to one of the less fully explored dimensions of Foucault’s work: his own consideration of families. I take these to offer one of the more promising dimensions within his own work for the consideration of the analytics of “abundance of critique.”

V. FAMILY AS THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF TECHNIQUES AND POWERS

Foucault published no projects directly on the family nor supposed its status as an institution. He anticipated a possible project on the children’s crusade but not a genealogy of families. But he revisited family spaces through multiple modes of analysis. We find in his work a great number of families, although, as has been widely observed, his optic is limited to the classical, the Christian, and the European. Within those parameters, Foucault will identify women in the family as traditionally subordinate to the patriarchal forms of power he deems sovereign.30

Women could also be described as subordinate within the family according to the vector of its emergence as a problem of management and governmentality. Thus wives, servants, and children belong to the households whose good management are associated with such forms as the care of the self, the arts of existence, and could give rise to parallels between good management of the household and of the state.

But in a discussion of the relation of wife to husband as one of the traditional (and lingering) forms of sovereign power, Foucault also describes the emergence of the family as the locus of complex intersections of the disciplines. While, as he argued
in *Discipline and Punish*, *Psychiatric Power*, *Abnormal*, and elsewhere, disciplinary institutions were not based on family structures (nor on their forms of discipline in the conventional sense), more archaic forms of sovereign power and their associated techniques of punishment and obedience might nonetheless reinforce the more productive disciplinary mechanisms that can be distinguished from sovereign forms of power. For example, techniques of familial obedience might be important to aspects of a subject’s integration in the disciplinary networks associating school-factory-army, etc. The individual who cannot be disciplined might be returned to the family, making it also a space of excess for disciplinary networks. Moreover, while disciplinary structures were not modeled on families, Foucault sees the family space as emerging as a vector for the disciplines in a number of ways, in interconnection with their capillary form. It is a domain of intense scrutiny and stimulation—of stimulation of oedipal interest, as Foucault argues, and of parental and expert hermeneutic scrutiny for signs of abnormality. Moreover it is also a securitizing domain—as with projects to defend the “traditional” family, or to defend children from destructive external influences, or connections between the normative conduct of families and the defense of populations, or nation, or futures. And it takes on neoliberal dimensions, belonging to understandings of human capital or to projects of “investment” in the family.

Another reason the multiple forms of power depicted by Foucault are not just linear developments replacing each other is that they embody techniques differently taking shape in different contexts (including those of observation, classification, the interest in the psychological “case,” pastoral care, police interest) and differently consequential as such. The fact that forms of power intersect may mean that some related phenomena coincide in strange ways or might even challenge each other’s interests: the biopolitical interest in taking care of life can, for example, intersect with regimes for taking that same life. Foucault is also interested in the ebbs and flows of conditions and techniques that allow forms of power to mutate into each other as indicated by the rich and varied metaphors to be found in *History of Sexuality* and *Society Must Be Defended* for the relationship between sovereign power and biopower, (such as the “penetration” and “imprinting” of the one by the other).

In short, the resources of Foucault allow more diverse ways of thinking the intersectionality of modalities of power. It is not that Foucault’s resources are indispensable. But there is more interest in interpreting Foucault in terms that correspond most, rather than least, to the theoretical resources for which Puar’s work
calls.

What might this intersection of multiple forms of power mean for an understanding of the techniques of parental and maternal care associated with family spaces? Families that became vectors of disciplinary environments might also come to be mediated by expert opinion about child raising, and the need for care in parental surveillance for abnormality, identity, concealment, deviation, harm, etc.

Thus, in participating in conducts of maternal care, women themselves can act as the hinges of sovereign power (their caring role also participating in the traditions of gendered subordination Foucault associates with sovereign power) with discipline and biopolitics in many senses. They might be vectors in the scrutiny of children in the home and the defense against masturbation, and they might be lynchpins in the surveillance and stimulation of interest in the micropractices of children's bodies. In the home, they might act as the more specific auxiliaries of the expert’s authority in childrearing, which might both reinforce but also replace some of the traditional domains of sovereign power also at work in families. And, as Foucault briefly argues in the first volume of *History of Sexuality*, maternal care could also, within disciplinary contexts, be individuated as with the problematization, medicalization, categorization or sheer alertness to the spectre of the harmful or “hysterical” mother. The conduct of maternal care is also assimilated to and plays a role in the abstractions of population management (thus the interest in “birthrate,” or the overall quality of health, childrearing practice, prevalence of wetnursing, etc in a population or nation). Women might belong to the governmentality of abstract trends, and yet at the same time be individualized, moralized, subjectivized, “responsibilized” in these terms also—according to the corresponding understandings of maternal duty towards state, future, population, nation. They might play a role in mechanisms of security, in ideas about the need to defend against risk to the health of population (for example, there might be indifference about problematized maternal practice, such as entrusting children to wetnurses below a certain threshold, but concern above that threshold).

The mother might be also be individualized in disciplinary terms. She might be associated with hermeneutically conducted identity formations, confessional practice, the production of forms of knowledge and self-understanding in corresponding categories and norms for the caring mother. Meanwhile, biopoliticized mothers (and women understood as potential mothers) might be caught up in
overall administrations of “birthrate” or “healthy upbringing.” Women might be individualized as abnormal (for example becoming psychological or sociological “cases” of aberrant maternity such as putatively negligent pregnancy or childraising). But such phenomena emerge also in accounts of trends, statistics, “prevalence” within groups, types, or populations. As such they can also be the pretext for differential distribution of concern, welfare, intervention, or resources. Similarly, biopolitical interest in “birthrate” tends to manifest as interest in the birthrate of certain groups within a population, tacitly or overtly in opposition to others. The result of interest in collective reproductive life and health has often been that some lives are implicitly or explicitly assumed to matter more. The reproductive conduct of some can be deemed to encroach on overall common interest. In short, the multiple ways in which maternal conduct can integrate into biopolitical and thanatopolitical, sovereign, disciplinary and securitizing registers can mean that the corresponding modes of power and strategies may simultaneously overlap, complement, and be at odds with each other in various respects.

Since a technique of maternal care could be at once multiple techniques—or be integrated into multiple apparatuses—and not always consistently, it does not have a definitive status (given the diverse, coalescing and decoalescing strategies, modes of power, and governmentalities in which it is imbricated). Given the range of overlapping modes and registers in which it might be participating: observation, concern, stimulation, interest, disinterest, correction, optimization, hermeneutics, classification, aggregation, demographization, individuation, explanation, subordination, identification, investment, it might be said never to completely or definitively take place.

So, to think of Foucault’s comment in “What is Critique,” that “no one should ever think that there exists one knowledge or one power,” the alternative might be to give greater attention to how the various modes and techniques he describes may coalesce and decoalesce without exactly coinciding. Analysis could reorient to how techniques, and segments of techniques, can belong simultaneously to different modes, and in specific cases, with what effects. And while they can be complementary, we can also give attention to conflicts between these techniques and the different apparatuses, assemblages, strategies, and temporalities to which they belong.

Such scrutiny offers a route back to the opening consideration of the scrutiny an intersectional framework is able to give the forms of mutually reinforcing and
mutually deconstituting subordination and authority embedded in colonial families. It could also lead to further dialogue with Achille Mbembe’s introduction of necropolitics to biopolitical theory. Mbembe has made intermittent reference to sex, gender, and sexual difference (terms most strongly in question in On the Postcolony) without extensively foregrounding their intersections. Insofar as his discussions of the necropolitical have briefly touched on sexual difference, there is a degree of affinity with an argument to which Charles Mills has also referred: the dissolution of the rule of law, national instability and the impact of colonialism on paternal authority can all manifest in forms of violence against women. Mills has cited Gloria Anzaldúa on a related point (the context is different, but there are similarities in the modeling of power relevant to gender):

‘machismo’ is an adaptation to oppression and poverty and low self-esteem. It is the result of hierarchical male dominance... The loss of a sense of dignity and respect... leads him to put down women and even to brutalize them.36

In “Politics as a Form of Expenditure”, Mbembe writes of decolonizing contexts and the perception that a threatened patriarchal power can manifest in a “hardening of the dichotomy of the sexes” and an intensification of sexual violence. This intensification is described as “another modality of domination,” reacting to a crisis of power and masculinization. It is identified by Mbembe in phenomena ranging from the exacerbation of rape to the manhood rites of child soldiers.37

For all that Mills and Mbembe offer very different arguments, they both refer to the view that one form of power can be understood as compensating for another. But Mbembe’s work has engaged a broader spectrum of concepts of power (not reducible to, but including, Foucault, Deleuze, and a number of post-Foucauldian Italian philosophers). One question that arises, then, is how his occasional reference to gender relations (particularly their necropolitical variants) could be engaged by the complex and multiple understandings of power available in other dimensions of Mbembe’s work on colonization, plantation, apartheid, and slavery, particularly in Critique of Black Reason. Hortense Spillers, Sharon Holland, and Saidiya Hartman are among those who have attributed a stronger and more complex role to the multiple temporalities of the sexual, gender inflected, and reproductive violence of slavery and its afterlife. Their work foregrounds the continuing impact on the meaning and embodiment of eros, family, sex, and care,38 and the dissociability of these dimensions from the multiple forms of power (sov-
ereign, disciplinary, biopolitical, securitizing, states of exception, states of illegibility) discussed in Critique of Black Reason.\textsuperscript{39}

VI. The multiple temporalities of necropolitics and \textit{White Material}

With the opening remarks on intersectionality and the family having lead, not only to Foucault on families and the multivalence of their technologies of care, but also to the postcolonial states of disorder in which “anybody can kill (or be killed by) anybody else,”\textsuperscript{40} I conclude with paradoxes of care in postcolonial and decolonizing contexts missing from Foucault’s work. Drawing on all the resources outlined in this paper, one could give attention to the plural contexts of bodily conducts such as gestures of care. With Mbembe, we can ask: how do they correspond at once to different modes of power, to multiple temporalities, and belong only unstably to their present? At a provisional juncture of Foucauldian and intersectional frameworks one could add attention to the mutual conditioning of gender and colonial subordination, the intersections of their forms and techniques of power, and their constitutions and deconstructions.

To this end, my conclusion turns to the concurrent forms of temporality and the deconstructions and reconstitutions of forms of care (parental, maternal, colonizing and decolonizing) explored in Claire Denis’ \textit{White Material} (2009). This film depicts the multiple formations of power and time of a decolonizing (unnamed) French-African country in which civil war is erupting. It is concerned, in this context, with the intersections of care and survival with gendered, colonial, post- and de-colonial authority, variants that both overlap and conflict.

Maria, a white French woman running a coffee plantation is among those for whom, in this context, time—which has never been one’s own “proper” time—has run out. Withdrawing, the French army takes Maria’s life to be their concern, making one more attempt to incorporate her into their securitizing logic. In the stupidity she attributes to this aim, Maria’s own suppositions enact their own stupidity. Her bodily habits participate in future oriented temporalties and forms of sovereign power “over” the land she takes to be hers and in which she still sees potential profit for her family. Her habits and suppositions belong just as much to the vectors and competing temporalities of disorder and retributive violence, and the dissemination of new forms of death described by Mbembe. That’s to say, the segments of coinciding techniques of power, apparatuses, and their complex temporalities may give meaning to each other and coexist while also calling each
other into question, contesting each other because they participate in each other.

Through much of the unfolding of White Material, Maria fights first to ensure that the beans are harvested despite the chaos, and subsequently, to get back to her plantation. But for reasons both patriarchal (the sale without her knowledge of the plantation by her husband and father in law to Cherif, the local mayor) and colonial (she then struggles to get back to a plantation it turns out the militia have burned down), her efforts belong to one form of time, and the land to another. So it is with Maria’s efforts to get home to her son, asserting his need of her. In fact he has been burned alive, along with the farm, by the local militia. This unfolding chaos with its disordered formations of power, fragmentary alliance, and death penalty belong no less to Maria’s futures than the family cares she is implausibly still projecting—all the while that the desperate force of her efforts implicitly recognizes the countering times.

But we have also seen how Maria’s concern for her son, Manuel, overlaps with an indifferent colonial privilege, when she dismisses the report of his recent attack on Lucie with whom her husband has had another son. Maria’s multiple efforts of care—for the land, the crop, the profit, son, futures, are playing out in a time both shortened and accelerated by their intersection with the decolonizing chaos. Chaos and care, the colonial and the decolonial are remaking each other’s modes and meanings. The bodily gestures and techniques of care, are corporeal engagements with the multiplicity of concurrently unfolding, disynchronous futures with which they simultaneously interconnect.

Consider Maria’s spontaneous and expectant turn for help and solace to an unknown African woman who does briefly place her arms around her in the gesture of comfort. As Cherif, also Maria’s friend or lover, drives her back to the plantation, he consoles her with his hand raised in the gesture of care. Meanwhile she is explaining, peremptorily, that he will have to help her locate her missing son, Manuel, as he is not able to take care of himself. Her various manners of entitlement seem consistent with the colonial demeanor which is depicted in the film as Maria’s unthinking habit. But Cherif’s raising of his arm in the gesture of consolation seems also to be raised in a different kind of authority over her as well, as he interprets the state of things in which she is now embroiled. In this present, he explains to Maria, blondeur, blondness, whiteness, and blue eyes represent malheur (the impending bad outcome) and provocation to be pillaged. How best to understand the spontaneous bodily gestures of care, as occupying...
concurrently different modes of power and as such, “thinking against each other,” disrupting each other? Because different forms of power are concurrently in play, the “same” gesture—the technique of a caring hand, or arm around the shoulders, the bodily gestures and emotional techniques of caring, like the projects of taking care of land as well as human bodies, are at once participating in different registers, deformations and reformations, constituting vectors in a number of apparatuses.

To return to the point from Mills with which this essay began, such techniques can be informed by the colonial appropriation of land and assertion of privilege, their legal and proprietal regimes, and their bodily assumptions of “rights over”. Yet their expressions of care might also be playing out as other forms of subordination (among them the patriarchal). The bodily techniques of care for the future of the plantation are intersecting with the traditions of feminine domestic management conventional to the narratives of white feminism. They are intersecting also with waning of the colonial privilege with which they are inflected. The very “same” bodily gesture might be at once all of these things, interconnecting with all these modes, in this sense multivalent. Meanwhile some of the items that have been integrated into the transactions of day-to-day caring take on a new significance as persisting. Not human bodies nor their gestures, but things: items of clothing, a necklace, small electronic devices, seem more likely to persist in a time of stimulated violence and spontaneous killing. An abandoned radio, a beret, a necklace, a priest’s cape, red shorts, will outlive these people who have used and worn them, acquiring new circulations, agencies, and new roles, longer time sequences, and unknown futures, in contrast to the terminal living bodies.

If we choose to see Foucault’s account of genealogy’s complexity as indicating a multiplicity of forms of power and their multivalent techniques, we can expand on a different sense of how the present is already disrupted. It is disrupted not just by the phenomenon Foucault thought of as resistance or polyvalent tactics of power, and not just by the possibility of imagining “a future or a truth that [it] will not know nor happen to be.” Auto-contestation, potential for transformation, the resources for an ongoing “imagining” otherwise, and a potential becoming-otherwise are already delivered in the unpredictable relations between the multiple roles and temporalities of the techniques, modes of power, and governmentalities described by Foucault—none fully accomplishing themselves and none fully belonging to their own present. *White Material* prompts reflection on the complexity of the multiple and inter-
sectsing times it depicts. It depicts elements (a gesture, a technique, an object) that are in Foucault’s sense, “thinking.” Participating in a number of modes of power and temporality, they also manifest their concurrent mutual contestation. I similarly see this as the significance of the multiplicity of modes of power and techniques considered by Foucault’s projects. In ways both articulated, but also available for further development, in Foucault’s own work, they can be reconsidered in terms of their cumulative effect, and as interrupting and contesting, the presents to which they belong.

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NOTES


7. See, for example, the prominence of this term in the definitions offered by Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge in *Intersectionality (Key Concepts)* (London: Polity, 2016), 2.


9. Mills, in Mills and Pateman, *Contract and Domination*, 172. Intersectionality analysis has also been characterized by Jasbir Puar as feminist theory’s dominant paradigm for the analysis of difference,” and as the “prevalent approach in queer theory,” if not (as suggested by Leslie McCall) women’s studies “most important theoretical contribution”), Jasbir K. Puar, “I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess”: Becoming-Intersectional in Assemblage Theory,” *Philosophia* 2.1 (2012): 49-66, 49.


13. The complexity of such intra-action would also be occluded by a long-standing habit within the tradition of white women’s rights claims of likening women’s status to enslavement or colonization.

14. In one interview with Pateman, Mills speaks to the need to factor class subordination in addition to the sexual and racial contracts, and acknowledges that there is also a heterosexual contract. But he also speaks to the analytic unworkability of too much multiplicity: “In my chapter on intersectionality ... I suggested that four subject positions needed to be taken into account: white men, white women, non white men, non white women. If you try to add class or sexuality, that number would go up to eight, or sixteen if you tried to add both. (The number of subject positions is 2n, where n = the number of ‘contracts.’) So obviously that would be unworkable. Maybe the thing to do is select out two variables at a time, and focus just on those, and then repeat the process with two other variables,” Carole Pateman and Charles Mills, “Contract Theory and Global Change: The Intersections of Gender, Race, and Class.” In *Sexuality, Gender, and Power: Intersectional and Transnational Perspectives*, ed. A. G. Jónasdóttir, V. Bryson and K. B. Jones (New York and London: Routledge, 2011): 113-126, 123. Naomi Zack expresses the concern that women and their political solidarity could be overly fragmented by an excessively intersectional understand-
ing, see Inclusive Feminism: A Third Wave Theory of Women’s Commonality (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).


17. Puar, “I would rather be a Cyborg,” 49.

18. Puar, Terrorist Assemblages, 204.

19. Puar, Terrorist Assemblages, 212.


23. Among his specific comments in this regard, see “Intersecting Contracts,” 175.

24. South Atlantic Quarterly 111:3 Summer (2012). See for example guest editor Jacques Khalip’s emphasis in his introductory essay of a reading of Foucault with Derrida “tend[ing]toward[s] the creation of multiple critical positions through which to ponder the forms of constraint and potentialities that underwrite the blindness or illegibility of their own insights” (426), Dean’s emphasis on the disunification and multiple topologies of Foucauldian bodies, and Hansen’s reading of Foucault in terms of molecular reconfigurations (434).


28. In this, the characterization also does not coincide with Deleuze’s own reading of Foucault.

29. See note 24.


32. A point particularly developed in Donzelot’s The Policing of Families (New York: Pantheon, 1979).


34. Michel Foucault, Security Territory, Population, 71.

Porter, (Los Angeles: Semiotexte, 2007), 60.


41. “Extreme blondeur attire une espèce de malheur. C’est quelque chose qu’on désire saccager. Les yeux bleus sont genants. C’est pourtant son pays, il est né ici, mais le pays ne l’aime pas.”

42. Foucault, History of Sexuality, 93-5, 98.

What difference would it make to our understanding of the process of interpersonal forgiveness to approach it as what Kierkegaard calls a “work of love”? In this article, I argue that such an approach—which I label “love’s forgiveness”—challenges key assumptions in two prominent philosophical accounts of forgiveness. First, it challenges “desert-based” views, according to which forgiveness is conditional upon such features as the wrongdoer’s repentance and making amends. But second, it also avoids legitimate worries raised against some forms of unconditional forgiveness. I argue that what we may call “love’s vision” has a crucial role to play in interpersonal forgiveness. Against the objection that viewing forgiveness as a work of love is problematic because love involves a certain wilful blindness, I argue (drawing on both Kierkegaard and Troy Jollimore) that a) love has its own epistemic standards, and b) pace Jollimore’s remarks on agape, his claims about romantic love and friendship can in the relevant respects be extended to the case of agapic neighbour-love. By developing this view—which I argue echoes important themes in Kierkegaard’s Works of Love—I show the importance of understanding “love’s forgiveness” in the light of other virtues, especially hope and humility.

A prominent mode of discussing forgiveness—sometimes labelled “conditional” forgiveness—takes it to be something that has to be “deserved” or “earned”; something for which a wrongdoer must somehow qualify by meeting a set of
requirements, ranging from a sincere apology to some more extended list. (Supporters of this view differ on whether, once amends have been made, forgiveness is then owed, or whether offering it remains elective.) Charles Griswold’s account of “paradigmatic forgiveness” serves as a prominent example of this approach. Griswold offers various criteria required of wrongdoers to “qualify” for forgiveness: accepting responsibility for one’s action; repudiating that action; experiencing and expressing regret; acknowledging the harm done; and convincing the wronged party one is capable of and willing to pursue appropriate moral self-improvement. By contrast, adherents of “unconditional” forgiveness hold that no such requirements are necessary before forgiveness can properly be granted. However, more radical claims have sometimes been made about unconditional forgiveness. Jacques Derrida’s account, for instance (introduced in the context of a discussion of political atrocities), insists that the only true forgiveness is that which forgives “the unforgivable”. What leads Derrida to this controversial view is his assertion that forgiving a repentant wrongdoer involves forgiving someone “no longer exactly the same as the one found to be culpable”. What “true” forgiveness amounts to, he insists, is forgiving “both the fault and the guilty as such, where the one and the other remain as irreversible as the evil, as evil itself, and being capable of repeating itself, unforgivably, without transformation, without amelioration, without repentance or promise”. It is in this sense that any act of forgiveness “worthy of the name” would need to “forgive the unforgivable”. Anything less, Derrida alleges, would be a merely “economic” transaction, in which the wrongdoer pays back a debt through their repentance and amends-making.

As a dismissal of conditional forgiveness as a genuine kind of forgiveness, this is too quick: Griswold is right to object to the claim that only “undeserved and unjustified” forgiveness is true forgiveness. I do not wish to endorse the Derridean view, nor the related claim that only such forgiveness has genuine moral worth. Note, however, that the implications of what Griswold says for less radical claims about unconditional forgiveness are extremely modest. “To forgive someone undeserving of the honor”, he writes, “under the banner of a ‘gift’, may condone the wrong-doer, and even provide encouragement to more offences.” It also “risks undermining the agent’s sense of her entitlement to warranted resentment”. Perhaps so, but risks and possibilities are merely that. While we should take seriously Griswold’s suggestion (against Garrard and McNaughton) that a forgiveness that requires nothing of the wrongdoer may communicate to her and others that she is not being held accountable, and that thus the “intrinsically
interpersonal character of (paradigmatic) forgiveness is lost,¹⁰ all this offers a space for “love’s forgiveness”. This falls on the unconditional side of the divide: it does not insist that certain conditions have to be met—by the offender (in most accounts) and also by the forgiver (in some accounts, including Griswold’s¹¹)—before forgiveness can appropriately be offered. But nor is it unconditional in the extreme sense to which Griswold objects. There is a morally admirable forgiveness which neither endorses the Derridean view, nor communicates to the wrongdoer that no judgement is being made on her actions. But insofar as the forgiver does not set prior conditions for forgiveness to be granted, such forgiveness remains unconditional. We can understand such forgiveness better, I shall argue, by considering it as a “work of love”.

But first, let us back up. Since there is some disagreement about the question of what forgiveness is, I should sketch the basic picture I shall be working with here. (I have space here only to state this, rather than to argue for it in full.) Though typically expressed in a speech-act (“I forgive you”), such speech-acts are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for demarcating forgiveness (since forgiveness can be enacted without being explicitly declared, and conversely, such a speech-act can fail in its expressed intention: I can say I forgive you, while my actions and attitudes reveal that I have neither done so nor intend to do so). I take it that forgiveness qua psychological process is a more important territory, and it is this that has attracted most of the philosophical attention. I broadly agree with those who have followed Bishop Joseph Butler in judging forgiveness to involve the forswearing of a spirit of revenge, such that part of what forgiveness involves is conquering the excesses—though not necessarily the complete overriding—of reactive attitudes such as resentment, indignation, anger or hurt.¹² The ‘such as’ here is important: I consider it to be excessively stipulative to insist that any one of these reactive attitudes must be the one conquered (this will vary from case to case). Forgiveness involves a ‘letting go’ on the part of the wronged party—but one that keeps the wrongdoer in view in such a way that one has towards them an attitude devoid of ill-will. Thus forgiveness is distinct both from forgetting, and from transcending reactive attitudes such as resentment or anger by replacing them with, for instance, contempt. But—as its etymology suggests—forgiveness is also a gift,¹³ typically from the wronged party to the wrongdoer.¹⁴ What the “gift” language connotes is that, even in cases where the wrongdoer repents and makes amends, forgiveness is still something beyond what the repentant wrongdoer “earns” by their repentance and amends-making. Finally, I hold that forgiveness is standardly of an agent rather than an act. Consequently, forgiveness is an arena
in which a version of the thought often attributed to St Augustine (to “hate the
sin but love the sinner”)—or its secular analogues—does some important work.
In such cases, one distinguishes the agent (who one forgives) from their deed
(which remains morally condemnable).

What of love in all this? According to Kierkegaard, part of what it means to love is
to presuppose love in the person loved - and in this way to “draw out the good”;
to “love forth” [opelsker] love (WL 216-7/SKS 9 219). This view—one of the
most radical aspects of Kierkegaard's view of love—has important ramifications
for how he construes forgiveness. If the process of forgiveness qua work of love
is to meet this stipulation, then integral to any such view is hope, of an at least
two-fold nature. First, the loving person hopes for the wrongdoer being willing
to repent, to return to the moral community and to make amends for the wrong
(compare Griswold above).

Second—since we are here treating forgiveness as a process—I suggest that it also involves hoping for one’s own ability fully to
give. This has important consequences for accounts of forgiveness which talk
of the wrongdoer “qualifying” for forgiveness, because such a hope will typically
need to be manifested before the wrongdoer has “made amends” (at least in full).
We might say: love takes a risk, in hope.

A possible objection to my general approach would be to say that it is simply a
grammatical remark to claim that forgiving someone is a work, or expression,
of love. But if one notes just how much discussion of forgiveness rests—either
tacitly or explicitly—on a model whereby one qualifies for forgiveness by aiming
to “wipe the slate clean” in some sense, then this objection fails. Note also that
Garrard and McNaughton—two writers who given their overall position one
might expect to be sympathetic to the claims of love in forgiveness—do suggest
that forgiveness requires “an attitude of good will (or even love) towards the
wrongdoer”. Yet—as the above quote suggests—even they seem cautious about
going as far as to insist on the “love” claim.

Can “love’s forgiveness” be hopeful without just being naïve? Put another way,
does such a view involve a certain wilful blindness on the part of love? And if so,
is this a fatal objection? “Wilful blindness” is a familiar worry in the philosophy
of love—often raised in the context of discussions about love and the ethics of
partiality—and it is one that readers of Kierkegaard have certainly not missed. It is
a question that perhaps arises for any “vision” view of love. In what follows, I shall
compare elements of Kierkegaard’s view of love with a valuable contemporary
such view, namely Troy Jollimore’s account of “love’s friendly eye”. While there is no explicit reference to Kierkegaard in Jollimore’s book, I find aspects of his account strikingly Kierkegaardian. The advantage of discussing Kierkegaard and Jollimore together, I suggest, is that each clarifies different aspects of “love’s vision”. Kierkegaard’s is without question a “vision” view of love: he is quite explicit that loving involves a kind of seeing, and as commentators have noted, images of “blindness”, “vision” and “seeing with closed eyes” abound in the text. However, I shall argue that much of what Jollimore says in defence of romantic love and friendship also applies, from a Kierkegaardian point of view, to agapic neighbour-love. In particular, Kierkegaard resists the common assumption that whereas romantic love and friendship are particularised in their focus, neighbour-love is just generalised benevolence. In stark contrast, Kierkegaard stresses the importance of attention to the particular in what it truly means to love one’s neighbour as oneself. In doing so, he anticipates Jollimore’s view that love has epistemic standards of its own. (As Jollimore talks of love’s “friendly eye”, so Kierkegaard speaks of love as a “lenient interpreter” (WL 294/SKS 9 291).) But in the context of forgiveness, Kierkegaard will add a focus on the importance of hope - including hope in the power of love to transform.

I. AGAPE AND ATTENTION TO THE PARTICULAR

Jollimore is clear that his primary focus is on romantic love and friendship (what Kierkegaard calls “preferential loves”), and is sceptical about agape. But much of what Jollimore says in defence of preferential loves also applies mutatis mutandis to agapic neighbour-love. Jollimore glosses agape as “God’s love for us”, expressing scepticism both about whether humans are capable of feeling such love and whether it is a worthy ethical pursuit. I take it as trivially true that humans are incapable of feeling divine love in any full sense—but no defender of agape as a human ideal need deny that. Typically what such a defender valorises is neighbour-love in the sense of the second biblical love commandment: that we should strive to love all, including those to whom we do not feel the kinds of attraction that characterise such “natural” loves as romantic love and friendship. It is unclear whether Jollimore is rejecting this notion of agape as an ethical ideal. What matters for my purposes is that Kierkegaard’s view of neighbour-love is significantly at odds with the view of agape Jollimore expresses when he claims that it involves “no appreciation of or attention directed towards its object”. Perhaps the clearest account of this is to be found in the deliberation “Our duty to love the people we see” (WL 154-74/SKS 9 155-74), in which Kierkegaard argues
that genuine neighbour-love does require the kind of attention to the particular that Jollimore claims not to be agape’s concern. Here, neighbour-love requires us, in Jamie Ferreira’s words, “to see the other just as he or she is, in all his or her distinctive concreteness”.26 Ferreira argues that this deliberation signals a crucial shift in the emphasis of Works of Love: a move from relative abstraction towards a focus on “vision” as a means of emphasising concreteness and particularity.27 An 1843 discourse of Kierkegaard’s, “Love hides a multitude of sins”, anticipates this: “it does not depend, then, merely upon what one sees, but what one sees depends upon how one sees; all observation is not just a receiving, a discovering, but also a bringing forth, and insofar as it is that, how the observer himself is constituted is indeed decisive”.28

Whether the observer is one who loves, then, is crucial. This trails what will become an important theme in the second part of Works of Love: the differences in how attitudes of trust and mistrust, hope and despair, interpret ambiguous evidence about the people we encounter, as part of a gloss on what it might mean for love to “believe all things” and “hope all things”.29 But in each case, what is being commended is not some generalised attitude of benevolence, but believing and hoping in the context of a particular concrete other.

Kierkegaard, then, would agree with Jollimore that love has epistemic standards of its own—but he would also argue that this applies to neighbour-love as well as to preferential loves. With this in mind, we can draw on both Jollimore and Kierkegaard to show how love’s “friendly eye” or “lenient interpretation” is a vital factor in sketching what a forgiveness that is a work of love might look like.

II. “LOVE’S FRIENDLY EYE”

On Jollimore’s account, the lover must see the beloved “in the best possible light”, typically minimising their weaknesses and flaws. This is, we might say—with a nod towards either Dusty Springfield or ABC (depending on our age)—the “look of love”. As Jollimore recognises, there is a range of possibilities here, not all of them defensible. For instance, he approvingly cites John Armstrong, for whom to love “is to interpret another person with charity. It is to believe the best about them which is consistent with the facts”.30 The qualification is important: its purpose is to exclude outright “denial” or falsification of the facts (such as claiming your partner could not possibly have drunk a whole bottle of wine before driving home and narrowly missing that child, despite the fact that everyone else at the party
witnessed her do so). What I want to endorse is not such cases of self-deception, but cases where we don’t “incorporate” the flaws “into the overall image”.\textsuperscript{31} Such a view generates the objection that Jollimore considers: isn’t such “blindness” about the beloved a \textit{distorting} phenomenon?\textsuperscript{32} In the context of forgiveness, the worry would be that the “look of love” might be blind to the demands of justice, sliding into condonation or excuse (notions from which it is widely agreed that forgiveness needs to be distinguished).

Central to the argument of this paper is that Jollimore’s response to this is ultimately the right one: to acknowledge that epistemic partiality \textit{can} be a problem, but to insist that we should be careful not to exaggerate its importance. This is because love’s own epistemic standards pose a threat to “the allegedly objective standards that are sometimes, wrongly, assumed to represent rationality itself”.\textsuperscript{33} I want to endorse Jollimore’s central claim that “love suggests a certain kind of epistemic practice, one centred on close attention, empathy, and generosity of vision, one that tends to conflict with other sorts of epistemic practice, particularly those that take neutrality and detachment as their presiding virtues”.\textsuperscript{34} But—crucially—I am also arguing that this applies to neighbour-love as well as to preferential loves, and that this has important implications for interpersonal forgiveness. Let me unpack this.

As a preliminary, let us re-emphasise that we are dealing with a range of possibilities. When the faults are trivial or irrelevant to the circumstances, viewing them as lovable quirks\textsuperscript{35} or outright “blindness” to them poses no significant epistemic problem. In other cases, what the “look of love” sponsors is that we do not \textit{focus} on the faults, refusing to let them determine our overall view of the loved one. (This is what I take Kierkegaard to mean when he talks of the “closed eyes” of love’s forbearance and leniency (WL 162/SKS 9 162).) We shall see the relevance of this in more detail towards the end of this section.

Jollimore discusses an example from a paper of Simon Keller’s, which attempts to argue that good friendship sometimes requires epistemic irresponsibility.\textsuperscript{36} It concerns the generosity you owe your friend Rebecca, who has ambitions as a poet and who asks for your support at a reading where she hopes to impress a literary agent. You have reason to believe that the poetry typically read at this venue is poor, and so ordinarily would have no reason to think Rebecca’s will be any better. But on account of your friendship—so the argument goes—you owe her not only to turn up, but also to listen to her poetry with an openness and generosity that
would not be justified by what you know about the venue’s standard fare. What is crucial in Jollimore’s critique of Keller is the claim that the generosity of spirit you owe your friend does not constitute an epistemic fault. We have no obligation to assume, as Keller assumes, that “an ideal evaluator of Rebecca’s work would aim at ‘critical and dispassionate judgements’ formulated from a detached point of view, or that ‘to allow the poetry to strike him in the best possible light’ and to ‘actively seek out its strengths’ would be to commit epistemic errors”.

Indeed, Jollimore adds that “it is quite doubtful that a person who did not allow a poem to strike her in the best possible light, or attempt to actively seek out its strengths, would be able to find anything of value in the poem”.

Note that the attitude Keller commends is strikingly similar to the attitude Kierkegaard describes as “mistrust” in “Love believes all things”. Mistrust is said to believe “nothing at all” (WL 226/SKS 9 228), in the sense of withholding judgement until there is “proof”, convincing itself that no conclusion is possible and thus withholding trust rather than taking what it sees as an unwarranted risk. But Kierkegaard argues that mistrust’s “shrewd secret” is in fact a “misuse of knowledge” (WL 227/SKS 9 229): it wrongly infers from ambiguous evidence that the need to withhold one’s trust follows as a necessary consequence. He suggests instead that this simply reveals something about the person making this judgement: “When knowledge in a person has placed the opposite possibilities in equilibrium and he is obliged or wills to judge, then who he is, whether he is mistrustful or loving, becomes apparent in what he believes about it” (WL 231/SKS 9 233).

Moreover, one feature of neighbour-love is to bring to each and every one of “the people we see” precisely the kind of openness and generosity of spirit we more naturally bring towards those we love “preferentially”. Jollimore suggests that in pursuits where evaluators need to pay close attention in order to grasp what is admirable or innovative about a performance, “epistemic partiality would seem to demand, with respect to our loved ones, precisely the type of focused, generous attention that an ideal evaluator would lavish on everyone”.

But—extrapolating from the specific example of performance—this ideal evaluator is precisely the goal for which neighbour-love strives. And though we will each likely fall short, we see something of such an attitude in Raimond Gaita’s famous example of the nun he encountered in the psychiatric ward on which he worked in his late teens. Patients whose abominable mental conditions had led
them apparently to lose all dignity were treated like animals by some hospital orderlies. Those whom Gaita calls “noble psychiatrists” nevertheless insisted upon the “inalienable dignity” of these patients. Yet the attitudes of both the orderlies and the psychiatrists to the patients were brought into sharp relief by the attitude of a middle-aged nun who profoundly impressed the young Gaita:

everything in her demeanour towards them—the way she spoke to them, her facial expressions, the inflexions of her body—contrasted with and showed up the behaviour of those noble psychiatrists. She showed that they were, despite their best efforts, condescending, as I too had been. She thereby revealed that even such patients were, as the psychiatrists and I had sincerely and generously professed, the equals of those who wanted to help them; but she also revealed that in our hearts we did not believe this.40

I take it that the attitude described here is not one that treated each such patient identically. Insofar as she demonstrated true neighbour-love, the nun did not respond only to something generic in all humans (what Kierkegaard calls the “common watermark”). Rather, such love required seeing what this particular neighbour needed, in these particular circumstances. That is what the nun managed, which the psychiatrists, with their nobly intentioned but ultimately “condescending” talk of “inalienable dignity”, did not.

Beyond this particular example, we can say more generally that the all-inclusiveness of neighbour-love seeks to extend the generosity of vision typical of friendship—as described in the case of Rebecca’s poetry—to non-friends.44 The overall point here is that the worry about being too generous to friends and lovers is only one side of the story. While this is indeed a potential danger, “failing to be generous enough” can also be an epistemic error.45 So there is no reason to suppose that the “look of love” necessarily leads us away from the truth: it might sometimes bring us closer to it, as when we consider extenuating circumstances to which friendly or parental love has the best access. The vision leading to the slack I cut my friend might be a more accurate judgement of the reasons behind the actions of the enemy I am tempted to condemn. We can conclude that it is not clear that “love’s vision” is “on the whole less likely to reveal the truth than is the detached, dispassionate view we tend to take of those we do not know or like”.46 In other words, in many circumstances “love’s vision” may be appropriate in the sense that while it is not epistemically mandated, neither is it epistemically forbidden.47
we can go further: sometimes it is only a loving kind of attention that provides a form of awareness that reveals deeper insights than any that are attainable from the perspective of detachment. (For example, a child who performs in a mediocre way on all the standard tests might have a specific latent talent—say for art—that has been missed by all his teachers noted and nurtured by a loving aunt who really cares about her nephew. Not all paintings on the world’s fridge doors are atrocious, and some latent talents are only noticed by the “look of love”.)

But how does all this apply to forgiveness? Note that the literature on forgiveness typically places an obstacle in the path of love’s vision by the very talk of “the wrongdoer” or “the perpetrator”. This is a convenient shorthand, and it is hard to avoid. But its convenience comes at a price: those who have wronged us are presented to us under that description. Getting beyond thinking of them as only that—wrongdoers—is thus part of the battle. But suppose we apply specifically to forgiveness—contrary to the assumptions of the proponents of the view that forgiveness must be “earned”—the following thought. That “[w]hatever good may exist in a person ... becomes apparent to us only if we adopt a charitable vantage point. To demand objective ‘loveworthiness’ in advance, prior to loving, is to assume a detached stance that prevents us from finding what we are ostensibly searching for.” In illustration of this, Kierkegaard has a memorable story of two artists, one of whom travels the world in search of a face worth painting, but comes back despairing of finding any without defects. The second stays at home, but reports not finding “one single face to be so insignificant that I still could not discern a more beautiful side and discover something transfigured in it” (WL 158/ SKS 9 159). The hard task that love’s forgiveness demands is to try to bring the attitude of the second artist to bear in our view of those who have wronged us (or others).

Yet sometimes this highly demanding task is achieved. There is an exemplary kind of forgiveness that is able to see the value in even egregious wrongdoers, in a way that goes beyond just the recognition of the common humanity they share with the rest of us (which—to draw an analogy with our discussion of Gaita’s nun—would take us beyond the orderlies but no further than the psychiatrists). If we ask what the value of the wrongdoer consists in, certainly part of it is the “common watermark” of our humanity: that which he shares with all human beings. But Kierkegaard’s insistence on loving “the people we see” suggests a need to go beyond just this, since this value is manifested uniquely in each case. Such vision is demonstrated by another nun, Sister Helen Prejean, “spiritual
advisor” to Death Row inmates and author of *Dead Man Walking*. In line with Kierkegaard’s focus on loving “the people we see”—as specific individuals rather than fungible recipients of a generic benevolence—she describes how she came to view the convicted murderer Elmo Patrick Sonnier as an individual who, despite his egregious crimes, was worthy of her care and understanding. It is not that Sonnier’s good qualities immediately impressed her, so while her attitude to him goes beyond mere recognition respect (that which is owed to any person *qua* person), it is not evaluative respect in this sense. Rather, I submit that what Prejean manifested was love’s generosity of vision: an openness to seeing the good in Sonnier that preceded any recognition of specific positive qualities in him. As Rick Furtak glosses Kierkegaard’s version of this idea, the thought is that “the unique and irreplaceable worth of *this* person will not be revealed to us unless we love them first, before we have entirely discovered why they are worthy”.

In Sonnier’s case, it seems that Prejean’s attitude indeed “loves forth love”: as her friendship with him develops, Sonnier seems to grow as a human being. In the final days and hours before his execution, he expresses real gratitude to her for being the first person to show him what love really means (“It’s a shame a man has to come to prison to find love”). His gratitude is also extended to the lawyer who tries, ultimately unsuccessfully, to get his sentence commuted to life imprisonment (“Mr. Millard, thank you for what you and the others done for me ... no, no, no, Mr. Millard, you didn’t fail...”), and to the chef who prepares him his final meal. Having earlier been tempted to use his final words to show hatred and defiance, in the event he asks forgiveness from the father of one of his victims.

And this returns us to the importance of hope. When describing the task of love as being to find the object of our attention lovable, Kierkegaard immediately adds that by this he is not recommending “a childish infatuation with the beloved’s accidental characteristics, still less a misplaced sentimental indulgence” (WL 166/SKS 9 167). What he calls the “earnestness” of love is said to consist in this: that *the relationship itself* will “fight against the imperfection” and “overcome the defect” (WL 166/SKS 9 167). In other words, rather than condoning or excusing serious defects, he expresses a faith and hope in *the power of love to transform them*. A key illustration of this is his discussion of Christ’s reaction to Peter’s betrayal of him:

Christ’s love for Peter was boundless in this way: in loving Peter he accomplished loving the person one sees. He did not say, ‘Peter must
first change and become another person before I can love him again’. No, he said exactly the opposite, ‘Peter is Peter, and I love him. My love, if anything, will help him to become another person’. Therefore he did not break off the friendship in order perhaps to renew it if Peter would have become another person; no, he preserved the friendship unchanged and in that way helped Peter to become another person. (WL 172/SKS 9 172)

Though the discussion is not explicitly about forgiveness, what is hinted at here is how the healing power of loving forgiveness—the vision of love’s “friendly eye”, held out in hope—illustrates the phenomenon here described. This is not to condone or to excuse. It is not to be “blind” to the offender’s faults in any problematic way. (Kierkegaard is explicit about this: “Christ still knew his [Peter’s] defects” (WL 168/SKS 9 168).) Rather, it is not letting their faults become the whole picture. It is to avoid seeing Peter exclusively through the lens of “wrongdoer”, “betrayer” or “coward”.

In summary, we have trivial deeds or flaws, which the “look of love” can legitimately ignore. More significant ones, which need nevertheless not be “incorporated into the overall image”. And—overlapping with this—truly egregious deeds or flaws, where not letting them be “incorporated into the overall image” might require the sort of exemplary attitude manifested by Christ to Peter or by Prejean to Sonnier. Let’s see how Kierkegaard develops this beyond this specific example of Christ’s attitude to Peter.

III. KIERKEGAARD ON LOVE AND FORGIVENESS

First, let us recap. I have sketched parallels between Jollimore’s account of “love’s friendly eye” (discussed in the context of preferential love) and Kierkegaard’s view of love as a “lenient interpreter” (applied to neighbour-love). In this section, I shall expand upon features of love that, for Kierkegaard, are important to understanding forgiveness as a work of love. First, how in forgiveness love “hides a multitude of sins” by acknowledging a wrong but refusing to focus all one’s attention upon it. And second, how “love’s abidingness is a form of love’s hopefulness”, discussed chiefly in terms of love’s continued openness, typically, to possible reconciliation with the estranged other.

The three Works of Love deliberations, “Love hides a multitude of sins”, “Love abides” and “The victory of the conciliatory spirit in love” all address forgiveness
and reconciliation. The first explicitly discusses forgiveness as one of the major ways in which love “hides” sins or wrongdoing, while the third—building on the second—focuses on the practice of reconciliation and restoring broken bonds. Love’s vision is integral to all these discussions.

It is with respect to the first two of these deliberations that Kierkegaard commentators have considered a worry akin to that we discussed in section II above: that Kierkegaard’s ethic might involve “an unhealthy kind of blindness or wishful thinking or an intellectual dishonesty”. The most interesting prima facie case for the “unhealthy blindness” charge concerns those instances in which love “cannot avoid seeing or hearing” (WL 289/SKS 9 286) wrongdoing. Kierkegaard claims that it hides such wrongdoing in three ways: by silence (such as avoiding careless gossip, rumour-spreading and slander); by looking for a “mitigating explanation” (WL 291-4/SKS 9 289-291); and—where this is not possible—by forgiveness (WL 294/SKS 9 291). In the second of these cases—the mitigating explanation—Kierkegaard’s concern seems to be to remind us, in our rush to form unfavourable judgement of others, of the extraordinary variety of possible interpretations of most forms of human action, and to commend choosing “the most lenient interpretation” (WL 292/SKS 9 289) consistent with the facts. (This might involve condoning or excusing, where one can legitimately do so.) This continues the line of argument of earlier deliberations: that trust and mistrust, hope and despair, have access to the same evidence, and when forced to choose on the basis of ambiguous evidence, our choices reveal something significant about us. But the very inclusion of a third category, the need for forgiveness, shows that there are limits to how plausible “mitigating explanations” (condonation or excuse?) can be. So does the “unhealthy blindness” worry emerge in the specific discussion of forgiveness?

Although at times Kierkegaard appears to conflate forgiving with forgetting and with blotting out sin (drawing on biblical imagery of God as hiding sin behind his back54 (WL 296/SKS 9 293)), this focus on “hiding” is not a claim about wrongdoing having been wiped out as if it had never existed, but rather, again, a refusal to focus on it or to allow it to determine one’s global view of the wrongdoer. However, it might be objected, to say this is still not to answer directly the following question: why look with love’s friendly eye in cases of wrongdoing? I think Kierkegaard’s answer, complementing that sketched above, is threefold. Firstly, a religious claim: such a way of seeing acknowledges that all humans—even the worst sinners—are equally loved by God.55 But second, a claim that requires no religious commitment to
accept: that such a way of seeing best facilitates personal relations between flawed human beings; the kind of creatures where “every one so often needs forgiveness himself”.56 Third—anticipating Jollimore’s response to Keller—it reminds us of something which while obvious when stated, is often overlooked in practice: that just as trust can be deceived, so can mistrust; just as love’s “wilful blindness” will strike some as unjustified, so too can the look of suspicion (or malice, or envy) be. A reminder, in other words, of the defeasibility of our judgements—uncharitable as well as charitable.57 These points are, I suggest, recommendations of a kind of humility, inextricably bound up with hope. And it is the presence of hope for the wrongdoer that distinguishes “hiding the sin” as a refusal to focus all one’s attention on wrongdoing from a mere “looking the other way”, as Griswold puts it.58

The next Works of Love deliberation extends these themes: the fidelity of love discussed in “Love abides” is explored in terms of love’s continued, hopeful openness to the possibility of reconciliation with the estranged other. Here, Kierkegaard also makes that move which is controversial even within the Christian tradition: a bold valorisation of pre-emptive forgiveness, offered in love, which he treats as the touchstone of exemplary forgiveness. Love, he claims, takes the initiative; loving forgiveness is offered before the wrongdoer repents or seeks forgiveness.59

Kierkegaard is well aware of a sometimes noted danger in the context of interpersonal forgiveness, that of forgiveness being wielded over the wrongdoer as a weapon. To counter this, he stresses the importance of sensitivity to the wrongdoer’s self-respect. Nevertheless the latter must become aware of their wrongdoing (what Kierkegaard calls love’s “merciful blow” (WL 339/SKS 9 334))—and this is why we need to keep it distinct from condoning or excusing. He describes the balance that needs to be struck in terms of a combination of “rigor” and gentleness, commenting: “[w]hat a difficult task ... to be as rigorous as truth requires and yet as gentle as love desires” (WL 339/SKS 9 334). Love’s forgiveness must thus be practised artfully.

But self-respect more commonly enters this debate in a different place: the concern about pre-emptive forgiveness is often that this is premature, signalling weakness, servility and a lack of self-respect on the part of the forgiver.60 However, notable instances of immediately proclaimed forgiveness—consider, for example, that of Gordon Wilson for the IRA bombers who took the life of his daughter at Enniskillen in 1987 or that extended to the racist murderer Dylann Roof from
several victims of the 2015 Charleston, South Carolina church shooting—do not strike me as involving these qualities at all. While such forgiveness is unconditional in the sense that it is offered pre-emptively, it is not unconditional in the sense to which Griswold objects (as discussed earlier). This is because forgiveness offered in love can be a loving gift offered in hope. As noted earlier, this hope has at least two targets: for the reform of the offender, and for the forgiver’s own ability fully to forgive. (In this sense, “I forgive you” can be a statement of hope or intent rather than a description of a state already achieved.)

The question underpinning such worries is again whether forgiveness offered in love threatens justice. So it’s important to note that nobody in the Enniskillen or Charleston cases thought that offering forgiveness was in any way inconsistent with letting the legal system bring the perpetrators to justice. But all this requires us to consider, in a little more detail, the relation of love’s forgiveness to other virtues—especially hope and humility.

IV. ALLIED VIRTUES: HOPE AND HUMILITY

Hope is a more important dimension of Kierkegaard’s thought than is typically recognised. Nor is this all about hope for one’s eternal destiny. On hope in forgiveness, Kierkegaard’s position seems broadly Lutheran. Commenting on Paul’s discussion of faith, hope and love in 1 Corinthians—in particular the “love hopes all things” verse that so interested Kierkegaard—Luther insists that the hope to which Paul refers is hope for the good of others:

Love despairs of no man, however wicked he may be. It hopes for the best. ... Love is a virtue particularly representing devotion to a neighbour; his welfare is its goal in thought and deed. Like its faith, the hope entertained by love is frequently misplaced, but it never gives up. Love rejects no man; it despairs of no cause. But the proud speedily despair of men generally, rejecting them of no account.

Such hope is no naïve, sunny optimism. The sheer difficulty of manifesting it in the contexts of some wrongs means that it will sometimes need to be “radical” in something like Jonathan Lear’s sense of that term: the hope may be such that its precise content cannot be specified in advance. As Lear describes such “radical hope”, the best we can say is that “something good will emerge even if it outstrips my present limited capacity for understanding what that good is”.

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Such hope is connected to the patient openness to the future that one Kierkegaard commentator has called the virtue of “active receptivity”. And one manifestation of such receptivity is that openness to seeing the good in someone we earlier attributed to Helen Prejean.

We are now better placed to see the significance for forgiveness of Kierkegaard’s focus on striking the right balance between the “rigor” of what “truth requires” and the “gentleness” of what “love desires”. While “love’s forgiveness” does not stand by with a checklist, ensuring that the wrongdoer has first accepted responsibility, repudiated his action, and done enough to make amends, etc., before forgiveness may be dispensed, neither does it hope for nothing from the wrongdoer, fearful (like Derrida) that to do so would be to reduce forgiveness to an “economic” transaction. Thus it avoids Griswold’s worry, as outlined near the start of our discussion. Love’s forgiveness hopes for the offender to mend his ways in the kind of ways Griswold specifies—but it does not require proof of this in advance before forgiveness can be offered (and is in this sense unconditional). Love’s forgiveness is a gift, but not in the sense that Griswold rejects (where talk of gift “is taken to mean ‘elective’ in a sense that is not responsible to any moral reasons”). Love’s forgiveness responds to the kinds of moral reason I have drawn on Kierkegaard to sketch above: reasons such as a recognition of all as unique creatures of God or bearers of a common humanity, expressed uniquely in each individual; a recognition of one’s own flaws and vices (he needs forgiveness from me, as I do from others); a hopeful concern for the wrongdoer’s moral improvement and return to the moral community; and—sometimes—a restored relationship.

The balance that Kierkegaard stresses also reemphasises the importance of the need not to wield forgiveness domineeringly as a weapon of power (cf. WL 295/SKS 9 292-3). Recall Helen Prejean. What makes such an agapic attitude as hers possible in the context of forgiveness is inter alia the humility expressed in the recognition of the equal value of all before God (WL 342/SKS 9 336-7) and the need we all have for forgiveness, which, taken seriously, muddies the waters of any simple division of the world into “wrongdoers” and “wronged parties”; “perpetrators” and “victims”.

My final suggestion, then, is that what looks from some perspectives like “blindness” to justice is actually a manifestation of an admirable kind of humility. Space constraints preclude a full account of the kind of humility I have in mind, but we can outline some of its central features. One such is other-focus: an
orientation towards people and other things of value in the world such that we appreciate and promote their value apart from their instrumental value to ourselves. This orientation stems, in part, from a sense of dependence: a recognition that whatever we have achieved inevitably depends upon other people, institutions and circumstances beyond our control. Exemplars of such humility are those who focus less on themselves and more on what they find worthwhile in the world other than themselves, such that the “spirit of comparison” with others that Kierkegaard finds such a damaging element of human psychology is quietened. Such humility is, I suggest, in large part what enables us to get beyond the hurt pride that often stands in the way of forgiveness. And such humility is certainly not to be conflated with servility. Indeed, we might even think of it as a kind of moral strength. Robert C. Roberts, for instance—for whom humility is “a disposition not to feel the emotions associated with caring a lot about one’s status”—describes it as “a transcendent form of self-confidence”. Such a person has an “implicit and inarticulate sense of his own worth” that does not depend on his comparative value to others. And because such a person’s sense of self-worth does not depend upon a sort of ranking derived from the “spirit of comparison”, this will make easier a willingness to forego the sense of moral superiority towards those who have wronged us to which we might otherwise feel entitled. But this does not amount to the lack of self-respect that philosophers of forgiveness have worried about. Indeed, such willingness is also a kind of courage, insofar as it involves what Christopher Bennett describes as “having sufficient confidence in your own status ... that you are prepared to make yourself vulnerable to further insult in order to reach out to the wrongdoer in some way—for instance in the hope of encouraging his return to the moral community”. It is such an attitude, I submit—an attitude of hope and what Kierkegaard elsewhere calls “humble courage”—that makes possible love’s forgiveness.
NOTES

1. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the University of Pardubice and at the ASCP conference at Deakin University. I am grateful for these invitations to speak and to audience members at both conferences, as well as to Anthony Bash and two anonymous referees for this journal, for useful discussion and suggestions. The paper also develops some claims sketched in part of my "Kierkegaard on love", in Christopher Grau and Aaron Smuts (eds), The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Love, New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

2. Charles Griswold, Forgiveness: a Philosophical Exploration. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Griswold’s account has been taken by many to be one of the richest recent discussions of the topic, several later writers on forgiveness—including Peter Goldie, Nicholas Wolterstorff and Martha Nussbaum—taking it as a touchstone for further discussion.


6. Derrida, On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness, 39. He poses this as a question, but it is clearly rhetorical.

7. Griswold, Forgiveness, 63.

8. Griswold, Forgiveness, 63-4, my emphasis.

9. Griswold, Forgiveness, 64, my emphasis.

10. Ibid.


13. Interestingly, the connection between “gift” and “to forgive” is to be found in languages such as French (pardonner), German (vergeben) and Danish (tilgive), as well as in English.

14. Exceptions to the typical case would be cases such as where Alethea needs to forgive her colleague Jim for a wrong done to her friend Carla (but not—at least directly—to Alethea) if her relationship with Jim is to be restored.

15. For a secularised version of this general approach, see Lucy Allais, “Wiping the Slate Clean: the Heart of Forgiveness”. Philosophy and Public Affairs, 36-1 (2008, 33-68).

16. This and all parenthetical references are to Søren Kierkegaard, Works of Love. Trans. H. V. and E. H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, hereafter WL. All references to Kierkegaard’s works will also include a reference to the volume and page numbers of the standard Danish edition, Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn et al. Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 1997-2014, hereafter SKS.

17. Note that this is still unconditional, just as a university admissions officer who makes an unconditional offer to a predicted straight-A student may, with perfect consistency, still hope that she achieves high grades.

18. Garrard and McNaughton, “In Defence of Unconditional Forgiveness”, 44.


20. Jollimore goes on to discuss Kierkegaard in a later essay (“The Importance of Whom We
Care About”, in Anthony Rudd and John Davenport (eds), Love, Reason and Will: Kierkegaard After Frankfurt, London: Bloomsbury, 2015, 47-72), but has confirmed to me that at the time of writing Love’s Vision, he had not read Kierkegaard on love.


22. The reference is to Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar: “a friendly eye is slow to see small faults” (Jollimore, Love’s Vision, 46).


24. Ibid.


27. It is on the basis of this fourth deliberation in the first series of Works of Love that Ferreira explicitly suggests that “Kierkegaard’s Christian ethic is one of vision” (Ferreira, Love’s Grateful Striving, 105).


35. The idea that our defects humanise us is, I take it, the thought behind Disraeli’s objection that Gladstone had “not one single redeeming defect”.


38. Ibid.

39. Jollimore, Love’s Vision, 58. To say this is not to rule out the possibility that Rebecca’s poetry may be so terrible that a good friend should try to find a way to let her know that her efforts would be better extended in another direction (what Kierkegaard calls love’s “rigor”, as we shall see). But the point is that no such verdict should be reached in advance of giving that poetry a generous hearing.


41. It seems that, notwithstanding his professed scepticism about agape, Jollimore shares this view. Discussing a similar case, he suggests that the solution is not “to attempt to expunge love’s way of seeing from whatever realm we are speaking of, but rather to transform the realm in question so that everyone can be seen in this way” (Jollimore, Love’s Vision, 60).

42. Jollimore, Love’s Vision, 62. In fact, it seems to me that Keller does recognises this: see Keller, “Friendship and Belief”, 344-6. What Keller’s account does seem to overlook is the possibility that we might sometimes be more critical of our friend than we would be of a stranger, simply in virtue of knowing him better (and thus being aware of whatever his particular Achilles heel may be).

44. On this point, see Allais, “Wiping the Slate Clean”, 60-2.
45. I owe this example to Rick Anthony Furtak (“Love as a relation to truth: envisaging the person in *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook (2013, 236)).
49. “To be able to love a person despite his weaknesses and defects and imperfections is still not perfect love, but rather this, to be able to find him lovable despite and with his weaknesses and defects and imperfections” (WL 157-8/SKS 9 158).
50. In what follows, the talks of deeds and flaws is meant to capture the thought that, while what one needs to forgive a person for will typically be an action or set of actions, in some cases what one needs to forgive a person for may be a character flaw.
51. Glen Pettigrove discusses Jean Hampton’s claim that bestowing forgiveness on a person involves granting “her approval of him as a person despite what he has done to her” (Murphy and Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy*, 85). Pettigrove suggests that on a strong reading of “approving him as a person”, this is false (we need not approve of such a person “in an all-things considered moral sense”, judging that “on balance he has done something worthwhile with his life” (Pettigrove, *Forgiveness and Love*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, 97n58)). But on a weaker reading, it is true, since such approval need only amount to Kantian recognition respect. I am suggesting that love’s hopeful forgiveness, as illustrated by Prejean’s attitude to Sonnier, shows a third option, more than just recognition respect but still stopping short of judging Sonnier’s life as a whole to have been lived in a worthwhile manner.
54. Isaiah 38: 17.
56. Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, 58; SKS 5 68.
59. Interestingly, Kierkegaard takes God as the model for this: God’s forgiveness of sins is taken to be freely and gratuitously offered, as opposed to the view that forgiveness needs to be preceded by repentance (WL 336/SKS 9 332).
60. See for instance Murphy and Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy*, 16-19.
61. For a discussion of how punishment consistent with forgiveness can block condonation and preserve self-respect, see Pettigrove, *Forgiveness and Love*, 117.
63. Martin Luther, “Sermon for the Sunday before Lent: 1 Corinthians 13”, available at: https://www.stepbible.org/?q=version=ESV|version=Luther|reference=1Cor.13&options=VNHUG
64. Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 94. For more on the relevance of this to Kierkegaardian faith, see Lippitt, “Learning to Hope”.

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66. Griswold, Forgiveness, 68.


68. It is this that ties humility to gratitude, and which contrasts it with “hyper-autonomy”, that “vice of pride” which underestimates our dependence upon others (see Robert C. Roberts, “Humility and Gratitude”, in David Carr (ed.), Perspectives on Gratitude: an Interdisciplinary Approach. London: Routledge, 2016, 57-69).

69. This is a major theme of Kierkegaard’s various discourses on “the lilies in the field and the birds of the air”.

70. Roberts, Spiritual Emotions, 88.

71. Roberts, Spiritual Emotions, 81.

72. Roberts, Spiritual Emotions, 90.

what is philosophy as a way of life?
john sellars

I. INTRODUCING PHILOSOPHY AS A WAY OF LIFE

In recent years there has been a gradual development of interest in the idea that philosophy might be conceived as a guide to life. The phrase ‘Philosophy as a Way of Life’ is closely associated with the French philosopher and scholar of ancient philosophy Pierre Hadot, whose work gained prominence in the English-speaking world in 1995 with the publication of a book called Philosophy as a Way of Life. In the chapter from which the volume gets its title, Hadot claims that in antiquity “philosophy was a way of life,” a “mode of existing-in-the-world, which had to be practiced at each instant, and the goal of which was to transform the whole of the individual’s life.”

Hadot goes on to illustrate the ways in which a wide range of ancient philosophers presented the task of philosophy as something therapeutic, something aimed at overcoming mental disturbances so that the practitioner can attain some kind of inner tranquillity. Hadot contrasts this with philosophy as it is usually practised today: “Ancient philosophy proposed to mankind an art of living. By contrast, modern philosophy appears above all as the construction of a technical jargon
Reserved for specialists.” Having said that, Hadot also refers to a number of post-
antique philosophers whom he thinks still hold on to this ancient conception of
philosophy. He suggests that both Descartes and Spinoza held on to this way of
thinking about philosophy, as did Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, and Hadot thinks
that it is no coincidence that none of these thinkers held university positions. The
important point in the present context is that this is not only how philosophy
was once conceived long ago, but also a live metaphilosophical option that has
been taken up by philosophers throughout the history of philosophy and can still
be taken up today.

Can we flesh this notion out further? I take it to involve the following things:
first, that the ultimate motivation of philosophy is to transform one’s way of
life; second, that there ought to be some connection and consistency between
someone’s stated philosophical ideas and their behaviour; and third that actions
are ultimately more philosophically significant than words. It is often conceived as
something therapeutic, but it need not be. It usually aims at a good life, but again
this may not be necessarily so. It is transformative, though perhaps one ought
not to assume that this will always be for the better. It resonates with what Isaiah
Berlin called “the power of ideas,” that is, the ability of philosophy to transform
the life of an individual, or even an entire society. As he put it, the concepts and
categories with which people think “must deeply affect their lives.” One of the
best definitions of Philosophy as a Way of Life, however, can be found in Friedrich
Nietzsche’s Schopenhauer as Educator:

I attach importance to a philosopher only to the extent that he is capable
of setting an example. ... The philosopher must supply this example in
his visible life, and not merely in his books; that is, it must be presented
in the way the philosophers of Greece taught, through facial expressions,
demeanor, clothing, food, and custom more than through what they said,
let alone what they wrote.

Or, as he put it a little later on in the same work, “the only possible criticism
of any philosophy, and the only one that proves anything, is trying to see if one
can live by this philosophy.” Or again, from his notebooks, “the product of the
philosopher is his life (first, before his works). That is his work of art.” This
Nietzschean image was taken up by Michel Foucault when he wrote, “couldn’t
everyone’s life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art
object, but not our life?” It is this way of thinking about philosophy that we find

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articulated by Hadot, Nietzsche, and Foucault, that I want to examine further in what follows.

II. TWO COMPETING IMAGES OF PHILOSOPHY: SCIENTIFIC VERSUS HUMANISTIC

I want to begin by drawing a distinction between what appear to be two quite different ways of thinking about philosophy. I shall call these ‘the scientific conception of philosophy’ and ‘the humanistic conception of philosophy’. Neither of those labels is ideal, but I hope they will do for present purposes. I think the contrast can be seen clearly if we compare the metaphilosophy of Socrates and Aristotle. In drawing a distinction between them, I differ from Hadot, who, as we shall see, tried to present both Socrates and Aristotle as adherents of Philosophy as a Way of Life.

First, Socrates. In the Apology, Plato has Socrates say that his principal concern is a desire to live a philosophical life. This is implicit throughout the text but there are a few passages that stand out. The first of these is when Socrates tries to describe his philosophical mission. He presents it as a duty to live as a philosopher, examining himself and others. Later, in response to his accusers who have condemned him to death, he says, “you have brought about my death in the belief that through it you will be delivered from submitting the conduct of your lives to criticism.” This idea that the task at hand is to examine lives is repeated in another passage where he says that the best thing anyone can do is to examine themselves and others, adding—famously—that a life without this sort of examination is not worth living. For Socrates, then, philosophy is an activity directed at trying to figure out how to live well, subjecting our current way of life to examination. This of course leads to a desire to know various things and attempts to define various things, not least what is and is not good, but the motivation, even if it remains implicit, is clear: Socrates wants to find out how to live well—and not just for the sake of knowing how to live well, but because above all else he actually wants to live well, to enjoy a good life, whatever that might turn out to be. This remains the motivation throughout the early Socratic dialogues. In the Gorgias, for instance, Socrates insists on the seriousness of their discussion by reminding his interlocutors that it is about “what course of life is best.”

If we turn to Aristotle—or at least the Aristotle of the Metaphysics—we find a quite different image of philosophy. He presents the task of the philosopher as one of
uncovering principles and causes. He defines wisdom as knowing the causes of things. He then defines philosophy as “knowledge of the truth,” adding that the “end of theoretical knowledge is truth, and not action.” He acknowledges that there is also practical knowledge that is concerned with action, but here he identifies philosophy with theoretical knowledge and prioritizes theoretical knowledge over practical knowledge because it deals with things that are unchanging. The paradigmatic example of a philosopher that Aristotle has in mind here is not Socrates but instead Thales—the man who fell down a well because he was so engrossed in studying the stars that he failed to look where he was going, and also the man who could have made a fortune speculating on grain harvests using his ability to predict heavenly movements but chose not to—in short, a man far more concerned with trying to understand how the physical world works than he was in learning how to live well within it. It is true that at a number of points in the *Metaphysics* Aristotle says that philosophy is a wide-ranging subject that embraces theoretical, practical, and productive questions; however, he also insists that the “first philosophy” that he is examining there is the most important part of philosophy because it deals with what is unchanging, namely the first principles that underpin Nature. For Aristotle, then, the motivation is not to learn how to live well but rather to understand the way the world works.

There seems to be a clear metaphilosophical contrast, then, between these two images of philosophy. Socrates and Aristotle are doing two quite different things, it seems. Hadot did his best to subsume Aristotle under the banner of Philosophy as a Way of Life by reminding us that the Aristotelian ideal of *theôria* is an activity that itself becomes a lived practice and so something that effectively becomes a way of life. However Hadot does not deny that for Aristotle the highest form of theoretical knowledge is something that is chosen for itself. It is true that the pursuit of theoretical knowledge might itself form a way of life, indeed the best way of life to which a human might aspire. However, the claim that this form of life is the motivating force for Aristotle seems less convincing. What matters to Aristotle most of all is understanding the way the world works; given that, naturally he will prefer a life devoted to the pursuit of that kind of understanding over a life devoted to the pursuit of anything else. That does not mean, though, that the question of how best to live was uppermost in his mind, in the way that it clearly was for Socrates.

One might think that if we want to understand what Aristotle thought about the best way to live we ought to be looking at the *Nicomachean Ethics* rather than the
Metaphysics. In the opening book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle famously says that all human beings identify *eudaimonia* with living well. However, later on when he prioritizes the ideal of the contemplative life over other forms of life he does so not based on its propensity to generate *eudaimonia* but rather on the superiority of its objects of knowledge, namely unchanging universals rather than changeable particulars. The contemplative life is best not because it is identified with living well but because it devotes itself to the highest form of knowledge there is.

It seems, then, that we have a clear metaphilosophical division between Socrates and Aristotle. Both are committed to the pursuit of knowledge and both offer an image of an ideal life involving the pursuit of knowledge, but nevertheless there is a clear difference when we turn to their ultimate motivations. Socrates pursues knowledge in order to live a philosophical life, while Aristotle lives a philosophical life in order to pursue knowledge. This is a subtle but, I think, important difference. It is also the difference between what I earlier called the scientific and humanistic conceptions of philosophy. Aristotle’s scientific image of philosophy is a disinterested pursuit of knowledge for its own sake; Socrates’ humanistic image of philosophy is concerned with what it means to be human and how to live a good human life. The subsequent history of Western philosophy has seen both of these conceptions of philosophy flourish at different times, sometimes in combination, and sometimes apart. We see the contrast very clearly in the Renaissance, for example, when Petrarch attacks the scholastic Aristotelians of his day because, unlike Socrates and Cicero, he thinks that they teach him nothing about how to live.

Although I have not said it explicitly yet, it should be clear that I am provisionally identifying this Socratic, humanistic conception of philosophy with Philosophy as a Way of Life. By extension I am contrasting it with the Aristotelian, scientific conception of philosophy. Yet, as we shall see, such a distinction may turn out to be too simplistic.

**III. PHILOSOPHY AS A WAY OF LIFE AND CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY**

When faced with a contrast between a practical, engaged, existential image of philosophy on the one hand and a disinterested scientific one on the other, it is tempting to try to map this division onto the distinction between ‘continental’ and ‘analytic’ philosophy. Whether we think of the contrast between continental
Existentialism and Oxford linguistic philosophy in the 1950s and 60s or engaged Marxism and Quinean naturalism a little later on, it seems not unreasonable to suggest that continental philosophers are the heirs of Socrates while analytic philosophers are heirs to Aristotle. Indeed, some commentators on the so-called analytic-continental divide have presented the difference between the two traditions in terms of their motivation: while analytic philosophers pursue knowledge (*epistêmê*), continental philosophers aspire to wisdom (*phronêsis*).

There are certainly many examples of what I am calling Philosophy as a Way of Life among philosophers that usually get labelled ‘continental’. We might think of Nietzsche’s remarks in *Schopenhauer as Educator* that we saw earlier or the later work of Michel Foucault on care of the self. Hadot was an important influence on Foucault’s later interests in ancient philosophy and in his own work Hadot aligns a range of European thinkers with Philosophy as a Way of Life, including Goethe, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty. Of course for Hadot, writing in Paris, none of these were ‘continental’ philosophers; they were just modern exponents of an ancient way of approaching philosophy.

**IV. PHILOSOPHY AS A WAY OF LIFE AS A THIRD WAY**

Although there have been many continental philosophers who appear to embrace something akin to Philosophy as a Way of Life, there are no doubt others who do not. Of course it is difficult to make generalizations here given that the label ‘continental philosophy’ does not really refer to anything at all beyond those bits of recent Western philosophy that analytic philosophers tend to reject as not how they think philosophy ought to be done. But even so, there are many philosophers in the ‘continental tradition’ who seem to be engaged in something akin to Philosophy as a Way of Life, which should come as no surprise given that, as I have tried to show, the idea is expressed in texts that are foundational for the subject as a whole, namely Plato’s *Apology* and the early Socratic dialogues.

Even so, some have rejected the idea of any connection between the two. In particular, Michael Chase, who has translated the bulk of Hadot’s works into English, has recently presented Philosophy as a Way of Life as a third way of doing philosophy that is distinct from both analytic and continental approaches. He offers an autobiographical account of his own first experiences with philosophy and describes his own undergraduate education in analytic philosophy. He was, he says, “introduced to reading some of the most boring material I have ever
encountered,” which unsurprisingly left him feeling dissatisfied. For Chase, who was interested in the big questions that had occupied much of the history of philosophy, his analytic professors seemed bent on dispensing with such questions altogether, to the point of advocating “the elimination of philosophy itself.” No wonder that many of them seemed embarrassed to be philosophers at all and spent much of their professional lives wishing they were scientists.

Like many philosophy students before and since who have found themselves uninspired by possible worlds or out-of-control trolleys, Chase decided to move to a different university for his graduate studies where he would be able to study continental philosophy, which he had been told was “the only other game in town.” Although more congenial in many ways, Chase found continental philosophy’s own brand of jargon as off putting as the logical symbols he had just fled, especially in the secondary literature where “this jargon seemed to become an end in itself.” Summing up his experiences of both analytic and continental philosophy, Chase writes:

I had had a taste of both Analytic and Continental philosophy, the two mutually exclusive branches of the discipline, and neither had satisfied me. Neither seemed able to speak to my thirst for the honest, jargon-free discussions of philosophical issues that genuinely mattered to my life.

What he wanted was a third way and, to cut the story short, he found that in the work of Pierre Hadot, which he encountered after shifting direction to study Greek and Latin in order to work on Plato and Aristotle. Summing up, Chase says:

Hadot’s conception of Philosophy as a Way of Life, which does not fit neatly into the usual two-pronged division of philosophy into Analytic and Continental, may provide indications of a third way as an alternative to them both. This is because i) it does not shun the traditional big philosophical questions; ii) it deals with issues relevant to people’s lives; iii) it does not model itself on the natural sciences; and iv) it avoids being ironic or relativistic. It is a way of thinking about philosophy today that is accessible to non-experts and connects with the wider history of philosophy stretching back to antiquity. It also, especially in the hands of Hadot, has a rigorous intellectual foundation in the philological study of Greek and Latin texts. As such, it is also quite different from most popular
philosophical writing that aims to offer people guidance in their daily lives.

Whether Chases’s images of analytic and continental philosophy are entirely fair is a question I shall put to one side. I do not doubt for a moment that both accounts accurately present his own experiences as a student. No doubt both traditions are far richer than the particular instances that Chase encountered at university. The important point in the present context is that Chase is proposing three distinct traditions of philosophy rather than just two. It is also worth noting that Chase’s account does not neatly map onto the twofold division that I outlined earlier, even though there are some connections. Rather than draw a contrast between scientific and humanistic metaphilosophy, Chase’s distinction is between two kinds of equally arid and irrelevant academic discourse (analytic and continental) versus a venerable ancient tradition of life-changing wisdom (Philosophy as a Way of Life).

V. UNDERCUTTING THE DIVISIONS

In a recent essay entitled “The Complications of Philosophy” Tom Stern also notes the contrast between modern impersonal academic philosophy and the ancient image of philosophy as a therapeutic practice that teaches people how to live. However, he insists that this ought not to be an either/or choice. How can we be inspired by, say, Nietzsche (his example), if we have not yet worked out precisely what Nietzsche was saying? No doubt Chase, who, like his mentor Hadot, has devoted much of his own academic career to careful and patient scholarly work on ancient philosophical texts, would agree.

Stern recounts some of his experiences trying to bring philosophy to a wider public, running philosophy sessions for a mental health charity. The context of the sessions is broadly therapeutic but Stern is all too conscious that, for them to be serious philosophy sessions, a concern with trying to find the truth must trump any simplistic attempt to make the participants feel better. If they become simply therapy, can they at the same time be philosophy? Philosophy attempts to uncover truths, and some of those truths might not be particularly consoling at all: what if it turned out that life is meaningless, nothing possesses any inherent value, and there are no good reasons to keep living?

At the same time Stern is all too conscious that the vast bulk of academic philosophical writing has very little impact in the real world. Most of it, if it is read
at all, is read only by a handful of other academic philosophers. If it all disappeared overnight, he comments, tomorrow few people in the wider world would even notice. At the same time, however, there is a real public appetite for philosophy, and that appetite is satisfied by an industry of popular, therapeutic, self-help books that have little or no connection with academic philosophy, and which academic philosophers tend to dismiss out of hand as not proper philosophy at all. While Stern is sympathetic to the idea of bringing philosophy to a wider public in a way that might impact on their lives, he knows that in practice this can often become simply an exercise in trying to make people feel better in which “a messy argument about what’s true and what’s false can just get in the way.”

Stern’s greatest concern with that kind of popular philosophy is not its lack of academic or intellectual rigour but the way it papers over the fact that the truth might not make people feel better at all: perhaps on closer inspection it will turn out that you are indeed a failure, with no discernable talents, whom nobody loves. Reflect philosophically about your own life and you too can come to know that these things are in fact true. It may turn out that philosophy is no consolation at all.

Stern’s final conclusion in his reflections about philosophy and its practical relevance is that “wherever we find philosophy we find, on the one hand, the pursuit of truth and, on the other, some promise to make a difference or to guide us towards a better or a more fulfilled life.” If ever someone champions one side, the other side never quite goes away. Perhaps the best option, then, “is to keep moving from one to the next, back and forth, dissatisfied with each.”

At first glance, this contrast between these two sides of philosophy sounds similar to the contrast I drew earlier between Socratic, humanistic philosophy, motivated by a desire to transform one’s life, versus Aristotelian, scientific philosophy, concerned with truth. Yet Stern’s point is different. His point is that this tension is not between two competing conceptions of philosophy but is internal to any plausible account of philosophy. All philosophers worthy of the name are engaged in this constant back and forth between what we might call the Socratic and Aristotelian poles of philosophy. As I suggested earlier, both Socrates and Aristotle were concerned with the pursuit of knowledge and following a philosophical life, with the difference between them simply coming down to which of these was the ultimate motivating impulse. For Stern, both aspects are intrinsic to philosophy itself and any activity that tries to champion one at the expense of the other runs the risk of no longer being philosophy at all.
Stern’s account has a lot to recommend it. All really good philosophy worthy of the name takes seriously the central idea of Philosophy as a Way of Life, but never at the expense of the desire to understand the world as it is. This means that it cannot be merely a project aimed at making us feel good, because truths can sometimes be uncomfortable. This deals with one of the concerns philosophers might legitimately have about the idea of Philosophy as a Way of Life, namely that it reduces philosophy to a form of therapy, becoming simply something that is supposed to make us feel better. When the Greek concept of eudaimonia is translated as ‘happiness’ and then packaged for popular consumption, the danger is that philosophy gets reduced to being part of what has been called the ‘happiness industry.’ The real concern here is that the motivation becomes simply to make people feel better, potentially at the expense of everything else: it does not matter what people believe so long as it has the desired effect. That is certainly not what Socrates had in mind; his motivation to live a philosophical life, grounded on secure knowledge of what is and is not good, was, as we all know, one fraught with difficulties. And Aristotle’s ideas about eudaimonia, as anyone who has dipped into the Nicomachean Ethics knows, do not straightforwardly correspond to what people now think of as ‘happiness.’ In short, if we want to think of philosophy as something engaged, practical, and life changing, we need to be careful not to reduce it to something we do just to make us feel better. Thus, Philosophy as a Way of Life ought not to be conceived merely as a form of therapy. The same applies if we avoid talk of happiness and instead focus on self-formation or self-cultivation. The danger with Michel Foucault’s account of “technologies of the self” for instance, as Martha Nussbaum pointed out some time ago, is that it might be taken to be a purely aesthetic process of self-transformation that loses sight of what is distinctive about philosophy, namely a commitment to the truth based on sound arguments.45

In the light of what we have discussed so far, we might now point to three distinct views about Philosophy as a Way of Life. These are:

1. The claim that Philosophy as a Way of Life is a distinct tradition within Western philosophy, different in form and motivation from both analytic and continental philosophy, dominant in antiquity and present ever since, albeit marginalized in recent times.
2. The claim that Philosophy as a Way of Life is a humanistic approach to philosophy, to be contrasted with a scientific approach and, as such, perhaps sharing more in common with the work of some continental
philosophers than it does with most analytic philosophy.

3. The claim that Philosophy as a Way of Life is one pole inherent to all philosophy, sometimes marginalized but always present to a greater or lesser extent.

My own response to this would be to return to the question of motivation: does one do philosophy in order to transform one’s life, or in order to comprehend the world? I am sympathetic to Stern’s view that all really good philosophy does both. Do we have to choose? Perhaps we do not, but I think the notion of Philosophy as a Way of Life involves the claim that the ultimate motivation is the Socratic one to transform one’s life, with the caveat, as Stern points out, that for this to be philosophy at all that motivation cannot be at the expense of a commitment to the truth, for that is part of what makes it philosophy. There have been numerous thinkers throughout the history of philosophy who have held this view, some of whom might now be labelled ‘continental’ philosophers, and perhaps some more recently who fall into the increasingly amorphous analytic tradition. In that sense, I would be inclined to say that Philosophy as a Way of Life cuts across that divide rather than standing as a distinct third tradition.

VI. LEARNING FROM LUCRETIUS

I would like to conclude by saying a little more about the relationship between what we might simplistically call ‘therapy’ and ‘truth’. To do this I want to look more closely at one particular philosopher, one who embraces both the practical, therapeutic role of philosophy and its commitment to the truth. The philosopher I have in mind is Lucretius.

Lucretius’s poem On the Nature of Things is divided into six books. Its form—a lengthy didactic poem about Nature—was probably inspired by the work of Empedocles while its contents follow closely Epicurus’s magnum opus On Nature, which was for a long time lost but fragments of which have been recovered from among the papyri found at Herculanuem. Each book opens with a reflection on the nature and purpose of philosophy, which function as repeated reminders as to the purpose of the work as a whole.

At the opening of Book 1 Lucretius is explicit that the task at hand is to transform one’s life for the better and that the only way to do this is by gaining a correct understanding of Nature. The great enemy throughout the poem is superstition.
(religio)—a false and confused set of beliefs that cause people to behave badly. It is superstition above all else that must be overcome and there is only one way to do this. He writes:

This dread and darkness of the mind cannot be dispelled by the sunbeams, the shining shafts of day, but only by an understanding of the outward form and inner workings of nature.

That these three lines are key to understanding Lucretius’s purpose is underscored by the fact that he repeats them verbatim in the openings of Books 2, 3, and 6 as well. What is striking about them in their first instance in Book 1 is that they immediately precede his account of the Parmenidean metaphysical foundations of atomism—the very next lines say “in tackling this theme, our starting-point will be this principle: nothing can ever be created by divine power out of nothing.” The section that follows is probably the most abstract and philosophically technical part of the entire work and so the part that may seem to be of least practical relevance to anything, let alone overcoming the “terror of the mind” (terrorem animi). Yet Lucretius reminds us at the outset that his plan for therapy of the soul requires abstract metaphysics and that these metaphysical reflections will have a transformative effect on our lives. Metaphysics is both a necessary and ultimately sufficient condition for self-transformation.

At the opening of Book 2 he insists that it is reason (ratio) that can cure us of the fears and anxieties that keep us awake at night. Only philosophy can save us. And again at the beginning of Book 3 he says that the terrors of the mind (animi terrores) will only take flight when reason (ratio) uncovers the true nature of things (naturam rerum). That Lucretius sees the task at hand as a therapeutic one is also underscored at the opening of Book 4 where he compares his own use of poetry to present natural philosophy with the doctor who sugar coats his medicine. The poetry is designed to lure readers in but Lucretius is explicit that the goal is twofold: to understand Nature and to grasp the benefits of doing so.

Philosophy is presented as the rule of life at the beginning of Book 5, as that which rescues a person’s life from chaos and darkness, and leads it to the Epicurean goal of tranquillity. In what must be the most audacious defence of the utility of philosophy ever written, Lucretius compares the usefulness of philosophy to other human creations, including farming, the invention of which must surely be the single most significant event in human history. Lucretius argues that philosophy
is more important than farming because it is still possible to be happy without such an innovation but it is impossible to live well without philosophy. There are no happy and content noble savages according to Lucretius, and the unexamined life is indeed not worth living. A good life is impossible without a mind purged by reason, which only philosophy can deliver.  

The final book of the poem opens with a eulogy to Epicurus. For Lucretius Epicureanism is a therapeutic philosophy and the reason why it works where others fail is precisely because it was Epicurus who uncovered the truth about the way the universe works. It was, Lucretius says, “with words of truth” that Epicurus “purged the heart.” He then repeats those three lines we saw earlier in Book 1, reminding us once more that it is only by understanding Nature that one can overcome the terrors of the mind.

What comes through very clearly, then, is that there is no choice between conceiving philosophy as therapeutic, on the one hand, and its commitment to truth, on the other. The only way to overcome our fears and anxieties, Lucretius insists, is by uncovering the truth about the way the world works. The Stoics took a similar line, and so did Spinoza, who in his Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect argued that the only way for him to overcome the mental disturbances that stopped him attaining the happiness he desired was via a proper understanding of Nature. All these philosophers share an outlook quite different from the one outlined by Stern, in which facing reality can all too often breed despair. It is also worth noting that the Lucretian point regarding the relationship between therapy and truth goes in both directions, namely that the only philosophical therapy that will ever work is one grounded in truth and that the pursuit of truth, insofar as it frees us from confusion, error, and superstition, is itself therapeutic.

Lucretius gives us a vivid example of what Philosophy as a Way of Life might look like in action. He explicitly sees his philosophy as a guide to life. The division I proposed earlier between scientific and humanistic conceptions of philosophy more or less collapses here, although, as we have seen, Lucretius is much closer to Socrates than Aristotle when it comes to his ultimate motivation. His motivation is indeed therapeutic, but a therapy based on, not at the expense of, the truth.
VII. CONCLUSIONS

Philosophy as a Way of Life is a model of philosophy that emphasizes its practical, life-changing aspects. It cuts across the division between analytic and continental philosophy, neither aligned with nor opposed to either tradition. It can be a useful way to think about philosophy if the wider philosophical culture tends to downplay its practical side. Yet, as we have seen, there is a good case for the claim that all philosophy worthy of the name acknowledges this aspect of philosophy, which has been there since the beginning. If the idea is to refer to anything distinctive, we might reserve it for those conceptions of philosophy that explicitly identify their motivation as the transformation of one’s way of life. This would certainly apply to Lucretius. But, as Lucretius himself has shown us, perhaps it does not matter so much whether we start out in the pursuit of truth or with a desire for a transformed life, for if we do our philosophy well we shall always end up with both.

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NOTES


2. Ibid. 265. The essay, “La philosophie comme manière de vivre,” was first published in the *Annuaire du Collège de France* (1984-85), 477-87, and reprinted in the second edition of *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid. 272.

5. Ibid. 271-2.


7. Ibid. 10.


9. Ibid. § 8 (KSA 1: 417,26-8; Complete Works 2, 246).


15. Ibid. 39c (elenchon tou biou).

16. Ibid. 38a (ho de anexetastos bios ou biôtos anthrôpoi).

17. Plato, *Gorgias* 500C (hontina chrê tropon zên). One might argue that this concern with the best form of life, even when practically motivated, is directed towards the lives of other people rather than the life of Socrates himself. This is certainly possible. But as we saw earlier in the *Apology*, there Socrates says that he wants to examine the lives of both himself and others.


20. See ibid. 993b21-3.


22. Aristotle’s division of knowledge into the practical, productive, and theoretical at *Metaph*. 1025b25 does not appear to prioritize one form of knowledge over any other. However, under the heading of “theoretical knowledge” (*theorêtikê*) falls first philosophy or theology, which is accorded a priority over all other branches of enquiry because it deals with that which is unchanging. Knowledge of this sort forms the paradigm for Aristotle’s conception of philosophy.
he says further on that the theoretical sciences are superior to the other sciences, and that “first philosophy” (prôêt philosophia) is superior to the other theoretical sciences (Metaph. 1026a22-3).

23. See Pierre Hadot, Études de philosophie ancienne. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1998, 225. Note also Pol. 1325b16-21, cited by Hadot, where Aristotle presents contemplation as a practice, but also (significantly) describes it as an end in itself. Matthew Kapstein, in his book Reason’s Traces: Identity and Interpretation in Indian & Tibetan Buddhist Thought (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), 9, notes the “apparently diminished place of Aristotle” in Hadot’s account of ancient philosophy but also suggests that, for Hadot, Aristotle’s théoria is very much a lived practice. I thank my anonymous reviewer for bringing this to my attention.


26. In Eth. Nic. 6 Aristotle says there are different types of reasoning and that excellence in intellectual reasoning is to be preferred over excellence in practical reasoning, in part because it deals with unchanging universals rather than changeable particulars. That kind of knowledge is thought to be more valuable because of its wider applicability. This is effectively the argument behind the claim made later in Eth. Nic. 10 for the priority of sophia over phronêsis. However, as Matthew Sharpe has reminded me, in Eth. Nic. 10 (esp. 1177a22-5) Aristotle does say that one reason to prioritize a life devoted to contemplation is that it is the pleasantest of virtuous activities.


30. See Hadot, Philosophy as a Way of Life, passim.


33. Ibid. 269.

34. Ibid. 272.

35. Ibid. 273.

36. Ibid. 274.

37. Ibid. 275.

38. Ibid. 280.

39. See ibid.


42. Stern, “The Complications of Philosophy.”
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
46. It is worth noting that in the Apology, 29d-e, Socrates berates his fellow Athenians for focusing their attention on money and reputation rather than “truth (alêtheia) and understanding (phronēsis) and the perfection of soul.”
47. On the amorphousness of analytic philosophy see Glock, What is Analytic Philosophy? and on theoretical and practical motivations see esp. 200-1.
48. It is worth noting that Hadot not only had interests in a number of philosophers sometimes labelled ‘continental’, he also wrote on Wittgenstein and was one of his first champions in France. See now Pierre Hadot, Wittgenstein et les limites du langage. Paris: Vrin, 2014.
49. Hadot was certainly familiar with the work of Lucretius, to which he refers throughout Philosophy as a Way of Life.
52. Lucretius, De rerum natura 1.146-8: Hunc igitur terrem animi tenebrasque necesset / non radii solis neque lucida tela diei / discutiant, sed naturae species ratioque.
53. Thus De rerum natura 1.146-8 = 2.59-61 = 3.91-3 = 6.39-41.
54. De rerum natura 1.149-50: principium cuius hinc nobis exordia sumet, / nullam rem e nihilo gigni divinitus unquam.
56. De rerum natura 3.14-16: nam simul ac ratio tua coepit vociferari / naturam rerum, divina mente coorta, / diffugiunt animi terres ... 
57. See De rerum natura 4.10-25. This section is a repetition of 1.926-50 with some minor variations.
58. De rerum natura 4.24-5: ... dum percipis omnem / naturam rerum ac persentis utilitatem.
59. See De rerum natura 5.1-21.
60. De rerum natura 5.18: at bene non poterat sine puro pectore vivi.
61. See De rerum natura 6.1-42.
64. An earlier version of this paper was read at the Australasian Society for Continental Philosophy conference at Deakin University, Melbourne, in December 2016. I must thank both Matthew Sharpe and Sean Bowden for inviting me to speak at the conference and then to contribute to this issue of Parrhesia. A second version was read at a workshop at Monash University’s Prato Centre, Italy, ‘Reinventing Philosophy as a Way of Life’, held in July 2017 and organized by Michael Ure, to whom further thanks. I would also like to thank the audiences in both Melbourne and Prato for their comments on the paper, and an anonymous reviewer for Parrhesia for some helpful corrections and comments.
I feel moved that I have been invited to contribute to this event in honour of Russell Grigg. Part of the problem in doing so is that Russell is partially associated for me with an older Australian milieu which has now lamentably receded: that is, a social democracy in which nobody would ever say anything nice about anybody else publicly, mainly because to speak well of anybody in such a frame was smarmy and embarrassing. The covert social injunction was rather that one should be witty, self-deprecating and, indeed, other-deprecating too. For better or worse, however, the present age seems to demand new signifiers—often quite simple signifiers of approbation, assent, and affirmation to be passed from hands to mouths in a subsistence economy of semblance—but such aggressively altered forms of address shouldn’t stop us from acknowledging essential residues.

I have known Russell now for over 15 years, since I began teaching at Deakin University in Geelong in 2000. Over that time, I was lucky to be able to work with him in the now lamentably-defunct Psychoanalytic Studies, which he established and ran with a rather motley crew of psychoanalytically-inclined personages such as Ron Gilbert and Douglas Kirsner. As a supplement to the official subject listings—which included dedicated courses on the history and theory of psychoanalysis as well as on specialist technique—Russell and I also organised an ongoing sequence of fortnightly seminars on topics pertinent to psychoanalysis. Oliver Feltham, Geoff Boucher, Jon Roffe, Robert Sinnerbrink,
Dominique Hecq, Lizzy Newman, and the great table-tennis player Tamas Pataki were among the many local presenters. Eminent foreign guests included Santanu Biswas, Makoto Hirano (also a doctoral student of Russell’s), Eli Zaretsky, and Pierre-Gilles Guéguen. I remember one seminar at which Russell arrived late, mainly because he had himself sent out the notice of the seminar to his email lists ... but he never received the notice, as he wasn’t an addressee of his own missive: this phenomenon is now known as ‘Russell’s Paradox.’ We were awarded a large ARC Discovery Project on ‘Psychoanalysis and Science’ with Henry Krips. I helped Russell organize a double international conference on the topics of Jacques Lacan’s Seminar XVII (a text which Russell of course translated into English) and on ‘Psychoanalysis and Science.’ We also organized a symposium around and co-wrote an article condemning ‘The Crime of Torture,’ after two legal academics from this very same university had very publicly proposed the utility of torture in the treatment of so-called ‘ticking bomb scenarios.’ Finally Russell was founding President of the Lacan Circle of Melbourne, which continues to run study days, cartels and conferences to the present, and for which, as Secretary, I enthusiastically took the minutes for five or so years.

I hope then that it is neither too maudlin nor mawkish to add that Russell has therefore been a very important person throughout my adult life, or, more precisely, my post-PhD life, which is what I suppose passes for adulthood for academics. He has transformed my intellectual orientation, not least in his commitment to and his thinking about psychoanalysis, especially in regards to Freud and Lacan. Russell is an important exegete and commentator on psychoanalysis and philosophy, particularly regarding the operations of language, as the title of a collection of his essays has it, *Lacan, Language and Philosophy*. He is a great translator of major Lacanian texts, including Seminar III: *The Psychoses*, Seminar XVII: *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, and now Seminar V: *Formations of the Unconscious*. He has also advised many other English-language translators on their versions of the seminars: one fun thing to do is look for idiomatic Australian expressions in the lingo of some of the US translators. He has edited and co-edited major collections on *Female Sexuality* (with Dominique Hecq and Craig Smith) and on Seminar XVII (with myself). If you read his books and essays, you will find that there is no melodramatic grandstanding, only exceptional clarity, which offers, alongside or with the clarity, strange, striking, and singular propositions. Russell is also a purveyor of the now-threatened Australian art of ironic understatement. He is the only person who’s ever said to me: “You’ve got to remember, Justin, that Athens at the time of Socrates was the size of Horsham.” Yet much of his real work was,
is, and will always remain inaccessible to the university. As one of his analysands said to me recently: “If I hadn’t seen Russell I would have been fucked.”

So what I would like to do in this presentation is pose the question: what does Russell really want? Part of the answer hinges on the specificity of psychoanalysis. And part of the problem of this answer is that psychoanalysis is truly hateful: otherwise apparently quite reasonable people can still become uncontrollably incensed at the very mention of the word. Freud is out-of-date, non-scientific, patriarchal, offensive, plain wrong, etc., etc. To adopt Oscar Wilde here: “The dislike of psychoanalysis is the rage of Caliban seeing his face in a glass. The dislike of psychoanalysis is the rage of Caliban not seeing his face in a glass.” Russell himself insists on the distinction between analysis and academy, following Lacan in particular, who, in his famous matheme of the four discourses, identifies the linked but irreducible modes of master, hysteric, analyst and university. Psychoanalysis is not just one form of thought among others, to be adjudged and placed in context, and critiqued, and adapted to applications of culture—precisely unlike most modern philosophy has been. “After Kant,” as Maurice Blanchot writes, “the philosopher is for the most part a university professor.” So if much of Russell’s work could (and should) be read by students of philosophy and culture more generally, much of what he writes bears on technical issues in the practice of psychoanalysis. Hard for universities, their routines, and their personnel to take.

Yet what I want especially to point to is the way in which in Russell always focuses on the possibility and actuality of transformation in the theory and practice of psychoanalysis under the pressure of contemporary events, whether those events are political or utterly personal. Take Lacan’s early brilliant retheorisation of psychosis around the problematic of foreclosure (Verwerfung), to be strenuously distinguished from repression proper (Verdrängung) and disavowal (Verleugnung). As Russell points out, foreclosure forces our attention to the real, as well as sharpening Lacan’s division between the imaginary and symbolic registers. Yet Lacan later departs from this theory, insofar as “the symptom is no longer to be regarded simply as a message excluded from the circuit of communication, but also as a site of jouissance”; in Lacan’s later work, we find entirely new and different figurations of the stakes of psychosis, where it is not the symptom but the sinthome that will come to knot the rings of the subject.

As Lacan is developing his new theory, Russell notes how he requires a different appreciation of the role of the father in ontogenesis. Hence Lacan first defends,
then mocks Freud’s Oedipus. Indeed, there is trouble from the start for Freud: if Oedipus is allegedly a key developmental moment in modern childhood (in which there is a struggle against the father in the situation of the nuclear family), then *Totem and Taboo* and *Moses and Monotheism* would indeed be applied psychoanalysis, illicitly imposing the local fillips of the bourgeois unit onto universal history, thereby adding nothing substantial to our understanding of the role of the father in psychopathology, while inventing an anthropology. Of course, it would still be possible to argue that it is not the illicitly-projected limitations of the nuclear family that is at work in Freud’s speculative anthropological texts, but that it is only under the experimental social conditions of the nuclear family that certain invariants are able to emerge—but this is not really Russell’s point. For Freud is not engaging in an application, but himself falling into contradiction (e.g., does enjoyment precede the law or vice-versa?), a feature which should induce us to attend more closely to the complex forces at work in and through his writings.

For Freud, there are ultimately three different kinds of identification, which are often reduced or confused: 1) the primordial identification with an object, fundamentally ambivalent; 2) the formation of the ego ideal and superego in the wake of the dissolution of the Oedipal complex (as the precipitate of the internalization of the law); 3) the hysterical identification, an identification with an other in relation to a third party. The father becomes simultaneously norm and exception across these divisions, instrumental in all types of identification. But this inconsistent double act of the father as norm-and-exception is precisely what comes into question for Lacan in his very attempt to remain faithful to the Freudian discovery.

In his earlier work, Lacan tried to sharpen the distinction between the name-of-the-father and the phallus, insofar as the former functions as a ‘pure signifier,’ while the latter always comes immixed with imaginary elements. This first phase of Lacan’s (limited) critique then debouches to a later form, taking place between Seminars XVI and XVIII (1968-71), where Lacan criticizes Oedipus as ‘Freud’s Dream,’ that is, as an inadequate response to presentations of hysteria, and criticizes the father of enjoyment as the reflex of an obsessional. Note that this also means that Lacan’s critique is a critique of psychoanalysis’s own origins in hysteria qua neurosis: as Eric Laurent somewhere puts it, this can be considered Lacan’s move from a special to a general theory. From the name-of-the-father and the phallus in Lacan’s earlier seminars, we move to a theorization of castration-qua-cut and the priority of the master.
Notably, with the rise of the master the notorious object a takes on an ever more central role. Moreover, the questions posed by philosophy and science concomitantly become more and more crucial. The philosopher comes to be figured as an agent of the master, his insidious job to extract and transform the slave’s savoir-faire to savoir, and, in doing so, repudiate the un-known knowledge that is the unconscious, and reduce the diversity of techné to expropriated abstraction. This is a foundational operation of philosophy: an irremediably corrupted extraction device in the service of the master. Modern science, however, is not simply an extension of this inaugural philosophical expropriation of know-how. It is an entirely different proposition, at once incarnated in a bogglingly-complex material network of research and transmission institutions, and requiring the modern form of the subject of science for its elaboration. One should turn to Russell’s essay ‘Descartes and the Subject of Science’ for an elegant and persuasive elaboration of Lacan’s doctrines in this regard.

Today, however, it is possible that we have already entered a post-scientific world. For Lacan, it was a crisis internal to science that first impelled it to auction itself off to the highest bidder as a purveyor of gadgets; science has since kept itself going by turning technology into its symptom. Today, the convergence of information technology and capital means that science itself can be dispensed with in favour of pure technology, and everyone can go back to believing that we live in the Matrix or that climate change isn’t real, while continuing to enjoy (jouir!) the manifold fruits of ever-accelerating technical innovation. This is an issue that Lacan registers under the heading of “furrows in the alethosphere,” whereby language is subordinated to information, to lathouses (“false objects,” industrial parasite devices), and where semblants proliferate.5

But of course this poses a new difficulty for psychoanalysis itself, given that, instead of gadgets, pills, and their promesse de bonheur, psychoanalysis offers only an ethics of ordinary unhappiness. Remember that Freud claims that the aim of analysis is to turn ‘neurotic misery’ into ‘ordinary unhappiness.’ So that’s a big part of the analyst’s task. Happiness, as Freud said, is not a cultural value; and it certainly isn’t an analytic value. As he puts it in a footnote to his case history of Frau Emmy von N. in Studies on Hysteria: “We must not vaunt our happiness on the one hand, nor, on the other, must we talk of the worst or it will happen. The fact is that we do not boast of our happiness until unhappiness is in the offing, and we become aware of our anticipation in the form of a boast.”5 And even if, as Saint-Just declared, happiness is, after the Revolution, a political value, psychoanalysis

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itself is clearly not a political technology of happiness.

The analyst is not to educate the patient in happiness; the analyst is not to dominate the patient’s desire; the analyst ought not to condemn the patient’s acts; the analyst should not negotiate with the patient’s desire; the analyst should not simply invest in the patient’s desire (though there’s nothing wrong with an analyst liking money); the analyst is not to manage the patient’s desire; the analyst is not to martyr themselves for the patient; the analyst is not simply a repository for complaints; the analyst must not enter into sexual relations with the patient (whence Susie Orbach’s great title, *The Impossibility of Sex*); the analyst’s relation to the patient is neither ‘rare’ nor ‘elective.’ So, although analysis is now “practised in couples” as Lacan says, the analyst is not a teacher, nor master, nor judge, nor diplomat, nor entrepreneur, nor administrator, nor saint, nor complaints department, nor lover, nor friend (whether ‘true and perfect’ or ‘vulgar and mediocre,’ to invoke Cicero’s distinctions).

So WTF does an analyst want then? Lacan will add that: “The desire of the analyst is for absolute difference.” What does that mean? Most crucially, the ‘ordinary unhappiness’ the analyst desires of the analysand should not be understood as a commonplace affect or emotional state; it is rather, in analytic terms, a knowledge. Ordinary unhappiness is a knowledge. Why? Because the ‘desire for absolute difference’ is not a pure desire. Lacan says precisely this: “the analyst’s desire is not a pure desire.” Why is this desire not a pure desire? There are several major features of this impurity to note. First, as Russell reminds us: “a pure desire will always be a pure desire for death.” The desire of the analyst is an impure desire because it does not simply desire death. Analysis always and only operates in the realm of the living—if it certainly complicates any of the familiar ways of distinguishing between ‘life’ and ‘death,’ and indeed insists that the letters by which we live are already the articulations of death.

But why then does this impure desire render ordinary unhappiness a kind of knowledge? Lacan emphasizes that an impure desire is always bound up with knowledge as its condition. This is not the ‘knowledge’ of pre-scientific discourses such as scholasticism, which do not and cannot adequately acknowledge desire—and to that extent can never quite separate themselves from religion. Nonetheless, psychoanalysis, as Lacan himself notes, can itself come to resemble an institutional religion—which it is indeed often accused of being. Moreover, this proximity of religion brings us immediately to the central problem of ‘axiological neutrality’
that the analyst ought to evince towards the analysand’s presentations. As Serge Cottet notes, “Apathy, ataraxia, silence have for a long time passed as the cardinal virtues of the psychoanalyst.” Indeed, as Harold Bloom has put it, psychoanalysis is the greatest contemporary example of wisdom literature, an heir to Stoicism and Epicureanism, those great ancient rival enterprises for which achieved forms of indifference (ataraxia, apatheia, adiophora) were the ethical goal.

So it’s no accident that Lacan invokes both in Seminar XI, noting “This discipline [of indifference] which, in order to find a way out of the impasse of the Socratic interrogation, was practised by people who were not only specifically philosophers, but, in their own way, some kind of practitioners of religion—the Stoics and the Epicureans.” Moreover, these post-Socratics often, much like psychoanalysts, insisted on the absolute authority of the Other. But—and this is absolutely crucial—their understanding of this Other necessarily failed to understand this Other as the locus of desire, precisely because they preceded the Cartesian ascesis that founds modern science. This fact ensures the Stoic’s and Epicurean’s shared incompetencies vis-à-vis desire. So, insofar as its field is that of indestructible desire, psychoanalysis differs from its predecessors in that the analyst—as against the autarchy of the Stoic or Epicurean master—is differently detached in his or her indifference. Confronted with desire, Stoic and Epicurean indifference is unsustainable. Indeed, the indifference of the analyst can come to resemble its opposite, to the point of terrifying malignancy. As ever exaggerating for the sake of truth, Slavoj Žižek has interpreted (in too many of his texts to cite) the brain-eating serial-killer intellectual Hannibal Lecter as popular culture’s pathetic attempt to image the analyst. As Žižek remarks, the Lacanian analyst is in fact far more evil than Lecter could ever be: “Eat your Dasein!”

It remains for us to understand this peculiar form of analytic indifference correctly. After all, not only is desire always ‘a desire to desire,’ but simultaneously a ‘not wanting to desire,’ which is, in its turn, always a ‘wanting not to desire.’ Whence the necessity of indifference—notwithstanding its desirability. Or impossibility. So, as Cottet argues and Russell exemplifies, the analytic apatheia is far from a total detachment: on the contrary, it has to pass through the defiles of love, a love of the analyst for analysis. In fact, without love, analysis is impossible, but it is only on the other side of love that one can return to an indifference that is neither hatred nor impotence. For the place where the transference-effect known as love emerges is the place where the desire of the patient and the desire of the analyst encounter each other. But love is ‘essentially deception’ and is therefore in itself
neither absolute difference nor ordinary unhappiness. It is rather the supposition that the analyst is the *sujet supposé savoir* on the part of the patient that provides the support for transference and, as such, it is only transference that provides the traction and material for a genuine interpretation of symptoms on the analyst’s part, and a deflection towards knowledge for the patient (whose unconscious is itself a relentless interpreting machine). After all, there is no innate passion for knowledge in Lacanian psychoanalysis; the “three fundamental passions” being rather for “love, hate, and ignorance.”

Rather, the knowledge gained from interpretation discerns a hole for the subject, a *hole which is non-substitutable*: “Interpretation is a signification that is not just any signification....It has the effect of bringing out an irreducible signifier.... What is essential is that [the subject] should see, beyond this signification, to what signifier—to what irreducible, traumatic, non-meaning—he is, as a subject, subjected.” Now that’s *absolute difference*: the non-substitutability of the primal signifier, the master-signifier, towards whose discernment the analyst concentrates his or her efforts.

But this brings us to my third point about the statement that ‘the analyst’s desire is not a pure desire.’ If my first point was that the analyst’s desire is impure because analysis interrupts the pure desire for death, and the second outlined the bond between ‘impure desire’ and ‘knowledge,’ the third has to do with the sense of impurity as waste-product, residue. Enter the object: “Up till the advent of psycho-analysis, the path of knowledge was always traced in that of a purification of the subject, of the *percipiens*. Well! We would now say that we base the assurance of the subject in his encounter with the filth that may support him, with the *petit a* of which it would not be untrue to say that its presence is necessary.” Now that’s impurity.

We are now in a position to answer the question: what does Russell want? He wants life-death, un-knowledge, and inassimilable filth—that is, absolute difference and the common unhappiness of us all. If only more people wanted the same, then we wouldn’t be in this fucking mess.

The University of Melbourne
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I. PSYCHOANALYSIS AND/OR PHILOSOPHY

Many of you will have seen a wonderful film with Meryl Streep and Kevin Kline called *Sophie’s Choice*. Well I’m not going to speak of ‘Sophie’s Choice’ today, I’m going to talk about ‘Russell’s choice’. The cast is not quite so glamorous but the stakes are far higher and I think for many of us who have a passion, or a desire, for psychoanalysis and have somehow become university lecturers, this choice concerns more than one individual’s destiny: it is an example for us, perhaps even a model, of what someone can do, someone who could have chosen to continue to chair committees, fill in assessment grids, verify student learning outcomes, write twenty page grant applications with line by line budgets with a 5% chance of success, resubmit syllabi again to fit the latest template, renegotiate their workload, haggle over a 0.2 workhour per week lack to be filled with the internships committee, adopt the university’s new branding strategy, drive 400 km a week to repeat the same lecture, a dancing clown, to 600 almost entirely but not completely indifferent students in three satellite campuses, and frequently dodge flurries of voluntary redundancies become so familiar they not only have their own acronym but it usually comes in the plural form—‘VRs’.
Make no mistake, Russell’s choice serves as a diagnostic, it gives us a sudden vision of what is happening in these times in the space of the university as contrasted with psychoanalysis.

What is at stake in such a choice, between becoming a psychoanalyst and becoming a university professor? What logical operator can one admit between these two vocations: exclusive disjunction or inclusive conjunction? Both psychoanalyst and professor of philosophy? Either psychoanalyst or professor of philosophy? Colleagues and friends have spent their working lives trying out one conjunction or another. What would lead one, in these times, to move from the first articulation to the second, to make ‘Russell’s choice’, to become a full-time analyst and to leave the university professor behind?

To be clear, what I call ‘Russell’s choice’ has little to do with Deakin and little to do with the success of a particular clinical practice; in the end it doesn’t reflect that much on either. Why? Because it’s a second choice, it’s a choice to remain faithful to an original choice.

Russell is mildly sceptical concerning Badiou’s systematic philosophy; indeed, after I had already written half of my doctoral thesis on Badiou under his supervision he once said to me, “it really is all or nothing with Badiou isn’t it?” Now despite this carefully argued scepticism—see his technical yet illuminating paper on intuitionism and classical logic between Lacan and Badiou—despite this reluctance, Russell has actually proved to be thoroughly Badiousian. The original choice was his recognition of an event, the event of the emergence of the unconscious, and its nomination in Freudian and then Lacanian psychoanalysis; this second choice is part of his fidelity to that event, a fidelity in the form of painstaking enquiries into the nature of the unconscious, the clinical categories of hysteria, obsessional neurosis and psychosis, the nature of unconscious enjoyment, its manifestation in symptoms, in jokes, in melancholy, but also enquiries that have taken the shape of building a community of psychoanalysts in Australia and internationally, and ensuring the transmission of the Lacanian orientation, no easy task given not only the internationally volatile and fragile nature of Lacanian schools but also the ongoing battle with the state for recognition of the capacity of psychoanalytic schools to train their members in a profession and to sustain their clinics in accordance with the letter of law and insurance policy. This was not talk about justice as recognition, it was the work of justice as recognition.¹
There are two great figures of refusal in contemporary critical theory: “I’d prefer not to”, and “No Creon, I think I will bury my brother”. Russell is neither Bartleby nor Antigone because his choice is not a refusal but an affirmation, a carrying-forwards, a further exploration and expansion of an already existing fidelity. What this also means is that in posing this question for us of becoming a psychoanalyst and/or being a university professor, Russell’s choice is not about some romantic escape. There is no invitation here to throw your watch in the desert sands, abandon your life, and ride off on your Harley with Peter Fonda. This is part of the lesson: one can modulate the conjunction between psychoanalysis and the university from inclusive to exclusive, from both/and to either/or, on the basis of the patient construction of another profession.

But Russell’s second choice, his modulation to an exclusive conjunction: psychoanalysis rather than the university, has taken place at a particular historical moment—now—and so it does open up a question about the general state of the university and its relationship, or non-relationship, to psychoanalysis. This is a big question. It must be narrowed down.

It just so happens that in Russell’s publications there is one philosophical theme that comes back again and again, and that is freedom. So our question for the decision on the university and psychoanalysis will be that of freedom: what is the freedom of the analyst, and what is the freedom of the university lecturer? Don’t laugh. In the American system, where I work, we still speak of ‘academic freedom’: that is to say, a freedom that risks being merely academic.

II. THE FREEDOM OF THE ACADEMIC

Russell places the philosophical concept of freedom under the condition of the unconscious, that is to say unconscious desire. Thus our decision on freedom in psychoanalysis and the university becomes a question of desire: the desire of the psychoanalyst and the desire of the university professor of philosophy.

In the second of the three Lacan seminars that Russell has translated, Seminar 17, the Other side of psychoanalysis, Lacan sets out his theory of social structure, or of the social bond, which comes in four kinds that have emerged throughout history: the Discourse of the Master, the Discourse of the Hysteric, the Discourse of the University and the Discourse of the Analyst. The virtue of this theory lies in its Ockhamian simplicity. Each discourse has a specific structure that can be written
with four terms: the split subject (the barred S), the master signifier (S₁), the battery of other signifiers (S₂), and the objet petit a (a). Each of these four terms can occupy one of four places: that of the agent (or the dominant), the other, truth and production.²

The ‘agents’ of these discourses are not Aristotelian self-movers, and thus cannot be seen as incarnations of freedom and autonomy: rather Lacan says the agent is always a “double agent” and is thus what is “made to act” (SXVII, 197). In the discourse of the university we find ‘S₂’ in the position of the agent, signifying “structured knowledge” which for Lacan can be instantiated by both bureaucracy and science and technology (SXVII, 34, 120).³ Thus when a university is functioning correctly, what is referred to in the resolution of any problems or dysfunction, what is made to act, is the institution’s ground: structured knowledge, or the disciplines, in all of their dynamism. Since, as ‘agent’, structured knowledge is a kind of ultimate reference, something that is “made to act,” one cannot identify with it nor incarnate it; it is not actually a subjective position. To understand what happens to subjective identification and incarnation in the university—and thus to freedom—the other coordinates are essential. For example, in the position of ‘truth’ one finds the master signifier. In the discourse of the university it operates
as a command to “continue to always know more”, and to be an author, that is, to attach one’s own proper name, as signature, to a unique and original piece of writing thus sealing one’s self-identity as unique (SXVII, 120, 70). So another structural element of the university as discourse is an ideal, or a regulatory idea—authorship—and also a cruel imperative in the style of the superego which positions the subject as lacking enough knowledge. But that is not all. In each discourse the agent puts an ‘other’ to work, the other is thus a kind of material for the discourse, its field of operation. In the case of the university we find the little ‘a’ in the position of the other. From Lacan’s theory at the time Lacan claims that here this ‘a’ signifies surplus enjoyment in the shape of the consumable product, and for the university the consumable product is none other than the precious youth of today, our hope for the future, the student (SXVII, 35, 120). So in the discourse of the university the students are set to work by structured knowledge, and the result of this operation is found in the place of production, the barred S, or split subject, which in this discourse Lacan calls the subject of science.

There are two characteristics of this subject-position that are essential for our argument.

First, at the lower level of each of the four discourses there is an arrow that represents a relationship of impotence. In the discourse of the university this relation of impotence affects the subject of science in its capacity to respond to the commands “continue to always know more”, and “be an author”. As such, in so far as we are subjectivized by the university as the realm of structured knowledge we will always struggle with our incapacity to know enough, and our incapacity to become a fully original author.

The second characteristic of this position on the lower right-hand corner of the matheme, the position of what is produced by the discourse of the university, is that it is filled with split subjects. The split subject is also the hysteric. So the university produces hysterics: split from their enjoyment, full of unsatisfied desire, and aching for a master, aching for the split, the fault in the master, wishing for the failure of the master to capture what the hysteric knows about enjoyment. I am reminded of the lament of a French expert in which he bemoaned the tremendous numbers of young French people studying critical sociology: all of these students become experts on society, but the vast majority cannot get employment as sociologists, are not trained for any other employment, and so they cannot even take up an active role in the very society on which they are such experts. Whether
or not our university students suffer a split between the realities of the job market and the promises of their education, the virtue of the hysteric is that in complete contrast to the pervert he or she holds open the gap between articulated discourse and enjoyment.

The evident objection at this point is that Lacan’s matheme for the discourse of the university no longer corresponds to the university of today. The latter would be better characterized by the Discourse of the Master whose contemporary form, according to Lacan, is capitalism. How does the Discourse of the capitalist master work? In the position of the agent we have the command ‘fix it’, ‘make it work’, ‘be effective’, ‘just do it’. In the position of the other we have S2, the signifier of knowledge put to work, in other words the know-how, the technology, the savoir-faire of the sub-contractor or the wage-slave. In the contemporary university the knowledge that is put to work is innovative and assessable pedagogy in the contemporary university: nobody teaches anymore, we’re all pedagogues, fountains of fulgurating innovation, brimming with statistics on the reaching of learning outcomes. In the position of production within the capitalist discourse there is the objet petit a or ‘surplus enjoyment’ in the variant of ‘surplus value’. This time in the position of the truth there is the split subject; that is to say, the truth that the master does not know his or her own desire, the master does not know what he or she wants, the truth that the master’s desire is hysterical and thus a desire to be unsatisfied (SXVII, 34). But then how does the relationship of impotence occur in the Discourse of the Master? It affects the relationship between surplus value and the split subject. Whatever is produced within the Discourse of the Master, however successful the production of surplus, there will never be any address of this ignorance of desire. No subjectification of surplus-enjoyment, of profit or of the consumer bewitched by the promise of a commodity, will ever lead to knowledge of desire, to any genuine motivation.

In response particular universities may well be operating partially or fully through the discourse of the master in its capitalist variant. But, there are two qualifications to be made.

First, Lacan himself claims that in his time the Discourse of the Master is turning into the Discourse of the University, wherein it is structured and formalized knowledge that reigns, not the command.⁵ One might think here of the rise of Total Quality Management and a million other management theories.
Consequently, the situation of the contemporary university is precisely that of an unstable oscillation and interpenetration of the Discourse of the Master and the Discourse of the University.

In my eyes it is precisely this oscillation, this lack of a stable symbolic framework, that could go some way to explaining the epidemic of depression that assails young English and Australian academics, depression that in its extreme forms has resulted in suicide, characterized by a loss of any illusion and a lack of vision of any alternative. How so? Well, it is fine to be subjectivized by one’s impotence to become a real author, a self-identical and unique ‘I’—that is precisely what allows one to contribute to the contemporary structuring of knowledge, to participate in the dynamic of one’s own discipline. It is also fine to be subjectivized by one’s impotence to find genuine motivation, to encounter desire, from a position of fascination with commodities and the production of profit—that is precisely what allows one to moderate the demands of chief financial officers and anxious board members. There are all kinds of stories that one can tell oneself, coping mechanisms, one can become a hysteric, one can even become surplus human resources, one can become a harassed and melancholy administrator who does the best job they can whilst dreaming of writing the perfect sonnet. What is unbearable, however, is being caught between two impotencies; as a university professor with a few administrative duties I can’t become an author and I can’t know desire. This is academic freedom in the current state of the university, the freedom to fall from one impotence to another, the freedom to fail as author, and then to fail as a modern subject, as a subject of desire.

III. THE FREEDOM OF THE ANALYST

What then, of the discourse of the analyst, and what of freedom? This is where I want to cite some of Russell’s findings on what happens to freedom under the condition of psychoanalysis. These findings come in two forms: first, the disqualification of false freedoms, and second, one of the fundamental ideas behind the Lacanian school, that of self-authorization.

The false freedoms that Russell disqualifies are not so much errors in a philosophical or conceptual register, they are rather existential illusions or traps that may lead the would-be analyst astray. The matheme for the discourse of the analyst is designed to guide the analyst around these traps. There are a series of questions in Russell’s writings about particular subjective positions: what or who
is the father, nowadays? How is a father different to a master? What is a master nowadays? What occurs for subjects when the father function, or what lies beyond the father, does not work?—namely psychosis—and finally all of these questions turn towards one question, what is the desire of the analyst?

The first answer is that the analyst’s desire is one that he or she has managed to identify, to articulate around certain master signifiers that emerged from the unconscious during the work of their own analysis. It is a desire that can be kept at a slight distance, a desire whose onset and whose mechanism—fantasy—can now be anticipated and toned down or not taken quite so seriously, a desire that doesn’t need to get blocked up in a fantasy: so this is one determination of freedom for the analyst—the freedom to not act in the name of one’s fantasy. Conversely a false freedom from the analyst’s perspective is that kind of freedom that is felt— that enjoyment—when one does act in the name of one’s fantasy.

Another trap for the analyst’s desire—and this is why analysts do not exist in a solitary condition but come in schools and usually, at least when they are still young, come with a supervising analyst—is that of assuming the position of Kantian freedom, subtracting oneself from the pathologies of affect (such as counter transference), and adhering to reason alone so as to achieve autonomy and become the author of the moral law. Indeed Christine Korsgaard’s neo-Kantian philosophy of freedom suffers in Russell’s hands. The analyst is free precisely in so far as he or she avoids announcing the law.

The third trap for the analyst, the third false freedom, is that of the master, the one who commands, who possesses and organizes and can put to work all know-how when it comes to making society work for the analysand, and the analysand work for society. Model yourself on my ideal ego is the implicit claim of interwar American ego psychology, model yourself on me and you will be integrated, you will adapt to society. This misconception of the talking cure was one of the first targets of Lacan’s return to Freud.

So far we have nothing but negative freedoms for the analyst: the freedom not to act on one’s desire, the freedom to avoid announcing the law, the freedom to avoid taking the position of the master. But there is one positive freedom, or rather positive test or ordeal of freedom as desire in psychoanalysis, and it is intimately connected to transmission and the construction of the school: it is the practice of self-authorization. In the 2011 article “The analyst’s desire and analytic
training”, Russell writes:

For while Lacan declared that “a psychoanalyst derives his authorization only from himself”, there is no such thing as a solitary analyst; he or she depends on being recognized by an Other, even if this Other cannot be reduced to a normative, authoritative, regulatory or standardized Other. ⁶

I will end this brief enquiry into the freedom of the university professor and the freedom of the analyst, an enquiry invited by Russell’s choice, with a set of three questions inspired by this passage:

• What might it mean for us to be recognized, in our work, not just by our friends, at the level of the other with a lowercase o, but by an Other with a capital O, and specifically an Other that cannot be reduced to a normative, authoritative, regulatory or standardized Other? What kind of institution would this require?

• How can we develop some new practices that support self-authorization for the young philosopher, but a self-authorization such that she or he is no longer alone, nor strongest when identified with a single proper name?

• At the same time we should not ignore the political economy of the academy, and so we should keep another very simple question open: philosophy has survived outside the academy in the past. If you want to write philosophy and survive (the conjunction allowing the good life), is it always the best idea to work for a university?

If we find our answers to these questions—and I suggest the answers lie in the direction of the hystericization of discourse by holding open a gap between university and psychoanalysis, and a modified practice of the pass—if we find answers to the questions of recognition, self-authorization, and the good life, we will have made our own return, a return not to Freud but to Athens and to Egypt and to Turkey, to other origins of philosophy, a return to what has been not forgotten but obliterated, the school.

American University of Paris
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1. Initially with the Australian Centre for Psychoanalysis, the École de la Cause Freudienne, then with Deakin's Masters in Psychoanalysis, and then the Lacan Circle of Melbourne, the New Lacanian school, the World Association of Psychoanalysis.


4. A thorough investigation of the condition of freedom within the contemporary university would look at Lacan, Jacques Alain Miller and Alain Badiou's diverse arguments. See Jacques Alain Miller's original reading of Frege in Jaques-Alain Miller, “Suture: Elements of a Logic of the Signifier”, *Cahiers pour l’analyse* no.1, 1996, Lacan’s reply concerning the absence of the subject from the field of modern science, and Badiou’s article critiquing Miller in which what is at stake is nothing less than rescuing, in an Althusserian manner, within the field of logic, the distinction between science and ideology: “Marque et Manque: sur le zero”, *Cahiers pour l’analyse*, no. 10, 1969. See the excellent resources on the “Concept and Form” website that has translated and archived the *Cahiers pour l’analyse* journal at Kingston University.

5. This mutation is marked by the passage from Hegel's dialectic of master and slave through Marx and then on to the formalized quantification of work as energy in thermodynamics. See SXVII, 89-91.

What is the aim of psychoanalysis? Why should we do it? Or, to put it in capitalist consumerist terms, what is it selling? At the end of the day, one’s life is somehow supposed to improve after analysis. But what would count as improvement? What are the standards against which such improvement will be evaluated and who is to set those standards? This is how the question of the aim of analysis relates to the ethical question that haunts philosophy since its beginnings in Ancient Greece. What is the good life? Is there a general answer to that question; and, if not, then how are we to approach the question of what the good life looks like in each individual life?

This psychoanalytic concern and philosophical question of the good life comprises a central theme in Russell Grigg’s recent work, primarily in his conference papers. My engagement with Grigg’s philosophy of psychoanalysis has been predominantly through his spoken thought, in conferences as well as in an ongoing private communication since 2008, during which I profited enormously from his guidance and psychoanalytic insights. This ongoing conversation with Grigg, a Lacanian psychoanalyst and a Lacanian thinker, has been possible even if Lacan’s work is largely a mystery to me, thanks to Grigg’s rare capacity for speaking about psychoanalysis in ordinary language. Arguably this is traceable to Wittgenstein’s influence that runs through our shared array of philosophical references, including Quine, Donald Davidson, Harry Frankfurt, Richard Moran and Christine Kors-
In what follows, I examine Grigg’s spoken reflections about the question of well-being, a constant problem or irritant for the philosophy and the practice of psychoanalysis. I shall offer a brief critical reading of the talks he has given during the time that I have had known him, ask some questions that I would like to form the basis of on-going conversations on these topics and finally suggest my own take on the matter of the aim of psychoanalysis.

A layperson would expect, perhaps, that the aim of psychoanalysis is to increase one’s happiness or wellbeing. But this is, surprisingly, decidedly not the case, at least not in any straightforward way. That is, somehow analysis should, if all goes well, increase the patient’s wellbeing, but not by aiming to achieve wellbeing as a goal.

To begin with, the patient cannot aim for it because she does not know exactly in the beginning of analysis what the notion of wellbeing would mean to her at the end of analysis. In fact, it is more than likely that her initial ideas of what a happy life would be for her comprise part of her problem. Rather than having a clear idea of the good life from the start, a successful analysis would reveal or rather get a person to realize what is good for her and in what way.

Neither should the analyst aim for the patient’s wellbeing because it is not the analyst’s role to impose any specific notion of wellbeing (and there are many of those around) on the patient. As Jonathan Lear often emphasizes, analysis is meant to increase a person’s freedom. Guiding a person toward a specific goal would unduly constrain her and put obstacles in her way to mental health. Neville Symington describes such an intentional activity as interference with therapy, and quotes Wilfred Bion saying: “I don’t know why you are so angry with me. I am not trying to help you.” In fact, this quote suggests that trying to help an analysand is more than interference, but an act of aggression, an intrusion on a person’s freedom and capacity to make up her own mind, to identify her own desires.

Yet Symington recently asked me about my own psychotherapist: “Did she help you?” Somehow, although analysts are not supposed to intentionally help their patients – that is, they are not to help under that description, as Elizabeth Anscombe would say—it is nevertheless a good synoptic description of what they are doing, if they are doing a good job, which involves, paradoxically, not trying to help.
And so Grigg says:

Psychoanalysis is not a helping profession; it is not even a form of therapy, if being a therapy implies having a therapeutic aim. [...] What therapeutic benefits there are that come out of analysis arise from the fact that the aim is directed elsewhere, towards some other outcome. Of course, this takes place on the assumption that something beneficial for the patient will arise out of it, but only as a fringe benefit, as it were, of the treatment itself. This therapeutic paradox is similar to the hedonistic paradox, according to which you will never achieve happiness by making happiness your goal. You have to aim at something else, whatever that something else might be, and then, if you’re lucky, pursuing that goal might make you happy. Psychoanalysis works in the same way: aim to make your patients’ life go better and you will most likely fail. Aim to maintain a discourse in which they can explore their unconscious desires, and there’s a chance their life will go better.\

“A chance their life will go better”? Isn’t that an aim then? And how are we to understand the term “better” here? And why would anyone go to analysis if this betterment were a mere accidental “fringe benefit” that may or may not occur, depending on “chance” or luck? Let me acknowledge my own persisting desire to understand what psychoanalysts refuse to spell out by rephrasing one of Grigg’s favorite quotes by Octave Manonni who notices the frequency with which people say... “I know very well... But still...”: So yes, we know very well that analysis does not set wellbeing as its goal, but still—we all go to analysis with the hope that this newly found self-understanding will make us somehow happier or help us lead a better life. So once we get there, what did we get exactly? How can we understand this non-aim that we are all nevertheless striving for?

What we achieve, says Grigg, is some kind of character development, which prima facie seems similar to the Aristotelian call for the development of the virtues. But there are two crucial differences from the Aristotelian notion, which make it unsuitable to be the aim of psychoanalysis. First, as Grigg explains, Aristotle understands the human flourishing that is achievable through the cultivation of virtues to be universal. Grigg emphasizes the universality of the notion of “eudaimonia” and talks about its constituents as constituting “the sovereign good”. Grigg claims then, that inasmuch as psychoanalysis is concerned, universal notions of the good consist in ideals that often ironically comprise an obstacle to the good life.
Secondly, the virtues Aristotle has in mind belong to the moral realm. But whatever virtues or character traits one should aim to develop in analysis—they are not going to belong to the moral realm. In fact, Grigg claims that psychoanalysis does not see morality as part of the good life. It is rather a cause for pathology. As Grigg explains, Freud saw morality as unhealthy for us. The more “moral” we are, says Grigg, the more critical we are of ourselves. Our moral standards cause us great guilt. And that guilt is often unconscious, it comes together with an unconscious desire to be punished, and it manifests itself in psychological symptoms and in our refusal to let go of those symptoms. In short, as Grigg says: “The therapeutic aim of analysis frequently finds itself at loggerheads with morality.”

I want to claim here, that these two differences actually converge to what psychoanalysis should object to in Aristotle, an objection that is not at all evident in psychoanalytic literature. I am referring to the Phrominos, the Aristotelian ideal of the fully virtuous person who thanks to education and self-cultivation feels or undergoes emotional episodes “at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right aim, and in the right way” as well as does the right thing at the right time and for the right reasons. This ideal character is not only universal and moral, it is also ideally rational, and it is this ideal that clashes with the aims of psychoanalysis, whatever those may be. People who think they are close to this ideal in this or that respect, that they are “less than fully virtuous” but not that much less—live an illusion they would be better off without.

Rather than to Aristotle, Grigg suggests that the philosophical ancestry of psychoanalysis goes back to Plato, in particular to the allegory of the cave. Similarly to Plato’s call to see the shadows of the cave for what they are, psychoanalysis also aims at enlightenment, a “loss of illusions, [a] collapsing of ideals, and even a certain collapsing of morality.”

Grigg here uses the Lacanian term “semblant,” which means in French something between appearance and pretense, with the further connotation of imitation. As I interpret Grigg interpreting Lacan, semblants are close to what Christine Korsgaard calls “practical identities,” our social roles and group belongings, such as being a wife, a mother, or a member of the neighborhood cat rescue organization. The notion of character here is no longer a collection of virtues but of practical identities. But unlike the seriousness with which Korsgaard describes a practical identity, as “a description under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth under-
taking,”7 these practical identities come with a Sartrean twist. Recall what Sartre says about the waiter in a Parisian café:

His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes toward the patrons with a step a little too quick. He bends forward a little too eagerly; his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous for the order of the customer. Finally there he returns, trying to imitate in his walk the inflexible stiffness of some kind of automaton while carrying his tray with the recklessness of a tight-rope-walker by putting it in a perpetually unstable, perpetually broken equilibrium which he perpetually re-establishes by a light movement of the arm and hand. All his behavior seems to us a game. [...] He is playing, he is amusing himself. But what is he playing? [...] He is playing at being a waiter in a café.18

At some level we know that our social roles do not sum us up, that their typical characterizations are forced upon us by the social world, and that to some extent we are not just playing our roles—we are role-playing. For Sartre this was important: on the one hand we are the roles that we play and the manner in which we cooperate with our social definitions, and on the other hand we are not. Avowing only one aspect of ourselves, either the way we are objectified by others under certain identities or group-belongings, or alternatively the way that we as subjects can transcend any such objectification, can often be exploited as a strategy of bad faith and denial of responsibility. A stable social life is a life where we implicitly accept both these aspects, where we negotiate how we specifically inhabit our practical identities and what they commit us to through our choices and actions. But according to Grigg, in analysis, this implicit knowledge of the indeterminacy of our practical identities becomes a difficult explicit realization. At some point in analysis our semblants or our practical identities become “wobbly”, as Grigg describes them.9 Jonathan Lear also speaks of such moments and characterizes them as “ironic.” These are moments where, according to Lear, a person reflects on her duties and obligations that she associates with a certain practical identity, say on her being a woman, and on her various actions made under that identity about which she is emotionally conflicted, and asks herself: “What does any of this have to do with being a woman?”10

This wobbling of identities has been called the “Socratic Effect.”31 The phrase, “Socratic Effect,” was a term in currency amongst the French intellectuals to refer to the effect of truth-telling, explains Grigg in conversation. But there is another
way to understand the suitability of the term for the occasion. What is a woman? What obligations or commitments and responsibilities are involved in this role? This is a typical Socratic question.

Grigg further says that suddenly losing confidence in our practical identities, or suddenly losing one such identity entirely or gaining a new and unfamiliar one, comprises a trauma of the sort that often brings us to analysis, such as “[b]eing abandoned by a lover, falling in love, losing a job, getting a job one can’t manage [...].” Unlike such traumas that are inflicted upon us suddenly by our social reality and experienced as a crisis that may lead us to analysis, analysis itself is what Grigg calls “a gentle awakening”, a “slow-burn” trauma. And somehow, this “non-traumatic traumatization,” through which, I take it, we may abandon an identity or adopt a new one or change our way of inhabiting existing identities, is supposed to be beneficial. It is useful to recall Ian Hacking here saying that “[s]elf-knowledge is a virtue in its own right.” There is clearly an ethics of truth here, a struggle against self-deception and bad faith, “a recognition of reality,” as Freud put it.

I am skeptical about wobbling of semblants and their Socratic effect or about ironic reflections about practical identities. These descriptions seem to me to be ad hoc rationalizations of a longer process that has already happened by the time it is described. But I will not pursue this line of criticism here. Whatever is the case, I want to ask Grigg to say more about the truth that remains. Whereas the Socratic dialogues often end in aporia, Grigg promises us that “[t]his slow process of ‘disidentification’ doesn’t mean that the subject ends up with no identifications.” What does the patient end up with then? What sense do we make of the notion of character that is composed of our practical identities? What would count as a beneficial development of a character described in this manner? Korsgaard and Lear impose rational constraints on the collection of one’s practical identities. Does Grigg? How is this disidentification meant to occur? This is an issue we need to hear more about.

At times Grigg gives a positive description: “a certain robustness of character, let’s say, that makes you resilient to life’s misfortunes, capable of enjoying the pleasures of life, which includes the capacity for love, and a readiness to change the world to meet your desires, which is the capacity for work.” What would count as healthy resilience in contrast to unhealthy repression? Many well-functioning people who love and work need and go to psychotherapy. The trick is to
see how these could be improved. If this is how wellbeing is spelled out then we need to know what counts as good love and good work.

In conversations, Russell Grigg abandons the notion of character development and talks about the benefit of analysis in terms of a person’s symptom, which is normally what brings a person to seek therapy in the first place. The point is not to cure the patient from the symptom, but “to put the symptom to use.” In other words—people can make the symptom work for them. For them? To make their life better? For their wellbeing? And what is that?

Most of Grigg’s detailed discussion about the question of the good psychoanalysis can bring a person is a negative characterization of analysis—it is not aimed at happiness, it is not aimed at becoming moral, indeed it is a lot about ridding the patient from harsh moral demands that make her suffer from harmful guilt feelings; and it is about giving up and slowly dissolving illusory or unsuitable identities and too demanding ideals. What we have here is a notion of freedom from... rather than of freedom to... I take Grigg’s spelling-out of this negative notion to be a retroactive description of what I want to call the letting-go we find ourselves experiencing in analysis. But still, where does this letting-go lead and what is the good of it?

I conclude by raising a challenge to Grigg, and by suggesting a different take on the question of the aim of psychoanalysis. Firstly, Freud, as Grigg explains, thought morality is a cause of pathology and aggression toward others as well as toward oneself. Granted, morality has a dark side, specifically since, as Russell explains in his discussion of Freud and Kant in Lacan, Language, and Philosophy, morality is often a matter of prohibition, of what we should not do. But Freud would also agree that prohibition is what makes civilization possible. In fact, the prohibition of incest, for example, is the very condition of possibility of civilization, according to Freud, who was a great admirer of civilization, despite the neuroses that it produces in its citizens. Surely to say that morality is bad for us tout court—a claim that Grigg ascribes to Freud—is to overspeak. Indeed, I highly doubt that Grigg or any other psychoanalyst would be so delighted to liberate the desires of a murderous sociopath or a paedophile rapist as to think of these liberated desires as exemplary of mental health. Although there is surely an important insight in the thought that morality can be bad for us, we need a better understanding of that insight which, unqualified, is highly implausible.
Somehow we need to make a distinction between healthy morality on the one hand and unhealthy moralism on the other, where we reserve the harshness of undue punishment to moralistic rather than to moral demands we have of ourselves. What is the difference between being moral and being too moral? This is a philosophical question that further depends on getting clear about what morality is in the first place—a highly vexed question in its own right. And it is another place where psychoanalysis and philosophy intersect. As Grigg’s thought repeatedly shows, the work in the psychoanalyst’s clinic and conceptual questions about psychology inter-relate and mutually enrich one another.

I return to the matter of the aim of analysis. Psychoanalysis may not be selling a product, but it nevertheless requires further self-understanding, a more clear idea of how to supplement or fill out its purely negative notion of wellbeing. And this is not at all as paradoxical as Grigg and others would have it. The analyst cannot impose any specific instructions of what that patient’s good life shall be, whether she should change jobs or leave home etc. But this does not mean that psychoanalysis cannot aim at some positive picture of the good life, and by “picture” I am referring to Wittgenstein’s idea of a model that captures the imagination, that is not in itself true or false, and that has content only when applied to reality. In fact, the *Phronimos* is not merely the collection of virtues; it also comes with a picture. The Aristotelian notion does not provide an actual person to imitate or follow, nor a list of instructions of what to do when. It provides a picture of the rational and moral person: a bit of guru; wise and flawless; well-measured and balanced. Psychoanalysis should be able to offer an alternative picture to this rationalistic image.

That picture, as I will all too briefly sketch here, would be of a person that is giving in to life, a phrase that requires unpacking, but that I hope is nonetheless suggestive, and that includes an openness to unpredictable change in one’s emotions, desires and values. Instead of finding the *Phronimos*’s “middle way” between extremes it is a person who can live with those contradictions that are irreconcilable in her emotions, desires and values. One cannot exactly aim at becoming this person, since life, the affective life of emotions and desires, is something that happens, not something we choose to have. And giving-in to life and the letting-go that occurs in analysis and which facilitates this adventurous surrender and acceptance of one’s own creativity, also belong to the realm of affect. But this is not an accidental fringe benefit. It is rather a more or less anticipated side-effect, which importantly also includes a relief from the original issue that brought one
to analysis, even if by the time that relief arrives the person no longer sees it as her primary goal. It is a side-effect of the skill of self-awareness one acquires in psychoanalytic psychotherapy, the skill to “listen” to oneself, to become aware of one’s ongoing associations, of the imaginative connections among thoughts, emotions, desires, or memories that pop in one’s mind or bodily reactions that come to one’s attention. There is such a thing as imaginative self-knowledge and that is, I take it, the aim of psychoanalysis.

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NOTES

1. I am grateful to David Macarthur for his insightful comments on drafts of this paper.
2. In that sense Russell Grigg partakes in a great and largely unknown oral tradition in mid- to late-twentieth century Anglo-American philosophy of philosophers who have an enormous impact through conversation, e.g. Rogers Albritton, Thompson Clarke, Burt Dreben, and Sidney Morgenbesser.
6. Ibid.
19. See for example Grigg, “Philosophy and Psychoanalysis.”

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29. See in particular Sigmund Freud, The Ego and the Id, 1923, S.E., 19, 1-59; and Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents [1929], 1930, S.E. 18, 57-146.
I would like to begin by thanking Justin Clemens, Talia Morag and Oliver Feltham for their reflective responses to my work. What makes their contributions particularly precious to me is that all three are making impressive and important philosophical contributions. I have valued my association with them all over many years and the many conversations we have had. But also, as I take my leave from academic philosophy it is heartening to think that through them the voice of psychoanalysis will still gain a hearing.

All three papers lead me to reflect upon this difficult question concerning the relationship between philosophy and psychoanalysis. There is a lot to be said on this issue, of course, and much ink has already been spilt by philosophers—including some by the above contributors—and psychoanalysts writing about it. I don’t intend to buy into these discussions here. I would just like to treat this as an occasion to say something in a more personal note as one who has spent most of his life passing between the two.

Can this moment of passage between the two be defined? Perhaps we can think about it this way. The series of paeans to love that comprises the first part of the Symposium is brought to an abrupt end when an uninvited Alcibiades disrupts the party. This is well known and indeed constitutes the most dramatic moment in this dialogue—and yet it has not been until recently that philosophers have given
it particular attention and seriously wondered about the place that it occupies in the dialogue overall.

Having been invited to contribute a speech in praise of Eros, as the speakers have done before him, Alcibiades declines the invitation on the grounds of drunkenness and passes instead to speak not of love as such but of this particular love he has for Socrates. This gesture, this “I won’t praise love; I’ll praise Socrates, whom I love” can be described as the analytic moment in the dialogue for being the moment where Alcibiades passes from philosopher to analysand. This is analysis *avant la lettre*, perhaps, but it is nevertheless a key moment in the dialogue where it pivots from philosophy to something like analysis—proto-analysis, if you like, where what makes it analytic is the singularity of the address, the singular account that Alcibiades gives of his experience of his love for another.

This is not enough to make it “an analysis”, to be sure, but it is already on the side of analysis rather than philosophy insofar as the former is the “science of the particular”, whose empirical basis is the individual case study where each and every subject is taken on a one-by-one basis. Moreover, given that each individual case is a dialogue, albeit a one-sided one, each “case” is also the case of the psychoanalyst.

“Che vuoi?” “What do you want?” is no more a question for philosophy than it is for the academy. At least, it is one that is rarely asked of philosophers or by philosophers. And yet, it is not only the most vital question of all, but also the first; “What do you want of me?” is the child’s question to its mother whose desire (signified by the phallus) is the question in which his entire being is at stake and in terms of which his own desire is formed. This question lies at the heart of psychoanalysis, and it returns again and again to be asked of the analyst, in the form of the transference, and asked also by the analyst, in the form of his desire. It is present in every analytic experience, and what psychoanalysis discovered was that there are only ever individual responses to the question.

Desire is not always about love, since we also hate. In some ways, it comes more naturally; we might say it’s a skill acquired at an early age and one that, like riding a bicycle, we never lose. The word “hate” is both too broad and too specific; it is both part of a broader vocabulary and also an umbrella term for a category of so-called negative emotions: contempt, derision, indifference, resentment, jealousy, envy, aversion, revulsion, disgust, loathing, and so on. And then there is the hatred that turns back in upon itself: guilt and self-loathing, depression and melancholia.
The issue is this. How, beneath the pious homilies that people make about their desires to live well with others and work harmoniously with them for a better society, are we to live with the “dark side”, in both senses of the term, of being human? On the whole and for the most part we reject violence, because we are the benevolent ones; and yet we see violence all around us: *homo homini lupus*. Freud saw that for us who reject violence and hatred the repudiation comes at a price. When he wrote that “the normal man is not only far more immoral than he believes but also far more moral than he knows”, it was in reference to the fact that the price of our morality is the turn towards neurosis, so that we become what Nietzsche called the sick animal.¹

How do we measure the stance a person takes towards this goodness and this evil? What attitude takes rightful cognizance both of our morality without idealising it and of our wickedness without being seduced or corrupted by discovering it in the corner of the heart of every man and woman? Freud’s discovery of the unconscious was made possible by his discovery of the method of free association, for sure; but it also required a man called Freud to adopt an ethical stance, within the transference, that enabled him to analyse the hidden desires of those who lay on his couch and spoke openly in a way no one had ever spoken before. I love W. H. Auden’s words on this (they come from his poem “In Memory of Sigmund Freud”):

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he went his way  
down among the lost people like Dante, down  
to the stinking fosse where the injured  
lead the ugly life of the rejected,

and showed us what evil is, not, as we thought,  
deeds that must be punished, but our lack of faith,  
our dishonest mood of denial,  
the concupiscence of the oppressor.²
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It has been suggested that psychoanalysis encourages immorality—the accusation dates from the time of Freud’s early discoveries—out of concern that one is opening up a Pandora’s box of powerful libidinal and destructive thoughts and desires. It is a fear motivated by the thought that repression is a necessary condition for any social order. But it can also be an excessive fear, similar to the fear of one’s own unconscious and fear about what it might reveal to one and about one, and it has a similar origin—namely, the repudiation of what does not
fit with one’s (ego) ideals. The problem is not with the potential unleashing of the forces of immorality but rather with the excessive and cruel demands of morality itself which, and Freud is demonstrably correct on this, demand more and more punishment for an ego that fails to live up to its demands.

Philosophy views the pursuit of the good life in terms of the pursuit of ideals, only disputing the ideals (and even then, within a narrow range) and how to describe them. What is radically new about the ethics of psychoanalysis as a praxis, is that, to help a person’s life go better, it turns away from ethical guidance and instruction, rejecting looking to what a person is capable of at his or her best. It advocates neither inducing ideals that will lift a person out of his or her sources of unhappiness, nor encouraging a person to devote him- or herself to practices by which he or she will learn to follow the path to happiness or steer him or her away from sources of unhappiness. Look instead behind the idealisations to what repulses this or that person—always in the singular—for the origins of his or her disgust; look to what frightens and horrifies him or her, buried beneath layers of dissimulating rationalisation. What Ricoeur famously referred to as the hermeneutics of suspicion grasps in its way this point: be suspicious of the acceptable and decent, the happy and contented. It’s a point that Lacan puts in these terms:

It is not by accident, because it couldn’t be otherwise, that by a bizarre stroke of luck we go through life without meeting anyone but the unhappy. One says to oneself that there must be happy people somewhere. Well then! Unless you get that out of your head, you have understood nothing about psychoanalysis.³

Thus, Lacan says that psychoanalysis seeks salvation through human waste, through what has been discarded and rejected—both literally and figuratively.

There’s a gag in a Lubitsch film that goes like this:

PSYCHIATRIST: Well, Mrs Smith, how are you feeling today?

MRS SMITH: Perfectly well, thank you Doctor.

PSYCHIATRIST: Oh, well! We’ll soon fix that.

Not only does psychoanalysis refrain from seeking our “salvation” through adopting and pursuing the ideals of our culture, it is also suspicious of well-meaning intentions to do what is good for one on the grounds that doing what is
Doing what is good for one is integral to the discourse of governments, bureaucrats and public officials. It is the indefatigable discourse of public policy: to do what’s best, to do what’s good for you and everyone else; to have your interests at heart. This “I only want what’s good for you” should not be taken at face value, and, because it is essential to public discourse, psychoanalysis must maintain its distance and remain in a marginal relationship to it.

It is important for psychoanalysis not to allow itself to become inscribed in and incorporated into any of the above social functions of the state, for to do so would place it on the side of the “good will” of the Other and to mask the fact that the underlying “I only want what’s good for you” is never to be taken at face value. There is constant pressure on psychoanalysis both from within itself and from outside in the form of Government intervention and regulation to be recognised by the government and to be inscribed within the social register. But the effect of this would be for psychoanalysis to participate in and thus become an instrument of the master’s discourse. Psychoanalysis needs to continue to advocate and adopt another line, partly inside, partly outside.

Therefore, when an analyst asks whether one got any benefit from one’s therapy, it is not an analytic question; the analyst hasn’t asked the question qua analyst, but as a friend or acquaintance—and even when your friend and the analyst are the same person, the two roles are not to be confused. The roles are easily confused, however, even by the analyst himself. One of the most common issues that come up in supervision—where one discusses one’s cases with another and usually more experienced analyst—is the need to keep the focus of the discussion on the dynamics and direction of the treatment rather than on how the patient is doing. On the one hand, there is the natural desire to want one’s patients to do well. But the motivation for this “natural desire” is not free of self-interest; one’s narcissism, professional standing and reputation and self-esteem come into play. In Freud’s foundational dream of Irma’s injection we see a desire to shift the blame for Irma’s continued ill health onto external causes rather than to question the efficacy of his newly discovered technique. Freud’s unconscious desire here, which he became aware of through the analysis of his dream, was to blame his patient for not getting well. It is more difficult to present to one’s peers a case in which things have not progressed than a case where things have improved. And there is not only one’s individual standing within the profession but also the standing of the profession itself.
The analysand’s desire to improve is no less complicated. As Freud recognized, the analysand derives satisfaction—jouissance, as Lacan called it—from the very thing of which she or he complains and is reluctant to abandon it for that reason. This led him to conclude that the motor of analysis has to be the transference relationship between analyst and analysand. The analyst’s desire is absolutely crucial here and it is important for this desire not to take the form of the desire for the analysand’s good. According to whose lights? And, anyway, what does it mean to be well meaning in the context of analysis?

For one thing, a person’s ability to grasp how well intentioned his or her own actions are is always to be viewed with caution. I give an example: a single woman is having an affair with a married man who tells her, she says, that he will leave his partner once the children are older. Her analyst cannot avoid thinking that she is wasting the best years of her life with this man, that she is an attractive and charming woman and that as long as she remains in the relationship with him she is denying herself opportunities for a more satisfactory and fulfilling relationship with someone she does not have to share. She would, he cannot help thinking, be better off without him. Wouldn’t it be in her best interests for her to recognize this? This might seem obvious, but notice something that should give pause for thought. Aren’t these the very words that the lover would say when he wants to break off the relationship? You would be better off with someone else, I am holding you back, preventing you from a happy relationship with another man, and so on and so on. It’s all too familiar. One might say that since what the analyst thinks sounds rather like what the lover might say in ending the relationship, he is identifying with the boyfriend. To be more precise, though, the identification is with a man insofar as he is about to break off the relationship—there is, we can imagine, no indication of the analyst’s identifying with him in any other respect. What, then, does this mean? We don’t have enough information to know what that might be, but this little illustration shows that the analyst’s desire is highly relevant to the unfolding of an analysis. This is why undertaking an analysis is a prerequisite and supervision is an ongoing requirement for an analyst.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, there is one more comment to make about what the analyst wants for his or her analysands. The difficulty that the philosopher is caught in, in trying to articulate what it is about the good life, or what sort of good life, anyone, psychoanalysts included, should see as the aim of analysis, is the wish to find a formulation that fits all sizes and all circumstances. This is my reaction to Talia Morag’s talk of the aim of analysis being “an openness to unpredictable change” and living “with those contradictions that are irreconcilable in [the
analysand’s] emotions, desires and values”. I think “openness” here depends both on the person and also on the nature of the unpredictable change. An individual may at the end of an analysis no longer be the victim of their neurosis as before, but it would be unreasonable to expect such a person to be henceforth protected against renewed difficulties come what may. And as for living with irreconcilable contradictions—well, doesn’t everybody do this anyway? The trick is to find the right way to do it, or a better way, one that works for you. And there is no possible generic formulation that fits this.

It might seem that there are stronger grounds for wanting to find a generic formulation for the aim of analysis, since the conducting of an analysis is a technique that while not rigid has some general parameters. The rule of free association is one. The assumption of the unconscious is another. And one might note Freud’s sensibly modest observation that analysis gives a person the opportunity to re-examine and eventually alter their relationship to their symptoms. It is important to give this modesty its full weight here, because one doesn’t always require analysis to achieve this re-examination of how to lead one’s life. While the accidental traumas that one encounters in living a life will sometimes lead a person to analysis, the trauma itself can lead one to carry out some sort of a realignment of one’s values and ideals. Consider the person who, having survived a life-threatening illness, rethinks how to live his or her life. Their priorities change. And just as this is a deeply personal matter in which that person alone can make these decisions, no analyst can—or should—place himself or herself in the position of moral guide for those who seek analysis.

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2. See https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/memory-sigmund-freud
Edward Jeremiah’s *The Emergence of Reflexivity in Greek Language and Thought: From Homer to Plato and Beyond* (2012) is an illuminating study that pursues philosophy and philology to the elusive vanishing point of their intersection. It culminates with a dialectical analysis of “the self itself” which justifies the approach that has been guiding him from the start. His observations about the god-like pretensions of the subjectivist antithesis to “Platonic absolutism” are worth noting, but his luminous analysis of the conundrum that blocks German Idealism’s “founding act of self-reflection” is even more significant:

The question of self-knowledge becomes especially critical to the German idealists. Since the self is understood, after the manner of Plotinus’ νοῦς, as inherently reflexive, a detailed account must be given of its founding act of self-reflection. But here they ran aground on a permutation of the very problem we have been discussing. If the self is constituted by the act of self-reflection, and this act transpires discursively as a relation between a subject and an object, observer and observed, then some distance and difference between these two will always obstruct their complete equation, compromising the act’s unity and coherence.

Building on these illuminating reflections on the problem of reflexivity in German Idealism, I will argue that Jeremiah gets the order wrong when it comes to Plato,
and will therefore single out the following passage for criticism:

There is an intriguing structural correlation here between the thinking soul as that which should relate only with itself and shun any association with the body and the senses, and the objects of its thought as things which similarly relate only to themselves as things-in-themselves. A self-relating subject thinks self-relating entities.  

My purpose is to illuminate a Platonic solution to the problem Jeremiah describes, and I will show that it was rather on the basis of the Idea as thing-in-itself that Plato was able to discover and illuminate a new kind of self-formation, not the other way around. To validate this reversal, I will begin with Plato’s *Alcibiades Major*, a dialogue that refers to “the self itself [αὐτὸ τὸ αὐτό],” and has arguably suffered more than any other as a result of nineteenth-century German philosophy, thanks to F. D. E. Schleiermacher (1868-1834) who first banished it from the canon.

The twenty-first century Anglophone reception of Plato has gotten off to a promising start with Nicholas Denyer’s 2001 commentary on *Alcibiades Major*, the real purpose of which is undo the damage done by Schleiermacher by reopening the case for its authenticity.  

To begin with, this obviously introductory dialogue works in tandem with the far more complex *Symposium*, not only thanks to the presence of Alcibiades himself in both, but because of the argument Socrates uses to show Alcibiades why incurring wounds and death in order to come to the aid of your friends is productive of happiness.  

This argument turns on an often misleading substitution and an easily recognizable fallacy: since those who die for the sake of their friends in battle “do nobly [καλῶς πράττειν],” they therefore—by substituting “good” or “well” for “beautiful” and “beautifully” (also “nobly,” “honorably”)—“do well,” and in an equivocation exploited frequently in the dialogues, this means they “fare well [εὖ πράττειν],” i.e., are happy. Yet the one who dies nobly in battle does not “fare well” in any sense that we would usually associate with “happiness,” “faring well,” or even “the care of the self.” The definition of courage given at the *Alcibiades Major* 115b5-7 in fact makes this clear—ανδρεία is beautiful but not advantageous—as does the fact that Alcibiades regards injustice as advantageous but never beautiful (115a1-9), an insight he notably shares with the Polus of the *Gorgias* (474c4-d2).

But the most arresting passage in *Alcibiades Major* is the famous simile of the mirror, where Socrates analogizes the Delphic injunction by imagining that it
commanded the eye to see itself.\textsuperscript{20} What makes this passage even more striking is that our manuscripts lack some lines preserved by Eusebius and Stobaeus to the effect that it is definitely not enough to discover the self even in the most divine part of the self but rather only as reflected by God.\textsuperscript{21} The problem of “the [Eusebian] Addition” (Alc. 133c8-17) has generated a great deal of scholarship.\textsuperscript{22} But one basic point has received insufficient attention: it was scarcely in the interests of the Neoplatonists,\textsuperscript{23} whose commentaries on Alcibiades Major survive,\textsuperscript{24} to emphasize as fully Platonic a separation of the most divine part of the self from God, and thus to imagine a transcendent God as “the self itself,”\textsuperscript{25} imaged here as a far purer and brighter mirror wherein and whereby alone we would be able to see ourselves. Consider the analysis of Harold Tarrant:

It is clear then that Olympiodorus would reject any reading at 133c that would have Alcibiades gaze into any god outside the human soul. This would of course include 133c10-11 from the disputed lines: ‘so the god too happens to be purer and brighter than what is best within our soul.’ The passage alerts us to the key point in the ancient struggle over the meaning of the dialogue’s climax: the tradition of which Olympiodorus is part has Alcibiades directed towards a god within the human soul or ‘self,’ while the tradition to which Eusebius subscribes has him directed towards a single external god that is apparently the brightest mirror in which a human might see his inner self.\textsuperscript{26}

As Tarrant suggests, this is not, from a Neoplatonist’s point of view, merely what Christopher Moore calls “one odd piece of information” in the following passage (emphases mine):

These lines answer no questions about the means by which one knows the god, nor advance more than a merely metaphorical explanation for the improvement in self-knowledge these better reflective surfaces provide. Indeed they mostly restate the implications of the preceding analogy. They do, however, answer one question, and add one odd piece of information. God is purer and brighter than the best in the soul; this suggests that god is separate from the soul.\textsuperscript{27}

This separation constitutes this paper’s center, marking as it does the boundary between Plato and both his Neo- and post-Platonic receptions.
In order to get a clearer sense of this boundary, it is useful to see how it gets blurred in Christopher Gill’s work on “selfhood.”28 In “Self-Knowledge in Plato’s Alcibiades,”29 Gill enlists the aid of Jacques Brunschwig,30 who provides “the most acute and suggestive modern reading of this part of the dialogue,”31 to undermine an ultra-subjectivist interpretation of “the Self Itself” championed by Michel Foucault.32 Although Gill’s 2007 paper illustrates the growing importance of Plato’s Alcibiades in the wake of Denyer,33 what makes it more important is that he follows Brunschwig in distinguishing a theocentric reading of the dialogue—explicitly tied to “the Eusebian Addition,”34 and erroneously identified by both as “pre-Neoplatonic”35—from a horizontal and humanist alternative,36 a nuanced version of which he will deploy against Foucault.37 In the process, Gill confirms Brunschwig’s most provocative insight:38 those who regard Alcibiades as genuinely Platonic tend to regard “the Eusebian Addition” as interpolated, while those who emphasize its integral connection to the rest of the dialogue reject the whole as inauthentic.39 I am therefore challenging the validity of Brunschwig’s revealing disjunction by connecting a genuinely and characteristically Platonic “Eusebian Addition” to an authentic Alcibiades, while also upholding the underlying accuracy of his ongoing claim: a humanist reading of Alcibiades must ultimately give way to the theocentric implications of its most arresting and important passage.40 The boundary dividing us, then, is that Brunschwig and Gill fail to grasp that Socrates’ identification of an extra-psychic God with a mirror more perfect than whatever in us is most like the divine is anything but Neoplatonic.41

As a result, another interpretation of “the Eusebian Addition” becomes possible: it is better understood as “the Neoplatonic Deletion.” It was the Neoplatonists who had more to lose than the Christians had to gain,42 and they were clearly more comfortable with the arguably equalizing pairing of θεός τε καὶ φρόνησις (“both God and wisdom”)43 just before the Addition (Alc. 133c5) than with the separation of God from even the most divine part of the soul. By explicitly stepping outside of the circle of reflexivity, the original text of Alcibiades Major—i.e., including the Addition—illustrates the link between German Idealism and Neoplatonism once again by showing Plato to be opposed to both. I am suggesting, then, that long before Schleiermacher purged the entire dialogue from the canon,44 its soul had already been purged from our manuscripts, and it should not go unmentioned that Schleiermacher’s theology tended rather to a subjectivist notion of God, i.e., a god rather within than without.45
In another place I will argue this complex case in more detail, but for the present I want to build on a combination of my own previous work and the very promising start made by Denyer on the Addition. Although he too regards the Addition as inauthentic, he makes two other important claims about it. The first is that the Addition merely makes explicit what was implicit in the lines that precede it:

These lines therefore give a fair exposition of what is already implicit [cf. his opening words on c8-17 (emphasis mine): ‘these lines are extent only in the indirect evidence for the text. They make explicit one final detail of the analogy: the comparison between mirrors (last mentioned at 133a3) and God’] in the analogy.

The second, is that the Addition is directly analogous to the famous Divided Line in Plato’s Republic:

Thus, as in the analogy of the Line (Rep. 509d-511e), both vision (with its contrast between reflections in pupils and clearer reflections in mirrors), and the intellect (with its contrast between human wisdom and the clearer wisdom of God), provides analogies for the way that the realm of vision as a whole is like, but inferior to, the realm of intellect.

God as the perfect mirror corresponds to the First (i.e., highest or νοήσις-accessed) Part of the Divided Line while the imperfect mirror of the soul corresponds to the level of διάνοια, i.e., its Second Part. Meanwhile, in Plato the Teacher: The Crisis of the Republic, I have illustrated the link between the methods associated with διάνοια and the so-called “Shorter Way” that reaches its anti-climactic climax in Republic 4; thanks to the Image of the City and the Hypothesis that justifies the soul’s tripartition, Socrates can show that justice is to our advantage, just as he did in Alcibiades Major by equivocating there on εὖ πράττειν. The Longer Way, by contrast, is based on the un-hypothetical Good—corresponding in Alcibiades Major to the perfect mirror or “the self itself”—and points to the Allegory of the Cave as the real locus of Plato’s account of justice.

Plato’s fullest description of a transcendent Idea is found in his immortal Symposium, and the poetic fulsome of the peroration of Socrates’ speech creates a pointed contrast with his reticence in describing the Idea of the Good in Republic. Generally analyzed in terms of the lower and higher mysteries, Diotima’s discourse is better understood in relation to the logically and
philosophically prior distinction between good things and beautiful ones at 204d4-e7. When asked by Diotima, Socrates cannot say what there will be for the one for whom beautiful things come into being (γενέσθαι) — and that makes two ethical datives in a single eight-word question. But he can answer, and easily, in the case of good things: the answer is that he will be happy. This substitution, I contend, is not based on the identity of the good and the beautiful. Nichols states it bluntly: “The beautiful cannot be reduced to the good.” The clearest sign of this non-identity are cases of noble self-sacrifice, as we suggested above, and as Gabriel Richardson Lear has also observed:

The benefit of beauty per se is not immediately clear. The problem becomes all the more acute when we realize that among the most admired of beautiful things are self-sacrificing acts of virtue. The virtuous life is beautiful, but is it, after all, happy?

It is rather best understood as a shortcut that anticipates the eudaemonist Shorter Way in Republic, and for which the fallacious argument based on εὖ πράττειν in Alcibiades Major has prepared us. It is only because the Idea of the Good is a post-eudaemonist good, like Beauty in Diotima’s discourse, that it can inspire “giving birth in the beautiful,” a process that culminates in Socrates’ reply to Glaucon in Republic 7: it is only an other-regarding Justice that compels the philosopher to return to the Cave.

Plato dramatizes the inadequacy of this eudaemonist substitution of good things for beautiful things for us at least twice. First of all, it leads Diotima to explain as self-serving the examples of self-sacrifice that Phaedrus had used in the dialogue’s first and often overlooked speech. Anyone who knows why τὸ καλὸν means not only “the beautiful” but also “the ethically noble,” and why it, unlike the good or the beneficial, is not generally modified by the ethical dative, and thus why Aristotle distinguishes it in the Rhetoric from the advantageous — i.e., from what is advantageous “for us” — anyone who knows or rather recollects the intrinsic basis of all such things will also know that it was not for the sake of their own fame or happiness that Alcestis and Achilles laid down their lives for their friends. Secondly, it is thanks to the proliferation of ethical datives repeatedly coupled with γενέσθαι in Diotima’s peroration, that she ultimately answers the question that Socrates cannot: what comes into being for the one who climbs her ladder of the beautiful things up to the highest mysteries is not happiness but a vision of the Idea of Beauty, with Socrates’ own speech becoming a perfect example of
its productivity and thus of “giving birth in the Beautiful.”

We have often been told that since Socrates didn’t, Plato couldn’t accurately describe the Idea of the Good, but this truism is importantly untrue. Even if the only thing Socrates had told us about the Good was that it is most like the Sun outside of the Cave, we could be sure that he knew it couldn’t be described in relation to this life of ours, where the closest thing to the Good is the fire blazing at our backs as we sit immobilized, seeing nothing but the shadows it makes possible. And if, as we are also often told, Plato and his Socrates were really eudaemonists, the Good would not be outside of the Cave but within our ken if not in our immediate grasp: even if we debate how to get happiness, everyone must know what all men seek. It is amusing and revealing that all attempts to explain Socratic eudaemonism depend on Plato’s *Euthydemus*, a dialogue in which Socrates teaches a youngster how to recognize equivocation immediately before he begins the critical speech with one, i.e., the claim that all men wish to εὖ πράττειν, only later glossed by εὐδαιμονεῖν.

For the epigones of Aristotle, the Good will in any case lose its Platonic separation as some ethically chastened version of happiness, becoming in the process something else that the Idea of the Good is not: unquestionably “good for us.” As Julia Annas observes:

The culmination of the whole journey is comprehension of the Form of the Good—and this is precisely what is not good for the seeker, or good for others, or good in relation to anything or anyone, but simply and unqualifiedly good, in a way that is completely impersonal and indifferent between individuals.

It’s not just that the ethical dative is never applied to the Idea: the deeper problem “for us” is that the Cave image makes equally clear—by depicting the cave-dwellers as looking forwards at the shadows on the wall, which is no mirror—that we have not seen and therefore cannot even describe *ourselves*:

*Socrates*: ‘A strange image you speak of,’ he said, ‘and strange prisoners.’ ‘Like to us,’ I said; ‘for, to begin with, tell me do you think that these men would have seen anything of themselves [ἐαυτῶν] or of one another except the shadows cast from the fire on the wall of the cave that fronted them?’
In the Cave, there is no fully formed self that any given thing could be “good for.” It is therefore significant that the justice of the vividly described tripartite self is justified on an eudaemonist basis along the Shorter Way, such that the Idea of the Good is the determinative basis of the Longer. It is also the reason that Socrates’ just demand that the Guardians must return to the Cave has become the theme of endless scholarly discussion; it requires considerable ingenuity or rather sleight-of-hand to show that such self-sacrifice for the good of others is at one and the same time good for us. Gail Fine has wrestled with this problem for the eudaemonist Plato:

Hence Plato’s claim that the PJ [sc. ‘psychically just,’ on the basis of the Shorter Way’s tripartite soul] person will benefit others does not violate his eudaemonism. It is sometimes claimed, however, that Plato admits at least one exception to his eudaemonism. For he says that the philosopher—and it emerges that only the philosopher, in Plato’s view, can be PJ, since only he can have the requisite knowledge [note that R. 443c9-444a9 is in book 4; the philosophers emerge in book 5]—must go back to the cave in order to take his turn at ruling. However, he views some aspects of ruling as unpleasant; and that might seem to show that he is not motivated by egoistic reasons. On one view, he returns to the cave not because it is good for him, but simply because it is good—impersonally good or good simpliciter.

Shackled inside the Cave, then, we know neither the Idea of the Good nor ourselves, and the question guiding me in this paper relates to the priorities involved in this Platonic congruence: do we come to know the Good through deeper reflection on ourselves, or can we achieve genuine self-formation only in the light of the transcendent Good? And what I’d like to suggest is that there is another and anti-Platonic congruence to be considered: a Janus-faced project to make the Good immanent. Having begun with a circle of reflexivity common to German Idealism and Neoplatonism, I have suggested that there is another path that comes at Plato from a different direction but which leads to a remarkably similar destination: starting from Aristotle’s account of Socrates, and based on what Gregory Vlastos called “the Eudaemonist Axiom,” there has emerged in the Anglo-American West an ongoing attempt to interpret both Symposium and Republic as if Plato regarded the Good as nothing more than Happiness, thereby justifying Aristotle’s own views as expressed in his famous critique of
Plato’s separate Idea of the Good. In comparison, the Tübingen School—the pincer coming from the East, as it were—is philosophically more sophisticated, but it is equally dependent on Aristotle’s testimony, and it too culminates in the attempt to make the Good immanent as “the One” of the Unwritten Teachings. Having already used Jeremiah’s remarks on reflexivity to call attention to a pre-established harmony between the excision of Alcibiades Major and German Idealism, it will be valuable also to briefly consider Plato’s most thorough account of the One and the Indefinite Dyad in his Parmenides.

Explicitly performed as a gymnastic exercise for the sake of the Good, the Beautiful, and the Just—i.e., the kind of “forms” which are immune to the Third Man—Parmenides considers what he calls “my hypothesis,” i.e., the One, and it is necessary to ask: “Why is this a good way to prepare for what lies ahead?” Since Socrates is a youngster, the Republic is still very much in his future even if we, who are reading Parmenides, have that dialogue—and the Divided Line in particular—in our past. The Neoplatonist appropriation of Parmenides was determined to read it as the highpoint of Plato’s thought, where the ineffable One of the First Hypothesis stood atop a pyramid, with imitations of its unity made successively immanent in the various levels below it. As Gerald Bechtle has put it:

The general importance of the Parmenides for the philosophical speculation of the Middle Platonists and Platonizing Neopythagoreans is such that one could, I think, claim without hesitation that it is from there that they have developed, on a theologico-metaphysical level, the second One as a whole [sc. the ‘One’ of the Second Hypothesis], the ἐν ὄν. Its level is characterized by opposites joined together, from these opposites, then, becoming can come into being.

The goodness of a thing was its unity, and the harmony of Plato and Aristotle could be defended on this basis. But this hypothesis ignores the fact that the part-less One was made dependent on διάνοια in the Second Hypothesis, as was “indefinite plurality” in the Third and Seventh. Our ascent to the Good and the Beautiful—like activity in accordance with Justice, among the shadows of the Cave—by contrast requires us to see why these un-hypothetical and διάνοια-independent Ideas are different in principle from not only hair and mud, man and fire, but from the One and Many as well. They are fully transcendent, and only accessible to νοήσις, like the God of the Addition to the Alcibiades Major with which we began.
What then happens to the self in the moment of ecstatic vision that Plato describes in Socrates’ Diotima-discourse? As the example of the infinitely didactic yet equally ironic Socrates repeatedly proves, it can scarcely be said to disappear by merging into a mystical monism. Has there ever been a richer or more vividly human self than that of Socrates, the son of Phaenarete? If wonder was the origin of pre-Socratic philosophy, then Socratic philosophy seems to begin with wondering about Socrates, he who—in Cicero’s memorable phrase—brought philosophy down from the heavens and into the cities and the lives of men. A true son of Athens, Socrates will justify the dedication of his native city to the Goddess of Wisdom by dying nobly for philosophy, the love of wisdom. The reason that Socrates invokes the example of Achilles in *Apology* is because he too will lay down his life for his friends, and it would demonstrate a moral blindness to the kind of admiration Plato has been generating for his hero from the start, as well as literary blindness to the role Plato has carved out for himself by writing as he does, to imagine that Socrates sacrifices himself for the sake of his own immortal fame. But what really motivated the midwife’s son?

We seem to have forgotten, and it requires a sympathetic Platonist like Plutarch to reveal to the rest of us the inner consistency between the humility of Socratic ignorance and the certainty imposed by the divine mission that leads to his trial and death. In order to explain the seemingly antithetical relationship between Socrates’ certainty about his divine mission and his intellectual barrenness, Plutarch offers the following analogy based on hearing: just as we cannot hear sounds clearly if there is an internal buzzing in our ears, so too we cannot accurately “hear” the arguments of others if our mind is teeming with its own pre-established conceits and conceptions. According to Plutarch, Socrates’ intellectual barrenness opens him to divine wisdom:

> If nothing is apprehensible and knowable to man, it was reasonable for god to have prevented Socrates from begetting inane and false and baseless notions and compel him to refute the others who were forming such opinions.

Once the divine becomes responsible for “Socratic ignorance,” it is easy to see that Plutarch’s (pre-Christian) analogy corresponds to the one based on vision in *Alcibiades Major*: the imperfect mirror of our soul is still buzzing with error and conceit; God, as perfect mirror without, enjoins silence within. In this light, even
Further, the suspected passage spoils the metaphor. We were told that to see itself an eye should look at another eye (as seems reasonable in a culture with metal mirrors which would not give as clear a reflection of the eye as another eye would). Analogously, a soul should look at another soul, and there see God. But now we are abruptly told that God is a better and clearer mirror, just as there are better mirrors than the eye for an eye. So looking at God is now different from looking at the mirror in another soul. God thus seems to be both outside and inside the soul. It is tempting to see the passage as the work of a late pagan, or Christian writer, concerned to save Plato from the view that God is in our own souls, and hurriedly bringing God in as something external to us.

Against this revealing albeit negative verdict, consider Denyer’s succinct comment on the Mirror Passage as a whole: “God will provide a human soul with better understanding of itself than it could ever get from another human intellect.” Although we cannot doubt that Socrates seeks self-knowledge and famously wonders about his true self, can we find any other evidence that he sought “better understanding” from this unfashionable source? Aside from Alcibiades Major and the divine origin of the Delphic exhortation to “Know Thyself,” Socrates has long since answered that question: his Divine Sign prevented him from doing what he was about to do. Unless we are prepared to believe that Socrates routinely acted unreflectively, we cannot doubt that the Sign, which he always obeyed, was thereby “trumping” his reasoning, a particularly important finding if “Socrates’ moral psychology” requires every agent, Socrates included, to pursue nothing but his or her own good.

In Alcibiades Minor, Socrates illustrates the effect of the Sign by himself arresting the intended action of Alcibiades. The ambitious youngster is on his way to prayer; he intends to ask the gods to give him tyrannical power. Socrates’ questions obstruct his path: intent on prayer at the start, Alcibiades gives up his plan at the end. The philosophical implications of this development center on the two times Alcibiades uses the word ἐγώ: he definitely changes his mind about himself between them, and is brought to see himself better—especially the extent of his own ignorance—as a result of Socrates’ intervention. Appearing first in Socrates’ opening question, ὁ θεός creates the close textual connection with Alcibiades Major and the Sign. In addition to the first three mentions of God, the three
uses in the long speech between Alc. 148b9 and 150b4 mark it as the locus of instruction about God, and thus an important cause of the shift in Alcibiades’ use of ἐγώ that betokens his increased self-knowledge.

A quotation from Homer near the end of this despised dialogue strengthens the connection between it and Alcibiades Major in a crucial way:

Socrates: But I think, as Homer relates how Athena removed the mist from the eyes of Diomedes, ‘That he might well discern both god and man,’ so you too must first have the mist removed which now enwraps your soul [ψύχη], and then you will be ready to receive the means whereby you will discern both bad and noble [ἐσθλόν]. For at present I do not think you could do so.

The fog is first removed specifically from the eyes, but the eyes become the soul immediately after the quotation; this keeps us in the realm of the more famous dialogue’s mirror image. No longer the man who was preparing to pray for tyranny, Alcibiades is now the new ἐγώ who then responds:

Alcibiades: Let him remove the mist or whatever else he likes to call it: for I [ἐγώ] am prepared to obey every one of his commands, without fleeing, whoever the man may be, so long as I am to be the better for them.

While this response leaves open a “God in Socrates” reading of Alcibiades Major—a reading that likewise requires deleting the Addition—Plato forecloses that possibility at the end of both dialogues. The God, through but not within Socrates, has prevented Alcibiades’ prayer, and from being the “I” who was prepared to pray it, he has for the moment become the new “I” who seems to have the fog (or whatever else it might be at 150e5) removed from his soul. But despite his promise not to flee (150e6), we know that he eventually will (Smp. 216b5-6).

As for Socrates, it’s easy to see that he came to know himself—in accordance with Delphic wisdom—as the Socrates who obeys the Sign, not as the one who had his own good reasons for doing what the intercession of the Sign prevented him from doing. Securing his own happiness is not Socrates’ guiding principle, nor does Plato expect it to be ours. But even though the Anglo-American reduction of the Good to Happiness (as “the good for us”) distorts the core of Platonism, an even graver threat to Plato—and to the rest of us—comes from the kind of
Continental Philosophy that remains untroubled by Heidegger’s shadow. To state the congruence more ominously, thanks to the dependence of Socratic self-knowledge on the self-transcending and fully separate Idea, Plato is far closer to being a Jew than a German Idealist.

F. H. Jacobi (1743-1819), who initiated the *Pantheismusstreit* by reviving interest in Spinoza, and who exercised a determinative influence over Schleiermacher, expressed the dilemma well:

I repeat: God is, and is *outside* me, a *living, self subsisting being* [Wesen], or I am God [Ich bin Gott; a different *and* larger font is used here for emphasis]. There is no third.

It would be naïve to take it on faith that Jacobi chose the former, but not that Plato did. Glimpsed in the more perfect mirror of what the three Religions of the Book would recognize as “I am what I am” —i.e., that which we are not— the self, purified of the epistemological certainties that alone could justify its eudaemonist end, let alone of its self-maddening pretensions to misconceive itself as the *Übermensch*, becomes free to be just as elusive, playful, and unforgettable human as the Socrates who Plato made famous, the one who describes himself being schooled by Diotima before leaving the creature comforts of Agathon’s dining-room in order to school the rest of us from a jail-cell, where his true self had always known that it was already housed, if only temporarily.

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NOTES

A shorter version of this paper was presented as “Philosophy and Self-Formation in Plato” at the Australasian Society for Continental Philosophy Conference at Deakin University, December 7, 2016.

2. See Jeremiah, Emergence of Reflexivity, 250-52.
3. Jeremiah, Emergence of Reflexivity, 253: “For the reasons outlined above, just as in the case of the reflexive, the emerging role of the ‘I’ in reflections upon human identity and self-consciousness begins to generate those capillaried networks of linguistic connection upon which the overt concept formations of later philosophy depend.”
4. Jeremiah, Emergence of Reflexivity, 202: “It is of interest how extreme statements of subjectivism often treat the subject in ways otherwise associated with a divine creator of the universe.”
5. In “The (Im)possibility of Holistic Reflexivity,” beginning on 255.
6. Jeremiah, Emergence of Reflexivity, 258: Cf. 259: “There is a thorny contradiction in the notion of reflecting on something that is putatively pre-reflective.”
7. Jeremiah, Emergence of Reflexivity, 204.
8. Alc. 130d4; a similar expression (αὐτὸ ταὐτό) has already appeared at 129b1. I will not enter here into the problem of how this phrase should be translated, but will recommend R. E. Allen, “Note on Alcibiades I, 129b1.” American Journal of Philology, 83, no. 2 (April 1962), 187-190 as the proper starting point for such a discussion. Abbreviations for the dialogues follow LSJ and citations to them are based on the most current OCT versions.
11. For the ancient commonplace that Alcibiades Major was the first dialogue a student should read, see Diogenes Laertius 3.62; cf. Denyer, Alcibiades, 14: “By late antiquity this had become the

12. Note the connection between Symposium and Protagoras as indicated by Prt. 315b9-316a5; of Agathon’s invited guests, only Aristophanes is missing.

13. See Alc. 115b1-4.


15. Alc. 116b2.


17. Alc. 116b3-5. The fallacy turns on the equivocal εὖ πράττειν, best understood in the following grammatical terms: (1) active, “to do well,” (2) middle, “to do well for oneself,” i.e., “to succeed,” and (3) “to fare well.” At 116b3, εὖ πράττειν is used in sense (1), immediately thereafter, at b5, in sense (3). The classic account of this standard trick—“the convenient ambiguity” on 335—is E. R. Dodds, Plato: Gorgias: A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959, 335-36. More recently, see Rebecca Benson Cain, The Socratic Method: Plato’s Use of Philosophical Drama. New York: Continuum, 2007, 17 and 120n16-17.


22. Most recently, see Renaud and Tarrant, Platonic Alcibiades I, 187-89.


29. Christopher Gill, “Self-Knowledge in Plato’s Alcibiades” in Suzanne Stern-Gillet and Kevin Corrigan (eds), Reading Ancient Texts; Volume I: Presocratics and Plato; Essays in Honour of Denis

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33. Gill, “Self-Knowledge,” 101-102, especially 101n20; cf. Brad Inwood, Reading Seneca: Stoic Philosophy at Rome. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 335n15; note the characteristic “ontological minimalism” (334 and 323). Note that Foucault is even farther from a non-Neoplatonic Plato than Gill, e.g., Hermeneutics of the Subject, 53 (emphasis mine): “What is this identical element present as it were on both sides of the care: subject of the care and object of the care.” It is most unfortunate that Foucault fails to mention J. G. Fichte in these lectures. Cf. Jeremiah, Emergence of Reflexivity, 258-59 and 250-52.
38. Confirmed by Dönt, Paul Friedländer (see “Vorneuplatonisches,” 39-40), Gill (cf. “Self-Knowledge,” 97n1), and Brunschwig himself (“La déconstruction,” 61); disproved by Denyer, Schleiermacher (see below), and the author.
44. Note that Schleiermacher suppressed the Addition (without comment) before atherizing the dialogue as a whole; see F. Schleiermacher, Platon’s Werke, 1.3.252 and 365.
46. In a work in progress to be called “Ascent to the Beautiful: The Pre-Republic Dialogues from Protagoras to Symposium.”
47. See Denyer, Alcibiades, 236.

49. Denyer, Plato, Alcibiades, 236.

50. As per Rep. 51d8-e1.


52. Altman, Plato the Teacher, chapters 3 and 4.

53. Altman, Plato the Teacher, section §12.

54. Framed in terms of pleasure as well as tripartition in the second and third “falls” of R. 580d2-583b2 and 583b2-587e4. For the continuity of the Shorter Way, pursued both before and after books 6-7, see Plato the Teacher, 142.

55. Alc. 113d1-116e1.

56. See Altman, Plato the Teacher, chapter 4.

57. Smp. 210e2-211b5

58. This contrast suggests that the Glaucon of Symposium (named at Smp. 172e3) who wants to know what was said at Agathon’s is the same young man who does not get the information about the Idea of the Good that he desires in Republic (R. 506d1-2). Certainly Plato provides no conclusive evidence that they are different, but see Debra Nails, The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socrates. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2002, 154. Cf. J. B. Bury (ed.), The Symposium of Plato. Cambridge, UK: W. Heffer and Sons, 1909, 3: “probably not.”

59. See F. M. Cornford, “The Doctrine of Eros in Plato’s Symposium” in The Unwritten Philosophy and Other Essays, edited by W. K. C. Guthrie, 68-80. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1967, 75: “I incline to agree with those scholars who have seen in this sentence [sc. Smp. 209e5-210a2, translated by Cornford as: ‘Into these lesser mysteries of Eros, you, Socrates, may perhaps be initiated; but I know not whether you will be capable of the perfect revelation—the goal to which they lead.’] Plato’s intention to mark the limit reached by the philosophy of his master.”


61. Smp. 204d8-9: τί ἔσται ἐκείνῳ, [the first, followed by my comma] ὧν [the second, for whom what comes to be is in not in question, as it is for the first] ἂν γένηται τὰ καλά.

62. Smp. 204e6-7.


64. Lear, “Permanent Beauty,” 105.


66. Cf. the equation of the Beautiful and the Good at Alc. 116c1-2 with 115a13-15, where their opposites are cross-mixed, with “the good things” meaning: “good for me.” The most egregious abuse of such equations is in Protagoras, where Socrates claims that since going to war is noble, it is also good and pleasant (Prt. 359e3-360a3); for the distinction between the Good and the Beautiful there, see C. C. W. Taylor, Plato, Protagoras; Translated with Notes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 165-66 (especially the revealing understatement “less closely tied”). For the dramatic connection between Alcibiades Major and Protagoras, cf. Robert C. Bartlett, Sophistry and Political
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Philosophy: Protagoras’ Challenge to Socrates (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 226-27n4 and Laurence Lampert, How Philosophy Became Socratic: A Study of Plato’s Protagoras, Charmides, and Republic (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 141-44. For settling this quarrel in Lampert’s favor, Alc. 111a14 is decisive; the young man learned this ingenious argument at Prt. 328a1.

67. Note the connection between this famous phrase (Smp. 206e5 and 209a3-b4) and virtue-inspiring λόγοι at 209b5-c2 and 210a4-e1.

68. On R. 519e1-520e3, see Plato the Teacher, section §16.

69. Note especially the use of ὑπεραποθνήσκειν (“to die on behalf of”) at Smp. 179b4 and 180a1; it reappears at 207b4 and 207d2. On the basis of Plato’s statement in Ep. 314c4 that his writings were those of a Socrates who had become καλός and νέος, it might be more accurate to say that Plato returned to the philosophy of a new Socrates, now revealed by the maxim of the beautiful action that had led to his trial and death.

70. Cf. Taylor, Plato, Protagoras, 165: “praiseworthy, honorable, noble” and Cornford, “Doctrine of Eros,” 77: “we must learn to value moral beauty in the mind above beauty of the body, and to contemplate the unity and kinship of all that is honorable and noble—a constant meaning of τὸ καλόν—in law and conduct.”

71. See Barney, “Notes,” 367.

72. See Rhetoric 1358b38-1359a5.

73. Smp. 202d2-e1; our response determines whether we are pregnant in our souls.

74. Smp. 211d8-e1, 212a1-2, 212b3, and 212a6; cf. 204d8-9.

75. Smp. 204d8-11.

76. Cf. τὸ καλὸν at Smp. 209b3 (cf. 210d1) with τὸ καλὸν at 210d4. While the earlier passage is still in the realm of the good man (209b4-c2), the rich proliferation of “beauty” in 210a4-e1 (fifteen words for it appear there) indicates the connection between the higher mysteries (210a1) and the shortcut of 204e1-7.

77. Put in its proper place at Smp. 202e1-5, immediately after our “pregnancy test.”

78. Smp. 210d4-e1. The parallel passage before “the higher mysteries”—i.e., 209b7-c2 (see previous note)—applies better to the speech of Alcibiades in praise of Socrates than to the speech of Socrates in praise of τὸ καλὸν.


80. Hence also the strangeness of the image used to describe us; see R. 515a4-5.


83. Euth. 277e-278c1.

84. Euthd. 278b7. On the use of fallacy in “the First Protreptic,” see (in addition to the sources listed in the next note), William H. F. Altman, Ascent to the Good: The Reading Order of Plato’s Dialogues from Symposium to Republic. Forthcoming from Lexington Books, 2018, section §3.

85. Euth. 280b6. For critical attention to the speech, see Russell E. Jones, “Wisdom and Happiness

“After finding such serious flaws in this argument in the Euthydemus [sc. 279c9-281e5, analyzed on 203-205] we might remind ourselves that the dialogue as a whole is concerned with eristic, and suggest that even the protreptic passages are not free of the fallacious argument that is rife in the rest of the dialogue. But if we dismiss the argument we will have dismissed our best evidence of Socrates’ defense of the sufficiency thesis.” Cf. Rider, “Socrates’ Philosophical Protreptic,” 218n23.

86. See Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 1.6.


88. R. 515a4-8 (Paul Shorey translation).

89. See the proclamation at R. 580b1-c9, on the basis of the tripartite soul (580c10-d4), the life of ὁ φρόνιμος is also proclaimed to be most pleasant at 583a1-5.

90. See R. 504b1-505b4. In the context of the previous note, consider also 505b5-d4.


92. Thrasymachus has it just about right when he uses the equivocal phrase ἀλλότριον ἀγαθόν at R. 342c3 and 367c3.


95. Aristotle, Metaphysics, 987b1-10 and Nicomachean Ethics, 1145b21-27.

96. See Vlastos, Socrates, 203.
sich ruhenden], transcendent Absolute and reality [der Realität]."

103. Pr. 135c8-d1.


105. Pr. 137b3. See Altman, Guardians in Action, 227-29 for the claim that the indivisible One is Plato’s invention, and thus his hypothesis.

106. As suggested by the presence of both Glaucion and Adeimantus at Pr. 126a2, to say nothing of the dialogue’s evident difficulty. For Catherine Zuckert’s early placement of Parmenides, see William H. F. Altman, “Review of Catherine Zuckert, Plato’s Philosophers.” Polis 27 (2010), 147-150.


110. See Pr. 143a2-9, especially λαμβάνειν τῇ διανοίᾳ at 143a7.


112. See Pr. 158c2-7, where δυναίμαι is linked for the first time to ἁπειρὸν πλῆθος (cf. Pr. 158c6-7 and 165c2) albeit by using τῇ διανοίᾳ ἀφελέεσθαι instead of λαμβάνειν τῇ διανοίᾳ, as at 165a8-c5 and 143a7. For further analysis, see Altman, Guardians in Action, section §12.


114. Pr. 130c5-d2.

115. Pr. 130c1-4.

116. Pr. 130b3-6. For the centrality of 130b7-10, see Altman, Guardians in Action, 276n257 and 281-82.

117. Consider the verb θαυμάζειν in both the first and last sentences of Socrates’ first speech in Alcibiades Major (Alc. 103a1 and 104c4), and then confirmed in the young man’s reply (104d4). Clearly the speech’s second sentence—on the Sign, with a promise of future enlightenment about it (103a6)—is intentionally designed to provoke wonder.

118. Cicero, Tusculan Disputations, 5.10 (translation mine): Socrates, however, called philosophy down from the heavens first [primus philosophiam devocavit e caelo], and placed it in the cities, and introduced it even into the home; he forced it inquire about life, and customs, and things both good and bad.”

119. For “dying nobly” (καλῶς θνήσκειν), cf. Simonides’ epitaph on the heroes of Platea in Greek Anthology 7.253 with Ep. 334e1; indeed Ep. 334d6-335a2 further validates a post-eudaemonist reading of Plato. Moreover, what makes Alcibiades worth Socrates’ time is the fact that he would
rather die than be a coward (Alc. 115d5-14); this means he prefers what is καλόν to life, i.e., to what is good (115b1-c7).


122. See Opsomer, In Search of Truth, 157n141; cf. 135n23.


125. Cf. Denyer, Plato, Alcibiades, 236.

126. Phdr. 230a3-6.

127. However difficult to separate: see Alc. 124e7-b3, 129a2-6, 130e8-9, and 132c7-10.

128. See Ap. 31d2-4 and Thg. 128d2-5.

129. See Cf. Gregory Vlastos, “Letter to the Editor,” Times Literary Supplement (January 19-25, 1990), 63: “the daimonion sometimes vetoes quite trivial, unreflective, actions. Thus when he [sc. Socrates] is about to stand up in the palaestra the ‘voice’ says ‘Sit’ [importantly false; it sounds—Plato never implies it speaks in words—when Socrates has decided to stand and is about to do so], and sit he does. But neither here is there any trumping of rational argument: there is no rational argument to trump.”

130. See Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, “Letter to the Editor.” Times Literary Supplement (January 26-February 1, 1990), 80: “We find it wholly implausible that Socrates could have made such a morally significant decision [sc. to engage in politics; see Ap. 31d2-5] purely on impulse.” For more on this, see Ascent to the Good, section §13.

131. Terry Penner never tires of making this claim and therefore it can be found it in any of his writings.


133. Alc2. 138a1.

134. For “god” and Sign in Alcibiades Major, see Alc. 105d5, 105d7, 124c8, 127e6, and 135d6

135. See (1) in the following note.

136. Plato emphasizes this shift in the usual way, i.e., with repeating word patterns: (1) cf. 141a6-7 and 148a1-2, picking up on the first line at 138a1, and (2) cf. 146c6-7 and 148a9-b4.


138. In Alc. 105d2-4, Socrates was the only one who could help him to realize his ambitions.

139. Alc. 150e5-8 (Lamb modified).

140. Tarrant, “Olympiodorus and Proclus,” 20-21: “Looking into Socrates’ intellect is in Proclus’ view the culmination of a foreshadowing of the climax of the dialogue. Surely, therefore, Proclus associated this focus upon Socrates’ mind with the culmination of the climax itself.”

141. Tarrant, “Olympiodorus and Proclus,” 23: “This is where Olympiodorus would have him [sc. Alcibiades] being told to look into Socrates’ soul (as an alternative to his own soul), while Eusebius would have him being told that he needs to look upon god.” Cf. 27: “There really is no hint that Albinus has any movement towards an external god in mind as a likely outcome of reading the Alcibiades, and every reason to believe that the dialogue is already encouraging what it will encourage for the Neoplatonists—reversion to one’s own inner self.”
Alcibiades: Look now, I will crown you with this garland [it had been intended for the gods,] as I consider you have given me such good advice; and to the gods [this distinction creates the foreclosure] we shall offer both garlands and all the other customary things when I see that day has come. And come it will ere long, if they are willing.” Cf. Alc. 135d3-6.

On this important passage, see also Matthew Sharpe, “Reviewing Megalopsychia: Reflections on the Alcibiades II” in Johnson and Tarrant, Alcibiades and the Socratic Lover Educator, 134-146. London: Bristol Classical Press, 2012, 145. This paper is dedicated to him.

Note that “Socrates” in this paper never refers to anyone other than “Plato’s Socrates,” and does so without introducing any Vlastos-inspired distinctions.


For Jacobi’s influence on Schleiermacher, see Mariña, Transformation of the Self, 46-49, and Curran, Doctrine and Speculation, 8: “Schleiermacher’s reverence for Jacobi is well attested.”


For Jacobi’s exotericism as it bears on this sentence, see 45-51 of William H. F. Altman, The German Stranger: Leo Strauss and National Socialism. Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2011; also relevant is 63-74 (“Self-Deification in German Philosophy”).

My unpublished “Towards a Theology of Self-Deception” (2006) is available upon request for those who may be interested.

Cf. Denyer, Plato, Alcibiades, 191: “The maxim [sc. ‘Know Thyself’] enjoins us to know our limits.”

For Plato’s awareness of the fragility of εὐδαιμονία through its dependence on events post-mortem, see Mx. 247a4-6.


Cf. Grg. 493a2-3, Cra. 400c1-9, and Alc. 128e10-130d6.
I want to say something about the ethics of non-intention. That is, I mean to say something regarding the meaning, and/or what is meant, in artistic works involving non-intentional procedures. The language that I am employing here, which is our ordinary common-sense language, seems to assure me that I am capable of writing something meaningful in regard to my intentions. This is the sense of the French locution vouloir-dire that Jacques Derrida often employs. In English, this is highlighted by the double sense of the verb “mean” where “to mean” signifies “to intend” and also “to signify.” When I make such statements such as “I want to
say...” I find myself in the rather uncomfortable relationship with what I “wish” to discuss in this paper, namely the writing of non-intention. This non-intentional writing is perhaps more appropriately associated with John Cage’s paradoxical phrase: “I have nothing to say and I am saying it.” In one sense, we can take this as signifying an attitude of non-expressivity. But, further, it can perhaps be taken in the more radical sense of possessing nothing to say, or that what can be said cannot be a possession of one’s own. The upshot of this certain non-possession is that what can be said is not in the subject but always already out in the network of differential traces. It is through this problematic that I will approach the possibility of an ethics of non-intention, which may be an ethics of Gelassenheit or an ethics of dissemination: a “po-ethics.”

Gerald L. Bruns regards Cage’s chance operations as practical form of Heideggerian Gelassenheit and links Cage’s work to the ethics of Levinas, while Joan Retallack describes non-intention as facilitating a reconfiguration of the structures of attention. For N. Katherine Hayles, non-intention leads to a subversion of the anthropomorphic perspective. However, for another group of Cage scholars, non-intentionality has increasing been viewed with suspicion. Frances Dyson associates non-intentionality with passivity, silence and a retreat from meaning, a view which is reiterated by Douglas Kahn, who describes chance and indeterminacy as silencing techniques to eradicate the sociality of sound. This line of argument is continued by Seth Kim-Cohen in a forceful dismissal of strategies of avoiding expression, since the intention to do so, he reasons, would void the principle of non-intentionality. There are certainly grounds for calling into question Cage’s separation of music and sound from politics and meaning. However, it would be quite wrong to equate chance and non-intentionality with a denial of articulation and signification, or with a will to silence. This paper seeks to argue that the chance operation, rather than constituting a law or principle, functions as a quasi-phenomenological epoché that suspends intention and decision in the course of the compositional process. Further, I argue that the nonintentional epoché opens up a kind of ethics. Here, I wish to contribute to this debate by examining the chance operation in terms of Derrida’s critique of philosophical voluntarism, from his early notions of iterability through to the later work on justice. Here I demonstrate that the later work of Derrida’s “ethical turn”—where it concerns the question or “madness” of decision—extends an inquiry which was already underway in the earlier work.
John Cage not only composed music and multimedia works but also generated a considerable amount of literature by means of chance operations, such as his mesostic poems. Like the poet Jackson Mac Low, who adopted chance procedures in 1954 after encountering Cage’s *Music of Changes* (1951), Cage constructed a number of texts based on other texts, where aleatory operations are used to “write-through” the source text. Tyrus Miller suggests that the writing-through of Ezra Pound’s *Cantos*, in separate instances by both Cage and Mac Low, function as an ethico-political gesture, that is actively anti-political rather than being simply aesthetic and apolitical.

In one of the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard (1988-89), a member of the audience puts a question to Cage concerning the experimental methodology of his writing. The participant points to an apparent contradiction between non-intention (taking things as they are) and intention (compositional choice) in Cage’s description of the construction of one of his aleatorically determined mesostic poems. As the participant points out, when it came to words rather than sounds, Cage seemed to be violating his own compositional rules by censoring the results of chance operations—as Cage had stated in the previous week’s lecture: “I went through and eliminated all the words I didn’t like.” In his defence, Cage explains his methods in the following terms: that he is “hunting” for ideas and in order to uncover them he must eliminate any other word that might get in the way of these ideas. Although Cage here speaks of musical or non-syntactic qualities (aesthetic qualities), the overriding determination for eliminating certain words would seem, rather, to be a concern with meaning. It would seem that Cage refuses to allow the limitless generation of meaning because such a relinquishing of authorial responsibility might inadvertently misrepresent his views on certain issues: such as his objections to militarism and government. Thus, Cage responds to his interlocutor:

...I don’t know what it is that I will find but I’m looking in the mix for them [a series of words] and the only way that I can see them is to take out the ones that don’t belong to them. And I use the word “like.” It’s because I’m in the position of writing a text that uses words. It’s a different kind of language but it is every now and then highly suggestive, I think. And I want that suggestion to be in a spirit that I agree with.

This exchange raises some interesting questions about an experimental ethics, or the ethics of non-intentionality. In particular we might ask: how does the sur-
rendering of intentional agency come to terms with the call to ethical-political responsibility? Before returning to this issue I will briefly review Cage’s project to see what is at stake here. We might say that his project can be best summed up in terms of the idea of “experimental action,” which he describes as “simply an action the outcome of which is not foreseen.”

In order to arrive at the unforeseen, the unexpected, or the surprising, Cage employs chance operations such as the use of the I Ching where coins are tossed in substitution of making choices (in the writing of the Norton Lectures [I-V] Cage utilised Jim Rosenberg’s generative software “Mesolist”). For Cage, the chance operation forms a constraint that puts out of action “taste and memory.”

In his music composition, the constraint acts as a way of suspending judgments which might exclude certain sounds on aesthetic grounds (taste). Similarly, the constraint functions to prevent the habitual repetition of what the composer has done before or heard before (memory). I wish to argue here that the constraint functions as a form of bracketing, or an epoché, in phenomenological terms. In order to be effective, the rigor of the constraint must be observed. All outcomes must be accepted without revision. If one did not accept the final outcomes, and proceeded to consciously and subjectively alter the work then the whole point of the constraint would be voided. As Cage observes in an interview (with Joan Retallack): “It’s very clearly stated in the I Ching that if you don’t like the results of chance operations you have no right to use them (laughs),” and elsewhere: “chance operations are a discipline, and improvisation is rarely a discipline... Improvisation is generally playing what you know, and what you like, and what you feel...” It is this perceived departure from rigour that concerns the questioner. If Cage abides by the chance operation in music absolutely, then why does he not do so in the production of poetry?

It seems that, as Cage sees it, sounds can be taken as they are, in any contingent arrangement because, rather than being “suggestive,” they merely fall into a non-meaningful, non-symbolic, regime of form, or are, alternatively, incorruptible indices of the real, while words and language, in contrast—possessing suggestion and connotation—carry the risk of ideological determination. Words and representation call for responsibility. In conversation with Joan Retallack he describes his removal of unwanted words as the consequence of a different way of working. He explains that when working with words rather than sounds he is paying attention to the nature of language, where: “The sound sometimes becomes so powerful that one can put meaning aside. And vice versa.” Words, in the syntactical arrangement of sentence or message, on the other hand, represent for Cage “training, enforcement, and finally the military.” It is not that Cage’s ethics need
to be put into question. Cage argues for a strong libertarian ethics of individualism and freedom: a normative ethics of principals. However, a very different ethics presents itself in Cage’s work, and the shift from the modality of sounds to the modality of words marks the site of contestation between these two kinds of ethics. When it is a matter of sounds, it is an ethics of Gelassenheit, where no sound is privileged over another in accordance with taste, likes or dislikes. Further the epochē (the chance operation) that enforces this letting contains within it the ethics of a promise that must be kept. When it comes to words, however, Cage seems to be tempted to overrule chance determinations in the name of an ethics of principle.

VOULOIR-DIRE

“I have nothing to say and I am saying it” might, at first, sound like an attitude of semantic irresponsibility or a declaration of emptiness and silence. But, on the contrary, Cage takes responsibility for his words (I am saying it), even though these words do not come from an ego cogito that would take ownership in the sense of an originary source in absolute proximity to a self that is fully present to the moment of their genesis (I have nothing to say). The need for intervention in Cage’s chance-determined writing at first seems to confirm the common view that either such texts can have no meaning at all, since there is no intention involved, or that where intention is not present there will always be a risk of meaning betraying its author’s principles. When Cage says he has nothing to say, we can understand this in the sense of having nothing to express or, better, of having no need to express something or to represent, or having no desire to impart anything from himself. Further, this can be read in terms of Meister Eckhart’s stricture of dispossession of one’s will to possess one’s self—to sink into nothing (Cage was an avid reader of Eckhart). But still, he is “saying it” or, rather, letting it be said.

The artistic, or musical idea of expression that Cage eschews is synonymous to the linguistic idea of expression. The word suggests the projection of something inner, subjective and personal—an emotion, something envisaged or imagined, an inner hearing, or a mood—to an outside, where it resonates with the empathetic emotions of an audience or receiver. Thus, the common view of language regards speech as the voluntary expression of an inner stratum of pre-linguistic sense that is transported and made transportable by words. What is common to both aesthetic and linguistic conceptions of expression is the model which describes the outward projection of something inside, which is always privileged as primary,
original, and prior to the outside realm of social relations and fulfilled meaning. The root meaning of expression derives from the Latin *exprimere*, consisting of *ex*, meaning “out,” and *primere*, which signifies “to press.” Expression thus means to “press out.”

This metaphysical model of expression is encapsulated by Derrida’s observation in *Speech and Phenomena*: “Ex-pression is exteriorization. It imparts to a certain outside a sense which is first found in a certain inside.” Here Derrida examines the motivations behind Husserl’s move in the *Logical Investigations* to make a rigorous distinction between “expression” (*Ausdruck*) and “indication” (*Anzeichen*), where expression refers to meaningful signs (primarily those of living speech), and indication refers to empirical forms of signification including symbols, marks, indexical traces, and gestural/facial expressions. One of the aims of Derrida, in *Speech and Phenomena*, is to work towards the unsettling of what he sees as a “transcendental” voluntaristic privilege in Husserl’s work. It is important at this point to observe that the phenomenological term “intentionality”—which means, the aiming of consciousness toward something—should not be confused with the ordinary non-phenomenological usage (that I am employing in “non-intentionality”). But still, phenomenological intentionality remains, for Derrida, “caught up in the tradition of a voluntaristic metaphysics—that is, perhaps, in metaphysics as such.” As Derrida puts it: “for if intentionality never simply meant will, it certainly does seem that in the order of expressive experiences... Husserl regards intentional consciousness and voluntary consciousness as synonymous.”

The very idea of consciousness, for Husserl, cannot be disassociated from a spirit (*Geist*), a will, or a pure intention. Husserl wishes to exclude from the category of expression anything that escapes this animation of a “voice” (whether interior and silent, or externalised and sounded). In Derrida’s view, what Husserl cannot help reproducing is the traditional metaphysical model that consists of voluntary exteriorisation of a pre-expressive substratum of sense that is both pre-linguistic and self-transparent.

Expression is, thus, not only exteriorization but, moreover, voluntary exteriorization. What is expressed is meaning (*Bedeutung*), an ideal object with no real worldly existence. Meaning inhabits and animates the ideality of expression as a “wanting to say.” For Derrida, Husserl confines this operation to the act of speech, even if this act takes place within the isolation of solitary mental life (silently speaking to oneself). In the auto-affectivity of hearing oneself speak (*s’entendre parler*) meaning seems to the subject to be produced from within itself. The
meaning—what the speaker wants and means to say—is auditioned in the immediate moment of its production and instantly presented to the consciousness of the speaker which secures it as the intended meaning. In expression, meaning—that which wants to say—goes out of oneself while remaining before oneself; in consciousness, inside oneself as self-present to oneself.

As far as Derrida is concerned there is a privilege given in both phenomenology and linguistics to the plenitude of intentional meaning; of wanting-to-say (vouloir-dire) that would exist ideally behind and before every expression, and would find its perfect vehicle in living speech. “Vouloir-dire,” is the locution used by Derrida to translate the verbal form of Husserl’s use of the German word Bedeutung (“meaning”). Although both words would be translated into English as “meaning” or “signification,” the literal sense is “wanting-to-say.” What Derrida is locating in Husserl is the metaphysical idea which insists that behind and before any expression there lies something originating and intrinsic to it. The conception of a silent intuitive presence before speech rests on a presupposition that “prior to signs and outside them... something such as consciousness is possible,” and moreover, “even before the distribution of its signs in space and in the world, consciousness can gather itself up in its own presence...” In the translator’s introduction to Writing and Difference, Alan Bass points out that Derrida’s deployment of vouloir-dire refers to the metaphysical concept of voluntarism, the critique of which, he observes, emerges from Heidegger’s confrontation with Nietzsche’s doctrine of the will. That is, it would seem to form a unique polar opposite to the later Heidegger’s notion of a non-willing thinking of Gelassenheit. What is at stake is the primacy of a certain fusion of will and consciousness, that wants to say and means to say, which, for Derrida, constitutes the illusion of voluntary meaning being present to itself. We might say that this critique of the primacy of the will is Derrida’s way of continuing Heidegger’s thought in a demythologised tone.

ITERABILITY

In 1971 Derrida published an essay, “Signature Event Context,” in which—in opposition to J. L. Austin’s conception of perfectly successfully communicating speech acts that serve as the basis of all communication—Derrida introduces the general condition of “iterability” in which meaning in each case is cut off from the original intention of the speaker. In 1977, the essay was translated into English and appeared in the journal Glyph, in which, in its second issue, there appeared a polemic response to Derrida’s essay from the American philosopher John R.
Searle. In response to Searle’s attack, Derrida wrote “Limited Inc abc...,” and an Afterword, “Toward an Ethic of Discussion,” in answer to questions submitted to him by Gerald Graff (the editor of the book Limited Inc 23 which contains all three texts). What is in question, in Derrida’s engagement with Austin, and subsequent argument with Searle, is precisely what is at stake in Speech and Phenomena: “the plenitude of intentional meaning [vouloir-dire], and all of the other values—of consciousness, presence, and originary intuition—which organize phenomenology” (LInc, 58). That is, the primacy of intention in the fulfilment of meaning. In order to cast doubt on the possibility of the ethico-political responsibility of non-intentionality the classical move would be to conceive of a model of communication that would be absolutely uncontaminated by aleatory effects, and this is what, in Derrida’s view, Austin, and Searle, seek to achieve.

For Austin and Searle, successful communication depends upon an intentional force that is transparently delivered and received under the optimal conditions of the localised physical proximity of both parties, and an absolutely constraining context. This pure performative would be the kind of utterance against which all other (impure) utterances could be judged. Derrida complicates this model by arguing that not only are utterances able to be interpreted (and misinterpreted) in conditions where the source of intention is empirically absent but, further, in the pure instances of the performative speech act under optimal conditions, even when all parties are present, there is always some degree of interpretation involved. Meaning is not immediately present to all involved. Derrida seeks to undo the model of the pure exemplary performative by focusing on the elements that Austin wishes to exclude from successful communication, even though Austin himself recognises them as structural possibilities. Austin excludes the possibility of citation or “quotability” in the performative utterance—along with instances of non-serious intent, or non-ordinary linguistic exceptions as in the case of poetry—insisting that such “stage utterances” would be abnormal or parasitic. Derrida’s conclusion is that any pure speech act is already contaminated by the very elements that would define an impure speech act. This, he says, is due to the condition that he calls “iterability” which structures not only the possibility of any linguistic act but also the impossibility of such acts.

In order for something to mean something it must be repeatable. There would be no communicable signification, no re-cognition, if something presented itself only once. Iterability is this possibility of repetition but, moreover, it is a repetition that alters, that never returns to the same place in the text, never returns
an unalterable univocal meaning. In this sense, for Derrida, pure repetition is impossible, and iterability is structured by both identity and difference. This is because iterability is already divided or split. Each time a self-contained identity is constituted in a signifying element it is simultaneously split because this identity can only be maintained in accordance with a differential relation to other elements not present. In this way, there is always a non-present remainder of the differential and iterable mark. This also means that for Derrida, any utterance or signifying element can not only be taken out of context, but also radically disengaged from an originating intention. Every mark, whether it be spoken or written, has “the possibility of its functioning being cut off, at a certain point, from its ‘original’ desire-to-say-what-one-means [vouloir-dire] and from its participation in a saturable and constraining context” (LInc, 12). In this way, iterability divides intention, “preventing it from being fully present to itself in the actuality of its aim, or of its meaning” (LInc, 57). Each signifying element can further “be cited, put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable” (LInc, 12, Derrida’s emphasis). Iterability contaminates what it enables to repeat. The consequence of this, as Derrida sees it, is that “it leaves no choice but to mean to say (to say) something that is (already, always, also) other than what we mean (to say)” (LInc, 62). In this way accidents in communication are never just accidents but are, rather, structural to all communications. The gist of this is that a speaker’s (or writer’s) intention can never be unquestionably relied upon as a way of determining the meaning or what is meant by a particular utterance.

It’s not that Derrida wants to annihilate intention—to declare it absent from any linguistic exchange—which is how Searle mis-understands him—rather, what iterability calls into question is any absolute guarantee that intention may seem to provide for the fulfilment and delimitation of meaning. Iterability does not limit or cause an absolute breakdown of intention or a failure to get things done in the world of social relations. What it limits is intention’s undividedness: its self-present securement of its own operation. However, the dividedness or cleft [Brissure] of iterability is very far from constituting a negative condition. Derrida employs the botanical term “dehiscence” which, significantly, relates iterability to another important word for Derrida: “dissemination.” Dehiscence refers to the propagation or dissemination of pollen by the anther (part of the stamen) by splitting in such a way that the two chambers appear to be one (dehiscence also occurs in fruit and seeds). As Derrida notes in “The Double Session,” it is a kind of “quasi-tearing.” In this way, the dehiscence of iterability “limits what it makes possible,
while rendering its rigor and purity impossible” (LInc, 59). It has the workings of an “undecidable contamination”—and Derrida emphasises the positive sense of this—that is essential for the possibility of production and reproduction. It is both generative and disseminative. If non-intentional writing is generative, in this sense of dehiscence and dissemination, it is not due to an animating intention of an ego cogito; it is due to the generative possibilities of the system of language itself; or, better, of the systematic play of differences; the anonymous field of spacings.

THE ETHICO-TELEOLOGICAL VALUES OF PHILOSOPHY

Iterability may seem, at first like a kind of trivial inversion of the normal way of conceiving semio-linguistic communication but what is at stake here is an ethical consideration. That is, most importantly, the consideration of iterability leads us to a reconfiguration of the ethical. What is presupposed in the intentional model that Austin and Searle advocate is what Derrida calls the “univocity of ethico-teleological values in language” (LInc, 76), where “every methodological aspect of discourse involves decision… the more confident, implicit, buried the metaphysical decision is, the more its order, and calm, reigns over methodological technicity” (LInc, 93]. Those concepts that would seek to govern from the centre, Rodolphe Gasché describes as “desiderata,” which, since Plato, have been ethico-teleological values “not only of what is but what ought to be.” In Derrida’s terms, these values, as we have seen, not only animate hierarchical binary distinctions where the negative term is subordinate to the positive, but also emphasise a priority in which one concept precedes another in such a way that the metaphysical tradition conceives “good to be before evil, the positive before the negative, the pure before the impure, the simple before the complex, the essential before the accidental, the imitated before the imitation, etc.” (LInc, 93). In such a way, a hierarchy of ethico-teleological distinctions are set up in Austin’s theory of the speech act: standard/non-standard, pure/parasitic, etc. Moreover, Derrida continues, the methodological strategy of first positing the pure, simple, normal, complete, in order to then think the derivative, the impure, the non-standard, and the accidental, conforms entirely to this metaphysical telos. By maintaining Austin’s opposition between serious or normative forms of discourse and non-standard or parasitic forms, such as poetry, and arguing that only the serious forms are able to fully realise an intention, Searle, in Derrida’s view, insists that normative linguistic exchange ought to be serious and literal since only such language can be fully intentional, and that language ought to tend toward such an ideal: the perfect
communicative transferal. This reproduces, according to Derrida, “the given ethical conditions of a given ethics” (LInc, 122, Derrida’s emphasis). There is, as Derrida cautions, nothing pejorative in such an ethics. The prescription of an “ought” that is normative, and subscribes to an ideal purity, does not produce a “bad” or “wrong” ethics. What it does, however, is to exclude or marginalize all other possibilities—possibilities such as Cage’s po-ethics—and disallows the opening of another ethics which may be an an-ethics—not simply an anti-ethics.

Derrida shows us the inherent problems that are built in to a model of ethics centred on intention as a wanting-to-say. But there still remains the question of how, or if, authors of non-intentional works, such as Cage and Mac Low, can be held responsible for what they produce? How can one, in the play, acceptance, or letting of language, bypass definitive semanticism without surrendering ethical-political responsibility? In the “Afterword” of Limited Inc, in reply to a question from Gerald Graff (the book’s editor), Derrida explains how the singularity of the undecidable “opens the field of decision” (LInc, 116):

It calls for a decision in the order of ethical-political responsibility. It is even its necessary condition. A decision can only come into being in a space that exceeds the calculable program that would destroy all responsibility by transforming it into a programmable effect of determinate causes. There can be no moral or political responsibility without this trial and this passage by way of the undecidable. Even if a decision seems to take only a second and not to be preceded by any deliberation, it is structured by this experience and experiment of the undecidable (LInc, 116, Derrida’s emphasis).

This establishes the framework for his later work on law and justice where, in “Force of Law,” Derrida maintains that justice depends upon an epochē, a suspension of the law in its generalizable form, in order to open a space for a decision that does not fall into programmable calculability: to provide the conditions for what Stanley Fish calls a “fresh judgment.” He argues, “A decision that didn’t go through the ordeal of the undecidable would not be a free decision, it would only be the programmable application or unfolding of a calculable process.” The law in each singular case must be reinvented but this reinvention involves both suspending and conserving an existing law. The decision of a judge cannot slavishly conform to the law, as if the judicial system were a calculating machine, but neither should such decisions be arbitrary without respect to the law. What is interesting here is the epochē or suspension and how it functions. The epochē of
chance that Cage utilises in his production of texts could be said to follow a similar rationale. Judgment is suspended for long enough for the possibility to open up for a “fresh judgment.” In this way, non-intentional writing opens up a space for an ethico-political decision that is largely unforeseen. If the decision were to be foreseeable it would be assured of its felicity to its own principles and, thus, be programmable. The final decisions that Cage makes are made possible, and even structured by, the experiment of the chance operation which allows for the unforeseen. In Derrida’s judicial case the law is intermittently suspended so that a fresh decision can come into view. In Cage’s case the decision is suspended in order that a fresh analysis or reading can be made, which then, in a supplementary step allows a free decision. But in each case, in each ethico-political decision, it is singularity that is prioritised over the generalising principle. This kind of “loose” phronesis of an ethics of dissemination—an ethics under erasure—is described by John D. Caputo in Against Ethics:

Judging attaches itself to the incommensurability of the individual, to the exception, and knows how and when to lift the universal, to put it out of action, which is what is meant by a suspension or epoché. It is not a question of suspending judgement in order to find the eidos or the law, as in classical phenomenology, but of suspending the eidos or the law in order to judge what is happening. In this perversely deconstructionistic untranscendental Urteilslehre (doctrine of Judgment), it is not a question of the suspension of judgment but of judgments of suspension, of judgments suspended over an abyss.29

Such an operation involves, in the most basic terms, re-invention, and the bringing about of something new and different. At this point it must be emphasised that I am not equating iterability—or deconstruction or différance—with Cagean non-intentionality or indeterminacy. Derrida makes it very clear in his answer to Graff that neither undecidability (L1nc, 148) nor différance (L1nc, 149) equate to indeterminacy.30 The undecidable, as we understand it in the Derridean sense, refers to a highly determined strategy of locating and deploying certain terms as non-concepts (such as pharamakon, hymen, parergon, etc.), which, by oscillating between two possibilities, resist the structure of binary opposition without necessarily forming a third term. It is by way of such strategies that Derrida puts the primacy of the self-presence of meaning-to-say into question in order to discover its force and necessity, and determine—in the act of tracing each exigency back to its deployment in the text of philosophy—its “intrinsic limit” (LInc, 93). But
at the same time these undecidables are “pragmatically determined” (LInc, 148). At many of the decisive moments in each text, meaning is, in a certain way, found, and any deconstructive intervention must proceed not by way of the imposition of a will, but by the necessity of what the text demands and according to its syntactical structure:

The *incision* of deconstruction, which is not a voluntary decision or an absolute beginning, does not take place just anywhere, or in an absolute elsewhere. An incision, precisely, it can be made only according to the lines of force and forces of rupture that are localizable in the discourse to be deconstructed... This analysis is made in the general movement of the field, and is never exhausted by the conscious calculation of a “subject.”

Deconstruction, thus, always begins wherever we find ourselves in the text (of philosophy). We might say that there is some element of chance in Derrida’s work, but such contingency is far removed from Cage’s chance operations. However, we could say that if there is a certain constraint within Derrida’s methodology, it consists of finding the resources for the deconstruction of an author’s text(s) within the confines of the author’s text(s).

THE SWERVE

In Derrida’s response to Graff, he adamantly states that “I do not believe I have ever spoken of ‘indeterminacy,’ whether in regard to ‘meaning’ or anything else” (LInc 148). This is, however, not strictly the case. In 1983 (five years before the Afterword), in “Mes chances. Au rendez-vous de quelques stéréophonies épicuriennes” (translated in to English as “My Chances/ Mes Chances: A Rendezvous with some Epicurean Stereophonies”) Derrida explores indeterminacy in a slightly different context. Asked to speak on the subjects of psychoanalysis and literature, at the Washington School of Psychiatry, Derrida questions the inherent possibilities of indeterminacy that may occur in a lecture which is destined to those addressees (*destinaires*) he does not know, and who belong to a field that is not his own. Drawing on the ideas of the Democritian atomists, Derrida suggests that the lecture may fall upon those to whom it may or may not have been destined, reach its destination by way of “a chance open to some *parenklisis* or *clinamen*.” In the cosmology of Lucretius, atoms in the void are constantly falling downwards in parallel paths. The *clinamen* is the slight swerve in motion causing the atoms to collide with each other, which leads to the creation of phenomena. The swerve is

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also related to the genesis of man’s free will since it effects the atomic make-up
of the mind. In Derrida’s use, it constitutes the spacing and play of the trace be-
tween significance and insignificance, aim and fall, destining and destinerrancy.
The clinamen, in these terms, is purely contingent.

Drawing on this Epicurean model, Joan Retallack describes Cage’s chance opera-
tions as a composed clinamen, belonging to a poethical attitude: “a certain poet-
ics of responsibility with the courage of the swerve, the project of the wager.”35
The swerve, the unpredictable shift in direction, as Retallack proposes, redirects
the “geometry of attention,” and has the potential of jolting us out of the de-
fault set of predispositions that Pierre Bourdieu calls the “habitus.”36 The swerve
constitutes “the collision with contingency that dislodges us from enervated pat-
terns into a charged apprehension of something new.”37 In contrast to Derrida,
the figure of the swerve, in Retallack’s sense, is not something arbitrary but the
result of an imposed and determined operation or process. For Derrida, on the
other hand, there is a certain intertwining between chance and necessity. Drawing
from cybernetics and theories of dynamic systems, he observes that the signify-
ing elements of language “simultaneously incline toward increasing the reserves of
random indetermination as well as the capacity for coding and overcoding or, in
other words, for control and self-regulation.”38 In this way, the tension between
randomness and code both disrupts and regulates “the restless, unstable inter-
play of the system.”39 Derrida falls upon Lucretius’ characterisation of the fall-
ing atoms as being composed not just of matter but of letters or graphic marks
(stoikheion), where the swerve causes random combinations. A slight deflection in
one letter separates two words voluntas (will) and voluptus (pleasure), which are
intrinsically linked in Lucretius’ thought. The substitutability of the one letter in
these Latin words has, due to a certain clinamen or destinerrancy in the early edi-
tions of Lucretius’ poem De rerum natura, resulted in an indeterminate reading
perhaps skewing Lucretius’ notion of freedom toward pleasure, leading Derrida
from Lucretius to Freud’s pleasure principle.40

LIMITED/UNLIMITED RESPONSIBILITY

The central question of poethics is, as Retallack puts it: “How can writing and
reading be integral to making sense and newsense (sometimes taken for nonsense)
as we enact an ongoing poetics of everyday life?”41 It is to a similar question that
Derrida responds:
I try to write (in) the space in which is posed the question of speech and meaning. I try to write the question: (what is) meaning to say [vouloir dire]? Therefore it is necessary in such a space, and guided by such a question, that writing literally mean nothing. Not that it is absurd in the way that absurdity has always been in solidarity with metaphysical meaning. It simply tempts itself, tenders itself, attempts to keep itself at the point of exhaustion of meaning.42

A writing that tenders itself at the boundary of the exhaustion of meaning, Derrida emphasises, is not absurd, nor, would we expect, irrational or aesthetic—either in the sense of formal autonomy, or the sense of functioning as a signifier for expression (or life) itself (wanting to express without meaning as much as wanting to mean). We are reminded of Heidegger’s insistence that the irrationality of aesthetic Erlebnis would be the completion of representational thinking (Vorstellung), and thus “in solidarity with metaphysical meaning.”

But this play, which involves a risk of meaning, does not escape from ethico-political responsibility. Or, by way of an inversion, we might say that it is an ethico-political responsibility to keep things in play. On the one hand, as Niall Lucy observes, “neither ‘text’ nor ‘writing’ can avoid being ethical-analytical.”43 On the other hand, the discourse of philosophy cannot escape, as Lucy argues, the unwanted effects of what it claims to be purely different from, namely, literature and the “non-serious.” Thus, there can always be other readings or misreadings of any text. An author has responsibility for their text, but since intention is dispersed across various authorial motives, desires, citations, quotations, other authors, and so forth, responsibility, as Derrida claims in “Limited Inc a b c...,” can only be limited responsibility (LInc, 75). Or better, intention itself has only a limited responsibility. Language in the aleatoric poetry of the Language Poets, or of Cage, would call to be inflected according to an ethical-political decision that has only limited responsibility, yet the very necessity for keeping meaning in play is an unlimited responsibility.

Poethical texts inscribe the conditions of their own reception. They explicitly prescribe against the idea that there can be one singular univocal reading, and that such a reading could be directly attributed to an authorial intention. Part of the force of works engaging with non-intentionality, is their capacity to make explicit the implicit structure of iterability, and thus make legible that the conditions for reading the work do not involve a quest for authorial intentionality. The play of
the poetic text cannot escape the pull of ethico-analytic responsibility any more than philosophy can escape the effects of literature and the “nonserious.” What the structure of iterability shows is that any internality of an “expressed” meaning is already marked by an externality that consists of a textual spacing of differences and a citational network of referrals to other texts. This is no less true for the work of art. Expression, or the meaning to be expressed is, as Derrida maintains, “always already carried outside itself. It already differs (from itself) before any act of expression. And only on this condition can it ‘signify.’” What is given in a work of art is irreducible to an artist’s intention. Consequently, the model of intentional expression cannot be a reliable means to accessing what is given in the work of the work of art.

Cage’s “I have nothing to say and I am saying it” is not a statement of intellectual abandonment, or of ethico-political irresponsibility. It does not just indicate a suspension of expression as meaning-to-say but constitutes a putting into question of the primacy of intention as the guarantee of meaning and self-coincidence. In such a way, it opens up a space for a different kind of ethics. At this point we might go back and address the substance of the question posed by Cage’s interlocutor: why does Cage take out the words he does not like, rather than rigorously abide by the outcomes of the chance operations? We might answer that ethical decisions come to be made in the space opened up by the suspension of aesthetic decisions; in the space between aesthetics and ethics. Derrida’s philosophy and the non-intentional artistic works of Cage and Mac Low have one thing in common: they both work towards putting intention in its place; to prevent it from governing all “meaning” and interpretation; to dislodge it from its position of authority; to disrupt its illusion of immediacy and the efficient expedited express delivery of meaning that we see as the “postal,” or transmission, service of expression.

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NOTES

1. I take the notions of “an ethics of Gelassenheit” and “an ethics of dissemination” from John D. Caputo’s *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987). It must be noted, however, that Caputo in his later work despairs of any possibility of an ethics of Gelassenheit since Heidegger, by all indications, seems to exclude the idea of justice. The term “poethics” I take from Joan Retallack. It resonates with Caputo’s terms “theo-poetics” and “cosmo-poetics.”


7. A mesostic poem is much like an acrostic text but the vertical phrase, or spine—which in Cage’s poems often consist of proper names—runs down the middle rather than the edge. The term is attributed to Norman O. Brown.


11. Cage, *I-VI*, 15-6. The line “It’s because I’m in the position of writing a text that uses words,” is omitted from the written text. It can be heard in the recording [6’50” in] on the cassette tape supplied with the book.


21. There are two words in French that can be translated by the English word “meaning”: “sens” and “vouloir-dire.” The latter has connotations of volition as it is etymologically linked to *voluntas*, and can be translated as “meaning” or “to mean” but has strong connotations toward “want to say” or “will to say.” Derrida translates *bedeuten*, the verbal form of the word Husserl uses for “meaning” (*Bedeutung*) as vouloir-dire, a necessity since “sens” is reserved for the translation of the German word “Sinn,” and as Derrida explains in *Speech and Phenomena*, the French word “signification” presents problems because whereas in German and English one can say that a sign is without meaning (*bedeutungslos*), or that a sign is meaningful (*bedeutsame Zeichen*) to translate *Bedeutung* as *signification*, risks giving the sense of these expressions as the absurd “non-signifying sign,” and the redundant “signifying sign.” Cf. *Speech and Phenomena*, p. 17-18.
30. Derrida in his response in the Afterword is clearly irritated by Graff’s mis-construal of the notion of undecidability. What is named “undecidable” here seems to be the product of (at least) two authors: Graff, Derrida, and “Some American critics” (Searle among them) that Graff credits with accusing Derrida of “setting up a kind of ‘all or nothing’ choice between pure realisation of self-presence and complete freeplay or undecidability.” (*LI* 114). It could be said that the central theme of Derrida’s reply (to John Searle’s criticisms of “Signature Event Context”) in “Limited Inc a b c...” is the inevitable misreading and the shift that meaning takes when we attempt to understand each other. Thus the shift in meaning of “undecidability” is an example.
32. Jacques Derrida, “My Chances/Mes Chances: A Rendezvous with Some Epicurean Stereopho-


38. Derrida, Taking Chances, 2.

39. Derrida, Taking Chances, 2. Quentin Meillassoux makes the point that the notion of chance is dependent on the principle of sufficient reason. Thus, for Meillassoux, chance differs from contingency because the latter cannot be non-totalizable. He employs the example of the clinamen to make this point. See After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency. Trans. Ray Brassier (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), 99-101.

40. This indeterminate reading has been at the centre of as Derrida says “a classical philological problem.” Derrida, Taking Chances, 7. Natania Meeker points out that the early editions including the Oblongus and Quadratus manuscripts from the ninth and tenth centuries the lines in question are transcribed as: “libera per terras unde haec animantibus exstat, unde est haec, inquam, fatis avulsa voluptas, per quam progredimur quo ducit quemque voluntas.” The generally accepted rendering is: “libera per terras unde haec animantibus exstat, unde est haec, inquam, fatis avulsae voluptas, per quam progredimur quo ducit quemque voluptas.” See Natania Meeker, Voluptuous Philosophy: Literary Materialism in the French Enlightenment (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006). Also see Cyril Bailey, The Greek Atomists and Epicurus (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928).

41. Retallack, The Poethical Wager, 12. Retallack’s emphasis.

42. Derrida, Positions, 14.


44. Derrida, Positions, 33.
1. NUSSBAUM’S COMPLAINT

Martha Nussbaum begins The Therapy of Desire with the claim that “[t]wentieth-century philosophy, both in Europe and North America, has, until very recently, made less use of Hellenistic ethics than almost any other philosophical culture in the West since the fourth century B.C.E.” Nussbaum aims to remedy this neglect by attending to what she argues is the nature of Hellenism’s conception of *philosophical self-cultivation*, the complexity and unfamiliarity of which she believes has chronically hampered previous efforts to understand this tradition. By re-situating Hellenistic texts within a context that views philosophy as an eminently practical undertaking, one which primarily understands itself as an exercise in self-cultivation, she argues, Hellenism is a “very helpful way of balancing [moral philosophy’s] interest in common human problems” while “illuminating our own contemporary circumstances.” While Nussbaum acknowledges that traditional forms of folk self-cultivation were also a large part of the *Weltanschauung* of the Hellenistic world, and that the philosophers in this tradition had much “in common with religious and magical/superstitious movements [of] their culture,” she insists that:
What is distinctive about the contribution of the philosophers is that they assert that philosophy, and not anything else, is the art we require, an art that deals in valid and sound arguments, an art that is committed to the truth. These philosophers claim that the pursuit of logical validity, intellectual coherence, and truth delivers freedom from the tyranny of custom and convention, creating a community of beings who can take charge of their own life story and their own thought.⁴

It is her account of the specifically philosophical dimension of self-cultivation in Hellenistic ethics that Nussbaum tells us decisively separates her account from the account that Michel Foucault offers in his third volume of *The History of Sexuality,*⁵ *The Care of the Self,* which appeared in French a decade earlier than Nussbaum’s monograph. While commending Foucault for drawing scholarly attention to the “extent to which [Hellenistic philosophers] are not just teaching lessons, but also engaging in complex practices of self-shaping,” she argues that Foucault “fails to confront the fundamental commitment to reason that divides philosophical techniques du soi from other such techniques” and, because of this, she views his approach as “deeply problematic”.⁶ When scrutinising his reading of the Stoics, for example, Nussbaum complains that Foucault’s alternative “emphasis on habits and techniques du soi [...] too often obscures the dignity of reason,” and that although “many forms of life in the ancient world purveyed techniques du soi, ... what sets philosophy apart from popular religion, dream-interpretation, and astrology is its commitment to rational argument” (Nussbaum 1994: 353). Furthermore, in addition to disagreeing with the historical accuracy of Foucault’s account, Nussbaum tells us that his previous philosophical commitments severs him from the possibility of offering an account that does justice to the Hellenistic emphasis on rationality. In her scathing review of *The Use of Pleasure*⁷ in 1985, she argues that Foucault’s interest in classical self-cultivation in this work is a “re-treat from the principles that defined his career”; expanding on this view in her subsequently published *The Therapy of Desire,* she claims that “it is questionable whether Foucault can even admit the possibility of such a community of freedom, given his view that knowledge and argument are themselves tools of power.”⁸ In Nussbaum’s view, Foucault neither gives a historically accurate account of the practices and techniques of self-cultivation in the Hellenistic world, nor could he given the philosophical positions he had previously argued for so effectively in his earlier work.
On Nussbaum’s own reading, all the Hellenistic schools prioritised rationality and the use of reason in self-cultivation, and she adduces compelling textual evidence for her contention that a specifically philosophical conception of self-cultivation dominated the Hellenistic world. She cites Epicurus’s claim that philosophy must be primarily understood as therapy for the soul, before turning to the frequent references to this idea in the Stoic literature. Here she quotes Galen recounting the Stoic Chrysippus who tells us that, in addition to the “art called medicine,” there is a “corresponding art concerned with the diseased soul” which is called philosophy. Additionally Nussbaum finds further explicit support for this contention in Cicero’s writings on the early Stoics. She quotes the Roman statesman approvingly where he refers to the early Stoic writings that suggest that philosophy should be regarded as “a medical art of the soul” and by attending to it “we can become capable of doctoring ourselves.” Nussbaum believes that self-cultivation was necessarily philosophical at this time because she views Hellenistic ethics as organised according to an analogy that trades on a distinction between therapeutic procedures that apply to the body and those that apply to the soul. In the opening pages of The Therapy of Desire, she tells us that her work will not “attempt to [tell] the entire story of Hellenistic ethical thought,” nor try to provide a “systematic selective outline,” but rather it will present an account of Hellenistic ethics that follows a “central guiding … analogy between philosophy and medicine as arts of life.” In the same way that medicine treats bodily pathogens—so Nussbaum’s analogy runs—philosophy treats maladies of the soul, maladies that are either “produced by false beliefs” or by “emotions or passions.” She writes:

[Philosophy’s] arguments are to the soul as the doctor’s remedies are to the body. They can heal, and they are to be evaluated in terms of their power to heal. [...] This general picture of philosophy’s task is common to all three major Hellenistic schools, in both Greece and Rome.

The philosophical art of curing false beliefs and wayward passions should be understood as an “art whose tools are arguments, an art in which precise reasoning, logical rigor, and definitional precision have an important role to play.” Philosophical therapy is appropriate, Nussbaum argues, because of the nature of the malady: for the Hellenistics, “diseases of belief and social teaching” are what hamper human flourishing, so the only way “we can [become] truly free and truly flourishing” is through dialectical and deliberative practices, which she insists should be regarded as quintessentially philosophical. While the features of “pre-
cise reasoning, logical rigor, and definitional precision” still characterizes the discipline of philosophy in our own era, for Nussbaum, the use of such argumentation had a markedly different purpose in the Hellenistic world, one which aimed at the “achievement of flourishing human lives,” which meant that the “valuation of any particular argument must concern itself not only with logical form and the truth of premises, but also with the argument’s suitability for the specific maladies of its addressees.”20

Nussbaum is not alone in worrying about the historical accuracy of Foucault’s interpretation of Hellenistic self-cultivation, and she garners support for her view from Pierre Hadot, who Foucault acknowledges as a direct and powerful influence on his later works.21 In a footnote Nussbaum approvingly cites the first edition of Hadot’s *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* and his translated article “Forms of Life and Forms of Discourse in Ancient Philosophy,” both of which emphasise the explicitly philosophical nature of self-cultivation in the Hellenistic world, and go to great lengths to distinguish philosophical self-cultivation from the other modes of self-cultivation that were common in this era. Moreover, if Nussbaum had waited a year before publishing *Therapy*, she could have cited support for her view from Hadot’s own pointed comments on what he too regards as the lack of philosophy in Foucault’s account. In his 1995 *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, an English collected edition which includes the two texts Nussbaum cites, Hadot includes an extra chapter that strongly criticises Foucault’s neglect of the rational activities which Hadot claims were integral to the Hellenistic conception of self-cultivation. In this chapter, “Reflections on the Idea of the Cultivation of the Self,” Hadot bemoans the “tendency of modern thought” that views the ideas of “universal reason” and “universal nature” as being without “meaning anymore,” and suggests that Foucault, as an exemplar and committed advocate of this tendency, found it “convenient to ‘bracket’ them.”26 In a similar vein Hadot seems to have Foucault in mind in *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie antique?* [What is Ancient Philosophy?], which appeared in French the same year as the English edition of *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. Hadot does not mince his words when he tells us:

[The] danger, the worst of all, is to believe that one can do without philosophical reflection. The philosophical way of life must be justified in rational, motivated discourse, and such discourse is inseparable from the way of life. Nevertheless, we have to reflect critically on the ancient, modern, and oriental discourses which justify a given way of life. We must try to render explicit the reasons we act in such-and-such a way, and reflect
on our experience and that of others. Without such reflection, the philosophical life risks sinking into vapid banality, “respectable” feelings, or deviance.\textsuperscript{27}

In this article I will propose that there are three reasons why Nussbaum’s complaint misses its intended target. I will characterise the first two arguments as “positive” insofar as they deal directly with the account of philosophical self-cultivation offered in Foucault’s work, and because they relate to how Nussbaum misrepresents Foucault’s position. As well as listing the times Foucault explicitly emphasises the role of philosophy in Hellenistic self-cultivation (section 2), I will also explore the account of how the Hellenistics differentiated between the \textit{logos} of philosophy and the \textit{askesis} of self-cultivationary techniques offered in the work of John Sellars (sections 3 and 4). The third reason—which I will characterise as “negative”—concerns the supposedly alternative account that Nussbaum (and Hadot) offer of philosophical self-cultivation, one which I will argue does not adequately differentiate their own positions from Foucault’s (section 4). I will end by suggesting how resolving this debate in the light of Sellars’ work not only gives a more plausible account of Foucault’s own understanding of self-cultivation, but also leads us to a better understanding of Hellenistic self-cultivation itself.

2. PHILOSOPHICAL SELF-CULTIVATION IN THE CARE OF THE SELF

Given Foucault’s wide-ranging focus in \textit{The Care of the Self} and concomitantly-presented lectures, it is perhaps unsurprising that Nussbaum complains that his account of self-cultivation does not clearly emphasise its philosophical dimension. In the opening lecture on theme of the care of the self at the Collège de France in 1981 he tells us that over the “long summer of Hellenistic and Roman thought, the exhortation to care for oneself became so widespread that it became [….] a truly general cultural phenomenon.”\textsuperscript{28} Similarly, in a more polished version of the idea in \textit{The Care of the Self}, Foucault concedes that the theme of philosophical self-cultivation eventually worked “loose from its first philosophical meanings,” becoming “rather general in scope,” operating as an “imperative that circulated among a number of different doctrines.”\textsuperscript{29} Like Nussbaum, Foucault acknowledges that it would be “a mistake to think that care of the self was an inversion of philosophical thinking and that it constituted a precept peculiar to philosophical life” because, as he emphasises, the idea of cultivating and caring for the self “was actually a precept of living that, in a general way, was very highly valued in Greece.”\textsuperscript{30} During the Hellenistic period, Foucault contends that the ideal of cultivating the self be-
came increasingly diffuse, evolving into “procedures, practices, and formulas that people reflected on, developed, perfected, and taught,” which required it spilling into other disciplines outside of philosophy. He writes:

[T]he fact that the philosophers advise that one give heed to oneself does not mean that this zeal is reserved for those who choose to live a life similar to theirs, or that such an attitude is required only during the time one spends with them. It is a valuable principle for everyone, all the time and throughout life.31

Foucault’s account here fits with Nussbaum’s acknowledgement that both philosophical and non-philosophical kinds of self-cultivation pervaded the Hellenistic world, and that even philosophers whose work falls squarely under the medical analogy have much in common with those “religious,” “magical,” and “superstitious movements” who also “purveyed a biou technê [or] an ‘art of life’”.32 But because she also concedes that self-cultivation was a wide spread phenomenon in the Hellenistic world, caveats like this seem to undercut the severity of her criticisms of Foucault, especially if we consider the prominent appearance of philosophers in The Care Of the Self. While Foucault clearly does not view Hellenistic self-cultivation as only existing within the province of philosophy, many of the sources with which he articulates his reading have a distinctly philosophical flavour, even when they do not directly come from philosophers themselves, and moreover he often directly cites philosophers on this theme, which we will explore in depth below.

Although Foucault begins The Care Of the Self with a lavish description of the dream interpretation of Artemidorus33 and frequently refers to the medical texts of Soranus34 and Galen,35 he draws the substance of his account from self-described (and, for the most part, canonically ratified) philosophers. Of course just because Foucault draws on texts written by philosophers does not mean his account of Hellenistic self-cultivation is philosophical, nor that it elides Nussbaum’s charge that it is philosophy “and not anything else” that we require in order to understand Hellenistic self-cultivation, but in what follows I will suggest Foucault’s use of the source material is overwhelming directed towards showing that philosophical thought—understood as broadly as it was in the Hellenistic world—was necessary (although not sufficient) for Hellenistic self-cultivation.
Foucault begins his account of the role of philosophy in self-cultivation with an analysis of Plato’s early dialogue\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Alcibiades}, which he views as emblematic of the importance of care of the self in the classical period, and which he tells us “constitutes a basic theme of the dialogue.” Socrates tells Alcibiades that in order to shoulder his political responsibilities effectively\textsuperscript{37} he “must first attend to himself.”\textsuperscript{38} And indeed the theme of caring for oneself in order to care for others is an oft-revisited theme in Foucault’s later analysis of self-cultivation in the classical era.\textsuperscript{39} In a similar vein, in Plato’s portrait of Socrates in the \textit{Apology}, Foucault tells us that it is as a “master of the care of the self that Socrates presents himself to his judges,” one who urges the Athenians not to “concern themselves [with] riches [or] honour” but with “themselves and with their souls.”\textsuperscript{40} But although the idea of the care of the self was strongly articulated by Socrates, Foucault argues that it tended to be down-played in the later Platonic dialogues (although not the Platonists of late antiquity), was suppressed by Plato’s successors in the Academy, and was completely ignored by the Peripatetics. For example, Foucault argues that for Aristotle the “question of spirituality was least important.”\textsuperscript{41} Instead of a set of teachings (\textit{logos}) that require initiates to cultivate themselves through various different practices and techniques (\textit{askēsis}), Aristotle introduced the idea that philosophy should be resolutely theoretical insofar as it should primarily strive to attain objective knowledge, albeit including practical habit-forming techniques that he discusses in the \textit{Eudemian Ethics}.\textsuperscript{42} Although it is this that leads many to regard Aristotle as the “founder of philosophy in the modern sense of the term”, Foucault argues that this should also lead us to view Aristotle as “not the pinnacle of Antiquity” but rather “its exception.”\textsuperscript{43} For Foucault, rather than either Aristotle or Plato, “Socrates is, and always will be, the person associated with care of the self.”\textsuperscript{44}

After the various classical interpretations of (and deviations from) the care of the self, Foucault tells us that the philosophers of the Hellenistic and Imperial eras—the period that \textit{The Care of the Self} covers in most depth—returned to Socratic self-cultivation, and developed this idea increasingly programmatically. He writes:

In the slow development of the art of living under the theme of the care of oneself, the first two centuries of the imperial epoch can be seen as the summit of a curve: a kind of golden age in the cultivation of the self—it being understood, of course, that this phenomenon concerned only the social groups, very limited in number, that were bearers of culture and for
whose members a technê tou biou could have a meaning and a reality.\textsuperscript{45}

Not only did the Hellenistic philosophers return to Socrates’ understanding of self-cultivation, they also retained its philosophical dimension. Accordingly Foucault’s account of this return to Socratic self-cultivation explicitly draws from sources that offer a robustly philosophical account of this theme. Beginning with the Epicureans, Foucault quotes Epicurus’ Letter to Menoeceus, which he plausibly interprets as “stat[ing] the principle that philosophy should be considered as a permanent exercise of the care of oneself.”\textsuperscript{46} After this Foucault moves to the Stoics, noting that both Musonius Rufus and Plutarch approvingly quote Zeno’s injunction that “He who wishes to come through life safe and sound must continue throughout his life to take care of himself,” before turning to Seneca and Marcus Aurelius. Here he quotes the latter urging us to “hasten […] to the end, discard vain hopes, and if you care for yourself at all, rescue yourself [sautai boêthei eti tì soi meleîsautou] while you still may”, and cites Seneca’s remarks about “devot[ing] oneself” to philosophy, “spar[ing] no effort in order to ‘develop oneself,’ ‘transform oneself,’ and ‘return to oneself.’”\textsuperscript{47} But although these quotations indicate that the idea of self-cultivation was taken as a serious philosophical concept by Hellenistic philosophers, Foucault tells us that “it is in Epictetus […] that one finds the highest philosophical development of this theme” since the Discourses define human beings as beings who are “destined to care for [themselves],” a definition that is used to distinguish them from other sentient creatures.\textsuperscript{48} For Epictetus, Foucault claims, while other creatures are “‘ready prepared’ [with what] they need in order to live” and do not have “to look after themselves,” human beings “must attend to [themselves]” because the “god (Zeus) deemed it right that [they] be able to make free use of [themselves]; and it was for this purpose that [Zeus] endowed him with reason.”\textsuperscript{49}

From this we can see that Foucault’s account of Hellenistic self-cultivation strives to reflect the extant textual emphasis on the philosophical dimension of this theme. So, if Nussbaum’s objections do not stem from the source material Foucault uses to present the Hellenistic conception of self-cultivation, why does she object to his account so vehemently? The answer to this lies, I will argue in the next section, in the fact that Foucault’s account also makes much room for practices and techniques of self-cultivation that are what I will term extra-philosophical. As well as citing source material that explicitly underlines the importance of philosophical interest in self-cultivation, Foucault also attends to the more ancillary dimensions of self-cultivation in the Hellenistic world, especially those
aspects through which one’s philosophical commitments could be expressed. But while Nussbaum regards Foucault’s coverage of these techniques as evidence that he misses the essentially philosophical dimension of self-cultivation, we will see that Foucault devotes serious scholarly attention to these techniques—including the dream interpretation of Artemidorus and the medical texts of Soranus and Galen—because he views these “procedures, practices, and formulas” as strengthening, precipitating, and expressing the tenets of a certain philosophical outlook. Foucault does not introduce extra-philosophical practices and techniques to replace philosophical ones; he views these techniques as a necessary complement to philosophical ones because it is through these techniques that the philosophical commitments of the Hellenistic school (whichever school that may be) are realised.

3. EXTRA-PHILOSOPHICAL SELF-CULTIVATION IN FOUCALUT

In addition to his emphasis on the philosophical sources of Hellenistic self-cultivation, Foucault spends much of The Care of the Self detailing practically-oriented techniques, which seems to give succour to Nussbaum’s complaint. Many of the practices of self-cultivation that he includes in this text are patently non-philosophical in modern terms, although Foucault views them as having philosophical significance for Hellenistic philosophers. Directly after his account of how Hellenistic philosophers viewed the philosophical self-cultivation of Socrates as their immediate precursor, Foucault writes of the importance of practical techniques of self-shaping for the Hellenistics. In contrast to the detached and contemplative attitude students are encouraged to take up in a modern philosophy seminar room, Hellenistic philosophers encouraged their students to engage with practical tasks that allowed them to imbibe and mull over their philosophical insights. Foucault writes:

It is important to understand that [the cultivation of] oneself does not require simply a general attitude, an unfocused attention ... This time is not empty; it is filled with exercises, practical tasks, various activities. Taking care of oneself is not a rest cure. There is the care of the body to consider, health regimens, physical exercises without overexertion, the carefully measured satisfaction of needs. There are the meditations, the readings, the notes that one takes on books or on the conversations one has heard, notes that one reads again later, the recollection of truths that one knows already but that need to be more fully adapted to one’s own life.
Instead of viewing techniques of self-cultivation as philosophical or non-philosophical like Nussbaum, Foucault proposes that we should regard Hellenistic exercises as lying on a continuum between “two poles,” which the Greeks called meletê [meditation] and gymnasia [physical exercise]. Between the poles of meletê and gymnasia, he tells us, there were a “whole series of intermediate possibilities” which comprised the bulk of self-cultivationary exercises in the Hellenistic world.\(^{52}\)

Foucault’s discussion of gymnasia begins in The Use of Pleasure. Taking Hippocrates’ account of the regimens the physician prescribes for his patients as his example, Foucault notes that:

> What a properly designed regimen \([diorite]\) ought to cover was defined by a list that became almost conventional as time went on. It is the list found in Book VI of the Epidemics; it included “exercises \([ponoi]\), foods \([sitia]\), drinks \([pota]\), sleep \([hynoi]\), and sexual relations \([aphrodisia]\)—everything that needed to be “measured.”\(^{53}\)

When turning to Hellenism in The Care of the Self, Foucault tells us that the importance of practices and techniques relating to gymnasia had “remained remarkably continuous since the classical period,” and that although the “general principles stayed the same,” they were “developed, given more detail, and refined” as the Socratic principle of care of the self regained its importance in the Hellenistic world. For Foucault, “what stands out in the texts of the first centuries … is the insistence on the attention that should be brought to bear on oneself” specifically in terms of “the modality, scope, constancy, and exactitude of the required vigilance.”\(^{54}\) The “intensification” of Hellenistic techniques relating to gymnasia required a “more constantly vigilant attention to the body” which took the form of a “change of scale in the elements to which one needed to direct one’s attention […] as a physical individual.”\(^{55}\)

But as well as devoting much attention to practices of self-cultivation relating to gymnasia, Foucault cautions that an individual would only “be able to assign [a] regimen correctly provided it has done a good deal of work on itself” which he describes as “eliminat[ing] the errors, reduc[ing] the imaginings, master[ing] the desires … in order to be able to guide the body.”\(^{56}\) This is achieved through mental and intellectual exercises which—according to Foucault’s continuum metaphor—would be situated towards the meletê end of the self-cultivation spectrum. Like
Hadot,\textsuperscript{57} Foucault tells us that \textit{meletê} includes heterogeneous “rational,” “imaginative,” and “intuitive” elements that were fashioned into mental and intellectual exercises that aimed to foster the care of the self. While some practices of \textit{meletê} included a physical dimension,\textsuperscript{58} Foucault’s detailed account of these exercises in his shorter texts from the mid-1980s focus on those that involve using one’s mental faculties alone. The first, “controlling one’s representations,” appeared in both the Epicurean and Stoic schools, and consisted in an “attitude of constant supervision over the representations that may enter the mind.”\textsuperscript{59} Epictetus’ account of such mental exercises, Foucault tells us, was expressed with “two metaphors”:

\begin{quote}
[T]hat of the night watchman who does not let just anyone come into the town or the house; and that of the moneychanger or inspector—the arguronomos—who, when presented with a coin, examines it, weighs it in his hand, and checks the metal and the effigy.\textsuperscript{60}
\end{quote}

Watching “perpetually over representations” involved a “morning examination” that considered the “tasks and obligations of the day,” alongside an examination of one’s conscience in the evening to “review the day that had gone by.”\textsuperscript{61} But the most-prized Hellenistic exercises of \textit{meletê} were those devoted to the “meditation on future ills” [\textit{praemeditatio malorum}] and the “meditation on death” [\textit{meletê thanatou}]. The aim of the \textit{praemeditatio malorum} was not to “visualize the future as it is likely to be” but rather to “systematically imagin[e] the worst that might happen,” even if this was not likely to happen at all; whereas the aim of the \textit{meletê thanatou} was to make the initiate “live each day as if it were the last,” that is, as Seneca puts it in his letter to Lucilius, live “each day as if one’s entire life depended on it.”\textsuperscript{62} While both exercises may sound pessimistic and needlessly morbid, Foucault’s account emphasises how they were primarily aimed to reappraise one’s worldly attachments, and to “judge each action that one is performing in terms of its own value.”\textsuperscript{63} As we will see in the next section, Foucault does not claim that such exercises were philosophical in themselves, but rather that they aimed to elucidate the philosophical positions of the school concerned. To see why this is so we must turn to an important Hellenistic distinction that Nussbaum does not employ: the \textit{logos} of the Hellenistic schools and the \textit{askesis} they proposed employing to access it.

4. PHILOSOPHICAL SELF-CULTIVATION?

Despite Nussbaum’s complaint, we have seen that Foucault views philosophy as
having an integral role in self-cultivation, both according to the Hellenistic philosophers he cites and in terms of these philosophers’ explicit claim of the essential role of philosophy in self-shaping. As we have seen, in The Use of Pleasure Foucault supports his account of philosophical self-cultivation from Plato’s early dialogues, whereas in The Care of the Self he finds similar accounts given by the major thinkers of the Stoic and Epicurean schools. Not only do the figures Foucault cites explicitly agree that philosophy is important, they also offer persuasive reasons why philosophy is necessary in appropriately employing and directing self-cultivationary techniques themselves. What is less clear, however, is what role extra-philosophical cultivationary techniques play in Foucault’s conception of self-cultivation and how they are connected to the practice of philosophy. Both Nussbaum and Hadot rightly note that Foucault’s account of self-cultivation does not restrict itself to canonical philosophers, but includes a wide range of putatively non-philosophical authors, especially when he discusses the self-cultivationary exercises that are situated between the poles of meletê and gymnasia. In fact it is Foucault’s focus on such extra-philosophical techniques that arouses both Nussbaum and Hadot’s ire. While Nussbaum concedes that the value of self-cultivation was widely recognised across a variety of discourses and disciplines in the Hellenistic world, Foucault’s detailed account of the writings of non-philosophical figures—from Artemidorus to Soranus to Galen—directly leads her to complaint that Foucault unfairly deemphasises the importance of philosophy. So does Nussbaum overreact to the presence of these figures and the lavish descriptions of extra-philosophical self-cultivation in Foucault’s account? Or is there a way to justify Foucault’s inclusion of so much of this kind source material which is compatible with Nussbaum’s claim that philosophy has an essential role?

To understand why Foucault devotes much attention to the extra-philosophical exercises of meletê and gymnasia, we must view his conception of Hellenistic philosophy as a bipartite endeavour involving both our rational and non-rational faculties. While—along with Nussbaum and Hadot—Foucault clearly states that the faculties of rationality and reasoning are essential to Hellenistic self-cultivation, he proposes that an exclusively-rational conception of self-cultivation is insufficient because rational techniques must be supplemented by a range of extra-philosophical and practically-orientated self-cultivationary practices that allow rational insights to be expressed and assimilated. Viewing the Hellenistic conception of philosophy as one which has both a theoretical and a practical dimension is strongly supported by some of the most insightful scholarly literature published after the Therapy of Desire. In his 2003 text on this topic, The Stoics on
the Nature and Function of Philosophy, John Sellars insists that Hellenistic philosophers viewed their discipline as “involv[ing] both rational principles (logos) and practical training (askesis)”65 Because it necessarily involves two complementary elements, for Sellars, we cannot understand Hellenistic self-cultivation if we:

[I]dentify spiritual exercises with philosophy itself [because such exercises are] merely the second, although essential, stage of philosophical education coming after an initial stage devoted to philosophical principles (logos).66

Taking on board the fact that we must view Hellenistic self-cultivation as including both theoretical and practical components can explain Foucault’s inclusion of those extra-philosophical techniques that vex Nussbaum so much. The rational dimension of Hellenistic self-cultivation only accounts for half of the process. In order to fully understand self-cultivation in the Hellenistic world, we must give an account of how the logos of the school concerned was theoretically tied to a practical set of exercises though which this logos could be imbibed and ratified in the life of the initiate. On the one hand this explains Foucault’s interest in those mental self-cultivationary exercises that he refers to as meletê. The techniques of daily self-examination, or even the exercises of praemeditatio malorum or meletê thanatou, should not be understood as philosophy themselves, but rather as an extra-philosophical technique which enabled initiates to assimilate the insights of their school. The same applies to the more practically-orientated techniques relating to gymnasia, such as dream-interpretation or the physical training of the body. Nussbaum is certainly right to identify that these are not philosophy themselves, but she is mistaken in denying that they had a philosophical import and purpose in the Hellenistic world (and therefore mistaken in denying that Foucault has reason to include them), as these techniques are solely aimed to develop and corroborate philosophical insights.

Nevertheless, while we may agree that Nussbaum is right to insist that Foucault pays relatively little attention to the rational aspects of self-cultivation, we may also feel that her complaint is unfair on account of the presence of non-philosophical self-cultivationary techniques in her own work. In section one I noted that she acknowledges that self-cultivationary techniques were employed in Hellenistic “religion, dream-interpretation, and astrology”, but we should also note that there is a significantly widespread exploration of extra-philosophical techniques of self-cultivation throughout her own work. Early in Therapy Nussbaum
describes Hellenistic ethics as an “immersed and worldly art of grappling with ... issues of daily and urgent human significance – the fear of death, love and sexuality, anger and aggression” which coupled with her subsequent descriptions of this art is loose enough to accommodate many of the self-cultivationary techniques that belong to Foucault’s continuum.67 Like Foucault, Nussbaum, also refers to “memorization,” “confession,” and “daily self-examination” when she discusses Stoic self-cultivation exercises,68 for example, and—even while she distances herself from Foucault—aligns herself with Hadot’s and Arnold Davidson’s accounts of these kinds of extra-philosophical self-cultivation exercises in the Hellenistic world.69

Although Nussbaum concedes that such techniques would be no longer regarded as philosophical by the “detached intellectual techniques” of modern Anglophone philosophy, she commits to the position that they were philosophical staples in the Hellenistic world.70 As we have seen, one kind of malady is false beliefs, and it is relatively straightforward to envisage how a specifically philosophical techniques of self-cultivation might be used to correct these.71 But, as well as treating the mistakes generated by “invalid inferences and false premises,” Nussbaum herself tells us that philosophical self-cultivation in the Hellenistic world aimed to ameliorate unwelcome passionate attitudes: “irrational fears,” “excessive loves,” and “crippling angers.”72 Hellenistic philosophers believed that the passions were susceptible to the argumentative force of philosophy, she claims, because they had a “sophisticated” understanding of emotion, one which she believes has the potential to contribute to contemporary philosophical understanding by viewing the passions as “made up out of belief[s] and respond[ing] to arguments.”73 departing from Aristotle’s conception of passion (which views them as opaque and refractory to one’s rational capacities), Nussbaum tells us that the Hellenistics did not regard emotions and passionate states as “blind surges of affect that push and pull us without regard to reasoning and belief,” but rather as “intelligent and discriminating elements of the personality that are very closely linked to beliefs, and are modified by the modification of belief.”74 This explains the variety of self-cultivationary techniques that Hellenistic philosophers employed, as well as why these techniques often included non- or extra-philosophical elements. Nussbaum claims that Hellenistics had to resort to techniques that are “more psychologically engaging than those of conventional deductive or dialectical argument,” which is why Hellenistic texts typically shower the reader with “gripping examples,” “narrative,” “appeals to memory and imagination.”75 These rhetorical and literary forms were primarily ways “in which an argument may be effectively housed” so
that it could better discharge its philosophical content, which as we will see below
is supported by Hadot’s view of self-cultivationary exercises of the Hellenistic
world as using “all the means obtainable by dialectic and rhetoric.”

Interrogating Nussbaum’s own account of the necessary interplay between ra-
tional and non-rational techniques of self-cultivation suggests we should view
the substance of her criticisms of Foucault as less damaging than she presents
them as. To make sense of Nussbaum’s complaint, we must see it as urging us to
fully apprehend the role of philosophy in self-cultivation, one which Foucault’s
account includes albeit tentatively, while also acknowledging that the concep-
tion of philosophy that the Hellenistics operate with is vastly different to the one
we have today. Understanding Hellenistic philosophy à la Sellars, as a bipartite
process that includes rational elements pertaining to its logos while necessari-
ly including practically-orientated techniques pertaining to its askesis, helps us
make sense of this. Foucault’s detailed and extensive inclusion of the latter kind
of ascetic techniques is justified because it offers an account of how Hellenistic
self-cultivation operated, which Nussbaum herself acknowledges when she ex-
plores the use that Hellenistic philosophers made of imaginative and rhetorical
techniques to communicate the philosophical substance of their teachings. This
indicates that Nussbaum’s complaint against Foucault’s understanding of self-
cultivation does not capture a substantive difference between their respective no-
tions of self-cultivation, but relates instead to how they present its ascetic dimen-
sion. Moreover, there seem to be further persuasive reasons to side with Foucault
over Nussbaum on this issue: as we have seen, Nussbaum’s complaint is grounded
on a hard distinction between the philosophical and the non-philosophical, one
which we have little reason to attribute to the Hellenistic conception of the philo-
sophical exercise. In a similar way to how Foucault advocates understanding Hel-
enistic techniques of self-cultivation as lying on a continuum between gymnasia
and meletê, there is little evidence for a firm distinction in the Hellenistic source
material that Nussbaum and Foucault cite, and it is impossible to decisively pull
these two senses apart because this source material suggests that they had a wide
and porous notion of philosophy.

5. CONCLUSION

Both Nussbaum and Hadot single Foucault out for harsh criticism regarding his
analysis of the Hellenistic conception of philosophy because of his attention to
those extra-philosophical self-cultivationary exercises that he regards as integral
to the philosophers of the Hellenistic world. While Foucault certainly gives much attention to extra-philosophical self-cultivationary exercises, he also explicitly cites source material that suggests that philosophy was central to Hellenistic self-cultivation, which suggests that he views self-cultivation as a bipartite endeavour that involves both our rational and non-rational faculties. Nussbaum’s own account implicitly acknowledges this. Although she defines her account in contradistinction to Foucault’s as one that privileges the philosophical aspect of self-cultivation, she also attends to how non-rational techniques (especially imaginative and rhetorical ones) were integral to the conception of self-cultivation at work in the Hellenistic world. Understanding Hellenistic self-cultivation as comprised of a philosophical logos and a practically-orientated askesis helps resolve this difficulty. While this distinction shows that Foucault’s position may be closer to Nussbaum’s own than she is prepared to acknowledge, it also allows us to make better sense of the Hellenistic source material which resists sharply distinguishing between the philosophical and extra-philosophical dimensions of self-cultivation.

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NOTES

Many thanks to John Sellars’ insightful comments on an earlier draft of this article which I presented at ASCP 2016, and to my two anonymous reviewers for suggesting further references.

3. Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*, 16. For Nussbaum, Hellenistic philosophy is a “practical and compassionate philosophy ... that exists for the sake of human beings, in order to address their deepest needs, confront their most urgent perplexities, and bring them from misery to some greater measure of flourishing.” At Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*, 3. In contrast to what she views as the obtuseness of today’s moral philosophers: “Ancient Greek and Roman philosophy tends to be more sensitive to [philosophically understanding human need and motivation] than contemporary moral philosophy ...; for asking how to live is never, in the Greek traditions, a merely academic exercise, nor philosophy a merely academic subject. ... From all of these attempts contemporary moral philosophy has much to learn, if it wishes to move beyond the academy to take its place in the daily lives of human beings.” Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*, 484. Later Nussbaum helpfully lists the ways in which Hellenistic philosophy can add to contemporary philosophy, including their “lack of jargon-laden academic language,” their “interest in particular perception as an ingredient in good choice,” “their recognition that existing desires, intuitions, and preferences are socially formed and far from totally reliable,” and their recognition of “the existence of unconscious motivations and beliefs” provides them with much to contribute to modern moral philosophy. See Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*, 486–90.
12. The source is Hermann Usener’s *Epicurea*, which Nussbaum translates as “empty is that philosopher’s argument [logos] by which no human suffering is therapeutically treated. For just as there is no use in a medical art that does not cast out the sicknesses of bodies, so too there is no use in philosophy, unless it casts out the suffering [pathos] of the soul” (*Nussbaum 1994: 5*).
on the role of philosophy in self-cultivation
freedom is also a way of caring for others. This is why it is important for a free man who conducts himself as he should to be able to govern his wife, his children, his household; it is also the art of governing. Ethos also implies a relationship with others, insofar as the care of the self enables one to occupy his rightful position in the city, the community, or interpersonal relationships, whether as a magistrate or a friend. And the care of the self also implies a relationship with the other insofar as proper care of the self requires listening to the lessons of a master. One needs a guide, a counselor, a friend, someone who will be truthful with you. Thus, the problem of relationships with others is present throughout the development of the care of the self.” Foucault, “The Hermeneutic of the Subject”, 287.

40. Foucault, Care of the Self, 45.
41. at Foucault, Hermeneutics of the Subject, 16-17.
42. Interestingly, as well as blaming Aristotle for shifting the focus of philosophy from the injunction to “care for oneself” to the injunction to “know yourself,” Foucault also blames Descartes, at Foucault, Hermeneutics of the Subject, 14; and also Kant (in “The Ethics of the Concern for Self”, 279-80 and Christianity, eg, in Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self”, also in The Essential Works of Michel Foucault. Volume 1: Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth, 228.
43. Foucault, Hermeneutics of the Subject, 16–17. The full quotation reads: “[T]hroughout Antiquity (in the Pythagoreans, Plato, the Stoics, Cynics, Epicureans, and Neo-Platonists), the philosophical theme (how to have access to the truth?) and the question of spirituality (what transformations in the being of the subject are necessary for access to the truth?) were never separate. There is, of course, the exception, the major and fundamental exception: that of the one who is called “the” philosopher, because he was no doubt the only philosopher in Antiquity for whom the question of spirituality was least important; the philosopher whom we have recognized as the founder of philosophy in the modern sense of the term: Aristotle. But as everyone knows, Aristotle is not the pinnacle of Antiquity but its exception.” Foucault, Hermeneutics of the Subject, 16–17.
44. Foucault, Hermeneutics of the Subject, 8.
45. Foucault, Care of the Self, 45.
46. Foucault, Care of the Self, 46. Foucault’s translation reads: “Let no young man delay the study of philosophy, and let no young man become weary of it; for it is never too early or too late to care for the well-being of the soul.” This fits well with Nussbaum’s quote “Empty is that philosopher’s argument by which no human suffering is therapeutically treated. For just as there is no use in a medical art that does not cast out the sicknesses of bodies, so too there is no use in philosophy, unless it casts out the suffering of the soul.”
47. Foucault, Care of the Self, 46-47. Seneca’s Latin reads “Se formare, sibi vindicare, sefacere, se ad studia revocare, sibi applicare, suum fieri, in se recedere, ad se recurrere, secum morari.”
48. Foucault, Care of the Self, 46.
49. Foucault, Care of the Self, 47.
50. Foucault, Care of the Self, 37–68.
51. Foucault, Care of the Self, 50–51.
52. Foucault, “Technologies of the Self”, 220. See also: “Between the pole of the meditatio, where one practices in thought, and the pole of the exercitatio, where one trains in reality, there is a whole series of other possible practices designed for proving oneself.” Foucault, “The Hermeneutic of the Subject”, 102.
53. Foucault, Care of the Self, 101. The source is Hippocrates, Epidemics, 6, 1.
54. Foucault, Care of the Self, 41.
55. Foucault, Care of the Self, 103.
56. Foucault, Care of the Self, 133-34.
57. See Hadot, Philosophy as a Way of Life, 59.
58. Foucault tells us that Seneca and the neo-Pythagoreans recommended both recommended part-mental and part-physical exercises: he describes the former recounting an exercise which involved “voluntarily placing oneself ‘within the confines of destitution’ for three or four days, one experiences a bed of straw, coarse clothing, and bread of the lowest quality: ‘not a game, but a test’”; whereas Plutarch recalls a similar game championed by the neo-Pythagoreans involved “whetting the appetite through the practice of some sport [and then] plac[ing] oneself in front of tables laden with the most succulent dishes, [before leaving] them to the servants and making do with the kind of food that slaves ate.” (Foucault 1984 [1986]: 58–60).
59. Foucault, “Hermeneutic of the Subject”, 103-04.
60. Foucault, “Hermeneutic of the Subject”, 103-04.
61. Foucault, “Technologies of the Self”, 240; with Care of the Self, 60-61.
64. Foucault, “Hermeneutic of the Subject”, 105.
68. Nussbaum, Therapy of Desire, 40. Nussbaum’s account of exercises also seem very close to Foucault’s account of them in his 1980–81 lectures at Collège de France. On memorisation see Foucault, Hermeneutics of the Subject, 331–355; on confession, see 355–371; on self-examination, see 149–169.
70. Nussbaum, Therapy of Desire, 3-4.
71. Nussbaum views this as no accident. She writes “if the diseases that impede human flourishing are above all diseases of belief and social teaching, and if [...] critical arguments of the kind philosophy provides are necessary and perhaps even sufficient for dislodging those obstacles, then philosophy will seem to be necessary, perhaps even sufficient, for getting people from disease to health.” Nussbaum, Therapy of Desire, 34.
76. Hadot writes that: “[i]n all these exercises, all the means obtainable by dialectic and rhetoric will be utilized to obtain the maximum effect.” Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 59.
Nietzsche’s emphasis on self-overcoming and self-mastery in the higher type and the figure of the overman are usually associated with aristocracy, rank and the sacrifice of others in the pursuit of personal excellence. Indeed, Nietzsche’s discussion of the “lower types,” “slave morality” and “master morality” lends itself to an elitist misreading. However, Nietzsche’s opposition to democracy and equality stems from his endorsement of differentiation and particularly his concern with life-affirmation and life-denial. That is to say, Nietzsche’s seeming regard for the “higher type” comes from its status, for Nietzsche, as more life-affirming than the herd. However, contrary to popular readings, Nietzsche’s aim is not for a world of noble masters who obtain their rank at the expense of the lower types. Ultimately, as a close reading of Thus Spoke Zarathustra reveals, even the higher type must be sacrificed in pursuit of Nietzsche’s ultimate goal, of saying yes to life. The question which then arises is this: what role does self-sacrifice play in Nietzsche’s thoughts on the self in formation—in becoming what one is?

Sacrifice has not yet been satisfactorily discussed in the expansive commentary on Nietzsche’s philosophy. The majority of what has been said on Nietzsche’s views of sacrifice paint Nietzsche in an elitist light. It is no wonder, given Nietzsche’s aphoristic style, that he has been interpreted in such a way. However, these readings fail to see how Nietzsche’s views of sacrifice are intrinsically tied to his notion of self-overcoming, forming an important component of his vision of
the Dionysian man. A close reading of Nietzsche’s works reveal a link between Nietzsche’s dislike for self-preservation and the cultivating force of life affirmation. This article seeks to explore the relationship between sacrifice in the Nietzschean self-formation of the higher type and the Dionysian man. Close exegesis of Nietzsche’s work, in particular *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, shows that there is a subtle but important element of the sacrificial in Nietzschean self-overcoming which has been largely overlooked. I will argue that Nietzsche advocates a certain type of non-ascetic self-sacrifice in becoming what one is, which is exemplified by the self-overcoming of the “Dionysian man.”

1. SELF-FORMATION WITHOUT A SELF

It is essential at the outset to address the seemingly paradoxical nature of a discussion on self-formation in Nietzsche when it is widely accepted that he does not believe in a “self” to be formed. However, Nietzsche’s non-essentialist view of the self is the very thing which opens such possibilities for self-formation. If the self is not an essence, then it is not fixed or pre-determined and it is not even something we can “discover.” The self is, for Nietzsche, continuously in formation, as becoming. As Nietzsche succinctly puts it: “there is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything.” Nietzsche’s ideas on the subject are very much tied to his view of the world as becoming. The Dionysian man, for Nietzsche is thus the manifestation of life itself. He is a reflection and an affirmation of this life, of becoming. However, it is important to note that the concept of the Dionysian for Nietzsche underwent many transformations throughout his writings, from the Dionysian as contrasted to the Apollonian in *The Birth of Tragedy*, to the amalgamation of both, representing a kind of passion controlled, which he names Dionysian. I will be using the terms Dionysian and Dionysian man in the sense which it came to have for Nietzsche in his final writings, as the ultimate symbol of self-overcoming. The emblem of Dionysus as the suffering God who is killed and reborn is a fitting one for Nietzsche’s Dionysian man and in particular, as we shall see, for the sacrificial element it contains. Furthermore, the “higher type” must not be confused with Nietzsche’s concept of the Dionysian man (or overman) as they are not one and the same. As Fink argues, Zarathustra “...honours the higher men as a bridge to the overman.” Thus while the “higher men” are distinguished from the herd, each in his own way, none are yet the Dionysian man. We will return to this later; however, Nietzsche’s views on sacrifice must be understood first.
2. THE PARADOX OF NIETZSCHEAN SACRIFICE

The Christian faith is from the beginning sacrifice: sacrifice of all freedom, all pride, all self-confidence of the spirit; at the same time enslavement and self-mockery, self-mutilation.\(^\text{6}\)

Remarks such as these can, at first glance, lead us to conclude that Nietzsche views sacrifice negatively. Yet sacrifice in the work of Nietzsche is paradoxical in nature. On the one hand, Nietzsche abhors the ascetic self-sacrifice of the Christian. On the other hand, his own philosophy recommends a type of self-sacrifice that can be viewed as a highly-disciplined refinement of the self. This is perhaps why so many different interpretations of Nietzschean sacrifice have emerged. I argue that Nietzsche views sacrifice as necessary to the persistence of mankind. However, he despises the transformation of its value into the pointless self-sacrifice upheld by Christianity. This transformation from the fundamental and useful notion of sacrifice which Nietzsche endorses to the life negating and fruitless self-sacrifice he abhors is effected by what Nietzsche calls slave-morality.

In slave-morality, \textit{ressentiment} brews because the slave cannot act on his instincts. This \textit{ressentiment}, according to Nietzsche, ultimately leads to an inversion of the violence the slave cannot act upon others onto himself instead. The master’s values of confidence, vigour, selfishness, and abundance are transformed into selflessness, self-denial and self-sacrifice. However, we must not mistake Nietzsche’s Dionysian man as a man free of all negativity. Nietzsche acknowledges that while all emotions (or reactive states) are natural and indeed necessary, what sets the Dionysian man apart from the lower type is his ability to use them in the service of life—to creatively sublimate them into something productive and affirmative. In slave-morality the negative feelings are turned into \textit{ressentiment}, which are then used against life, to affirm something beyond this life. Thus Nietzsche connects the self-sacrifice founded on slave-morality to a life-negating “No” to life, while he associates the sacrifice of the overman with self-overcoming:

Through Christianity, the individual was made so important, so absolute that he could no longer be sacrificed: but the species endures only through human sacrifice... Genuine charity demands sacrifice for the good of the species—it is hard, it is full of self-overcoming, because it needs human sacrifice. And this pseudo-humaneness called Christianity wants it established that no one should be sacrificed.\(^\text{7}\)
However, perhaps the most telling section on sacrifice comes from *Beyond Good and Evil*. While the famous Nietzschean proclamation that “God is dead” is well known, the reasons for why he claims “we killed him” are perhaps less known. For Nietzsche, this involves sacrifice, and more specifically, a kind of sacrifice man has a propensity for, even a need or an instinct for. Nietzsche describes three “rungs of sacrifice” in *Beyond Good and Evil* and suggests that sacrifice underwent several transformations throughout human history:

There is a great ladder of religious cruelty with many rungs; but three of them are the most important. First people sacrificed human beings to their gods, perhaps the very ones whom they loved best. Here belong the sacrifices of the first born in all prehistoric religions, also the sacrifice of Emperor Tiberius in the grotto to Mithras on the island of Capri, that most terrible of all Roman anachronisms. Then, in the moral ages of humanity, people sacrificed to their gods the strongest instincts which man possessed, his ‘nature.’ This celebratory joy sparkles in the cruel glance of the ascetic, of the enthusiastic ‘anti-natural man.’ Finally, what was still left to sacrifice? Did one not finally have to sacrifice everything comforting, holy, healing, all hope, all belief in a hidden harmony, in future blessedness and justice? Did one not have to sacrifice God himself and, out of cruelty against themselves, worship stone, stupidity, gravity, fate, and nothingness? To sacrifice God for nothingness - this paradoxical mystery of the last act of cruelty is saved for the generation which is coming along right now. We all know something of it already.8

First, we sacrifice those we love for religion. Nietzsche gives the example of Abraham asked to sacrifice his only son Isaac to please God. Then we sacrifice ourselves, our very own nature, to God. Nietzsche is now referring to the ascetic ideal, to the giving up of one's natural instincts to appeal to God. This is the second rung on the ladder. Finally, with nothing else left to sacrifice, we sacrifice God himself. We sacrifice God for nothing. Keenan argues that, “to sacrifice God for nothing reveals the concealed truth of sacrifice itself.”9 This means that we sacrifice the very thing which we sacrifice for, and when we sacrifice the very thing which gives us redemption for our sacrificing we sacrifice economical sacrifice—we literally sacrifice for nothing. This passage shows, as Lampert argues, that a “…profound force in the human soul demands sacrifice.”10 Although sacrifice is a natural aspect of human nature, it has undergone transformations in Christianity that work against life.
The main approach to Nietzsche’s views on sacrifice in the literature highlights the difference between slave and master morality.\textsuperscript{11} For example, Siemens and colleagues argue that, for Nietzsche, sacrifice is healthy so long as it is “sacrifice as affirmation” as seen in master morality.\textsuperscript{12} They suggest that this healthy sacrifice is transformed into the unhealthy self-sacrifice of the Christian through the reversal of values promulgated by slave morality.

Nietzsche sees slave-morality, therefore, as central to the deterioration of a healthy notion of sacrifice. Nietzsche first distinguishes between “master morality” and “slave morality” in section 260 of Beyond Good and Evil, arguing that from the standard of “slave morality” what is “good” is that which benefits the community (of slaves). For example: sympathy, kindness and humility are praised as valuable while those traits associated with the master were deemed as “evil” by the slaves. Logically, from the standards of “master morality” values are reversed. Nietzsche thus argues that “slave morality” is born out of the unconscious resentment and vengeance of the slave who, powerless in his condition, has no choice but to render the attributes of the master as universal vices. In regards to sacrifice, therefore, we first begin to see its transformation here in the importance given to sacrifice in slave morality. However, it is not until Christianity, which Nietzsche argues is slave morality manifest, that we see the value of sacrifice completely transform into the Christian self-sacrifice Nietzsche opposes so much.

Bubbio agrees that Nietzsche’s account of sacrifice operates on three distinct definitions. The first is the sacrifice of master morality and the second is sacrifice in slave morality. This is congruent with other interpretations which note the distinction between master and slave sacrifice. However, Bubbio adds a third and different distinction - the sacrifice which belongs to active nihilism. Bubbio connects Nietzsche’s definition of sacrifice to the Dionysian, and to the loss of identity which is so central to the Dionysian man. He shows how after the death of God, concrete notions of the Self and of the World begin to crumble. However, this paves the way for active nihilism and Dionysian sacrifice of the self. As Bubbio puts it: “it seems that the ultimate sacrifice of the overman...is the abandonment of consciousness, the loss of individual identity.”\textsuperscript{13}

Bubbio rightly identifies sacrifice as a core part of the Dionysian and shows how Nietzsche sees active nihilism as a step beyond passive nihilism, because active nihilism is destructive. It has the power to destroy and the destruction of old values is a necessary step. However, active nihilism is not enough. Active nihilism
is still, after all, nihilism, and this too must be overcome. For example, in the late notebooks Nietzsche claims that nihilism “represents a pathological intermediate state.” Bubbio’s concern is with the nature of sacrifice in Nietzsche and he focuses predominately on the overman in defining Nietzschean sacrifice. However, a full discussion of Nietzsche’s views on sacrifice should include his account of the “higher men” in the fourth book of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which we will come back to.

Hedley’s discussion of sacrifice in Nietzsche brings our attention to the similarities of the sacrificial theme in both Dionysus and Christianity. Hedley notes that both Dionysus and Jesus are violently sacrificed. The difference, however, and the reason why Nietzsche accepts only Dionysian sacrifice, is that the latter is a “promise to life.” It is affirmative and yes-saying. In contrast, Christian sacrifice is not:

> The Christian says No to even the happiest earthly lot: he is weak, poor, disinherited enough to suffer from life in whatever form…‘the God on the cross’ is a curse on life, a signpost to seek redemption from life; Dionysus cut to pieces is a promise of life: it will be eternally reborn and return out of destruction.

We can see that Nietzsche views Christian self-sacrifice as a negation of life. However, Nietzsche is also suggesting that we are not to do away with sacrifice altogether. It is a human need after all, and, applied properly, in the service of life, will aid in the cultivation of humanity’s highest potential.

In *Nietzsche and Political Thought*, Ansell-Pearson argues that Nietzsche’s views on sacrifice are aimed at elevating humanity. He reads Nietzsche as saying that we need to overcome our pity in order to be able to sacrifice others so that we may enhance and allow the higher human types to emerge. Ansell-Pearson likens Nietzsche’s hierarchical theory to that seen in plants, whereby the creeper must sacrifice others along the way as it grows higher. This is as necessary for the higher type as it is for the plant. Ansell-Pearson argues that Nietzsche’s theory of the higher type ultimately requires the sacrifice of the “lower strata” in order for the higher types to flourish. However, although Nietzsche accuses the lower strata of decadence and decay, he also points to their necessity. For Nietzsche, that there are strata at all is essential to his philosophy, as hierarchy is what distinguishes the higher type from other types. Without the “lower types” there can be no “higher
types.” Not everyone can be a higher type. This is the privilege of the few and it must remain that way. The masses, therefore, despite their decadence, have their purpose for Nietzsche. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, under the rubric of “What is Noble” Nietzsche discusses the need for differentiation between strata for a higher culture to flourish. As Nietzsche puts it:

> Every enhancement of the type ‘man’ has so far been the work of an aristocratic society—and it will be so again and again—a society that believes in the long ladder of an order of rank and differences in value between man and man, and that needs slavery in some sense or another.\(^\text{18}\)

Other interpretations of Nietzsche’s sense of sacrifice have continued in a similar vein. For example, Camplon notes that the Sermon on the Mount is of particular hatred to Nietzsche because this is the passage which praises the sacrifice of one’s riches to the poor.\(^\text{19}\) For Nietzsche, to sacrifice for the preservation of the “unsuccessful specimens” is an error which suppresses the cultivation of higher types. Rather, Nietzsche advocates allowing “higher types” to strive for the fulfilment of their potential through a kind of “tough love,” Pity which leads to self-sacrificial giving to the poor actually does them the disservice of removing their basis for action.

All of this paints Nietzsche in a rather elitist light. Yet there is a kind of sacrifice which Nietzsche promotes which is not merely about enhancing the great at the expense of the weak. Sacrifice is also a requirement of Nietzsche’s higher men. Benson in particular shows how sacrifice remains a part of Nietzsche’s philosophy. Nietzsche still requires sacrifice—the sacrifice of one’s comfortable notions. For example, “The True World” and “morality,” “Good and Evil,” these ideas must all be sacrificed in order to achieve greatness. The first thing the higher type must sacrifice is comfortable metaphysical notions. They keep us warm, secure, they are sweet lies we tell ourselves to make the world more palatable, but Nietzsche wants us to dispense with them. *This* is sacrifice. Dispensing with these notions is no easy task, because even if one no longer believes in God, Christian values permeate the everyday in ways we are largely unaware of. Even science and the pursuit of truth is not unaffected, since this pursuit is itself rooted in the metaphysical-Christian will to truth.

In this connection, Lemm provides an interesting interpretation of “the honey sacrifice” in Nietzsche’s Zarathustra.\(^\text{20}\) Lemm argues that one of the reasons Ni-
Nietzsche dislikes Christian self-sacrifice so much is because of its selflessness. However, if self-sacrifice is selfless then it is meaningless as one has nothing to give. Instead, Zarathustra recommends that “your self be in your deed as the mother is in her child—let that be your word concerning virtue.”21 The type of sacrifice that Zarathustra advocates here is described as a “gift.” This is a real “giving” because this type of amoral sacrifice is full up with one’s self. Zarathustra recommends we place our entire selves in every act.22 And in this sense, perhaps sacrifice is “present in every action that is done with deliberation, in the worst as in the best.”23

3. THE FOURTH PART OF ZARATHUSTRA

There is debate surrounding Nietzsche’s fourth section of Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Some argue that the first three sections constitute an obvious beginning, middle and end, leaving the relevance of Nietzsche’s fourth and final section contestable.24 Additionally, Nietzsche wrote the fifth part of The Gay Science after completing the first three sections of Zarathustra and later returned to write the fourth part of Zarathustra.25 He published the fourth part at his own expense and distributed a mere forty copies to his close friends and later attempted to retract them. In addition to the continuity observed throughout Zarathustra’s first three sections this adds to the mysterious status of the fourth. Nonetheless, Zarathustra’s fourth part sheds some illuminating light on the current discussion, particularly on the “higher men,” as this section deals with the topic in detail. It will become clear that the higher men are not yet what Nietzsche is after but only an intermediary, albeit necessary, state between man and overman, just as active nihilism is also only a stage to be overcome. This is because while the higher men can destroy, what is still needed is the creation of new values. This is not dealt with in the first three parts of Zarathustra and could be a reason why Nietzsche released the fourth part later on in order to show that what is needed is the creation of new values. This paves the way for his next book, Beyond Good and Evil, which in this light can be seen as Nietzsche’s handbook for creating new values. Most importantly, I will now show how the sacrifice of men is not in the service of rank and aristocracy, but a gift in the service of life, for “man” himself must be overcome—not only the worst but the best of men.

While there are many themes that run through Zarathustra, the two most prevalent themes in the fourth part are the problem of pity and the de-deification of nature after the vanquishing of the otherworldly. The higher type and the prophecy of the overman are also core themes of the fourth part.
The fourth part begins with “The Honey Sacrifice,” which is relevant to our discussion of sacrifice as seen in Lemm’s description above. Years have passed, and Zarathustra is described as old and full of happiness. Surrounded by his animals, he tells them he is no longer concerned with happiness but with his work. Zarathustra describes himself as full of honey: “What is happening to me, happens to every fruit when it grows ripe. It is the honey in my veins that makes my blood thicker and my soul calmer.” The animals suggest a mountain ascent and Zarathustra agrees, telling them he wishes to “offer the honey sacrifice.” However, when they reach the top of the mountain Zarathustra sends his animals back and once alone talks to himself. Rosen argues that the animals represent the animalistic nature of man which cannot be present at Zarathustra’s revelation of the truth of human existence. Their absence signifies Zarathustra transcending “the merely animal.” Rosen astutely points out that the honey is associated with bees which are associated with work which has replaced happiness as Zarathustra’s chief concern. The honey, in its sweetness, represents happiness; however, it must be gathered by work, which now concerns Zarathustra more than the sweetness itself. The animals, however, are only attracted by the honey’s sweetness, pointing towards an important difference between animal and man. The symbolism of the animals returns in Nietzsche’s passage on “The Ugliest Man,” which will be analysed below. Zarathustra reveals he has lied to the animals about the sacrifice; he is overflowing with honey and will use it as a lure. This is consistent with Lemm’s analysis that, for Nietzsche, healthy sacrifice comes from overfullness rather than lack. Once alone on the mountain Zarathustra waits for men to come to him there. The imagery of fishing with bait is used here, as Zarathustra is described as a fisherman using his “honey” or happiness as a lure.

The next day Zarathustra is described as being in front of his cave with his animals. He has used all his honey and they are now helping him collect more. Zarathustra is visited by a soothsayer who tells him that the world is without meaning and nothing is worthwhile. They hear a cry and the soothsayer tells Zarathustra the cry of distress is for him: “The cry is for you. It calls you: Come, come, come! It is time! It is high time!... It is the higher man that cries for you.” The theme of overcoming pity also appears in this passage. Pity is described as Zarathustra’s “final sin” with which the soothsayer attempts to seduce Zarathustra. Thus as Zarathustra hears the higher man’s cry he decides to search for the higher man and answer the call of distress. An analysis of each of the higher men will illustrate that despite their status as “higher,” they each have something yet to be overcome. In contrast to elitist readings of Nietzsche’s notion of sacrifice, we shall see
that it is not the lower types that must be sacrificed for the sake of the higher men, but the higher men for the sake of the overman.

4. ZARATHUSTRA’S HIGHER MEN

On his search for the higher man Zarathustra encounters seven characters. The first of these are two kings riding an ass on the road. For Deleuze, the two kings represent morality and customs and “the two extremities of culture,” which are the dissolution of authoritative values and the victory of the mob that no longer care to be ruled. Nietzsche-Zarathustra admires the nobility which the two kings represent. Like Nietzsche, they are anti-democratic and have overcome egalitarian values, seeing the value of natural rank. However, the mob has no need for kings and lack of differentiation reigns among the herd, thus the kings react with nausea and pity. For Nietzsche, both self-pity and nausea must be overcome and this is a failing of the kings (and, as we shall see, Zarathustra too, who also suffers from nausea and pity for a large part of the fourth book).

Secondly, Zarathustra stumbles across a man attaching leeches to himself. The consensus in the literature is that the man represents a scholar, focused on his narrow field, he is described as devoting his life to studying the brain of the leech. He has similarities with many of Nietzsche’s scholarly friends, for example, Erwin Rhode or Overbeck and could perhaps represent one of them. Yet Young notes that he may just as well represent “Nietzsche himself, a professor of classics for ten long years.” In part three of Thus Spoke Zarathustra Nietzsche says: “the parasite is the lowest species; but whoever is of the highest species will nourish the most parasites.” It is clear that the bleeding man is, for Nietzsche, a “high soul.” He represents a scientist and the search for knowledge and truth. While this is a step higher for Nietzsche than those who wish not to know, the bleeding man lacks gaiety. Nietzsche prefers a gay science and the bleeding man has yet to learn how to dance.

Later, Zarathustra comes across a man moaning in pain and distress. After watching the man for a while, Zarathustra has enough, and demands he stop the charade while beating him with his stick: “Stop it, you actor! You counterfeiter! You liar from the bottom! I recognize you well!” Zarathustra asks him who he was pretending to be and the magician answers “the ascetic of the spirit.” The magician’s desire for greatness is admirable and so too is his honesty and ability to discern that he is not great. The exchange is symbolic of Nietzsche’s disillusionment with

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Wagner who he once thought great.\textsuperscript{35} Thus, while he is admirable, the magician has yet to overcome Wagnerian romanticism. The magician needs to embrace the earth as it is; both the beautiful and the ugly.

Zarathustra then encounters a retired Pope, mourning the death of God. The retired Pope has searched for the most pious amongst believers but after the death of God finds none and now searches for the most pious of the non-believers which he deems is Zarathustra. The Pope explains God died from pitying mankind. Zarathustra replies that “when gods die, they always die several kinds of death.”\textsuperscript{36} Throughout Nietzsche’s writings, he frequently accuses modernity of still holding onto Christian values despite the death of God. As we have seen, even in the sciences or the pursuit of truth, the ascetic ideal remains. The retired Pope is thought to symbolise what remains of Christian morality after the death of God.\textsuperscript{37} Zarathustra and the pope are both pious and this is a venerated quality: “I love all who are pious.”\textsuperscript{38} While piety is a strength, the retired Pope is also admired for his ability to acknowledge the death of God. However, while this is an important step forward for Nietzsche, one must not just acknowledge the death of God but respond to it in affirmation. For the retired Pope this is an event worth mourning and he wishes it was not so. He lacks \textit{amor fati} (love of fate) and has yet to learn affirmation.

After the Pope, Zarathustra meets the man who killed God—“the Ugliest Man.” Importance is again placed on the theme of pity as Zarathustra experiences pity for the ugliest man and his pity appears to demobilise Zarathustra for a moment. Eventually, however, Zarathustra overcomes his pity and invites the ugliest man to his cave. Santaniello argues that the man represents Socrates.\textsuperscript{39} This is because in \textit{The Birth of Tragedy}, Nietzsche accuses Socrates of expelling Dionysius from Greek tragedy. Furthermore, Socrates was famously ugly. Young disagrees, arguing that as it has already been revealed that God has died from pitying mankind, this pity is for mankind’s “ugliness.” The ugliest man therefore represents the “human-all-to-human” ugliness of mankind. As the man who killed God and is responsible for this great event, he is admirable. Unfortunately, however, the ugliest man has killed God out of revenge and for this reason has yet to overcome his revengeful spirit.

After his encounter with the ugliest man, Zarathustra comes across a “voluntary beggar,” a rich man grown weary of rich people who voluntarily becomes poor. Unfortunately, he is just as nauseated by the poor, and has now learned to cud
from the cows and found his cure for nausea. The dominant interpretation of the voluntary beggar in the literature is that he represents Jesus or a messiah figure of some kind. Kaufmann, in a footnote of his translation suggests that the figure is Moses. Kellenberger argues that “while the voluntary beggar is not named, it is clear beyond a shadow of doubt that Nietzsche has in mind Jesus.” Similarly, Lampert states that the figure is most likely Jesus. Seung, however, offers a different interpretation, viewing the voluntary beggar as a kind of “Spinozian superhero.” The voluntary beggar is one who looked for happiness in both the poor and the rich and could not find it and so now looks to find the secret of happiness from the cow. Seung argues that the voluntary beggar’s quest was established on other-worldly delusions. Having found only disgust in humans of any class (rich or poor) he turns to find “a new mode of life (cow-life) that will both preserve itself and also be happy because unconscious of disgust, and will finally thus be conducive to the other-worldly.” He also notes that the herd of cows may represent a joke on resurrection. The voluntary beggar has learned to overcome nausea and for Nietzsche this is no small feat. However, he is praising the herd-like qualities and egalitarian principles which the cow represents, and this still needs to be overcome.

Zarathustra has been persistently followed by his shadow. As his shadow calls to him, he is annoyed and tries in vain to outrun him. Eventually, Zarathustra realizes his folly and stops to confront his shadow. The shadow reveals he is a wanderer looking for his homecoming. He is described as tired “so thin, swarthy, hollow, and outlived.” Zarathustra invites the shadow to the cave to rest there and he continues his journey finally alone. Scholars are in agreement that the shadow represents the positivist Nietzsche. This is because the shadow is described as a “wanderer” and “homeless,” sharing obvious similarities to Nietzsche’s book *The Wanderer and his Shadow* from his positivist period. However, little is said as to why Nietzsche/Zarathustra casts his positivist self away and continues his journey alone. As this is the seventh character, I suggest that this represents Nietzsche’s journey of self-overcoming, and the shadow is the final overcoming before we are left with the current Nietzsche, the author of Zarathustra represented by the character of Zarathustra himself. The shadow represents nihilism and is important to Nietzsche because it is the last of the higher men he meets. Nihilism in Nietzsche’s eyes can be positive or negative. As Nietzsche runs from his shadow, the scene portrays the shadow running after Zarathustra, who is running after the voluntary beggar. This is not insignificant. The voluntary beggar and the shadow represent two different consequences of Zarathustra’s teaching: the two poles of
active and passive. Thus when Zarathustra finally faces his shadow he not only overcomes his pity but points towards the overcoming of nihilism.

Kaufmann notes that each of the characters also represents something of Nietzsche himself, an allegorical personage. Each of these men, therefore, represent “higher men” and each have something of the spirit of the overman. However, it is essential to note they are not yet the overman and neither is Zarathustra. This becomes apparent when Zarathustra returns to his cave, and following a welcome, enjoys “the last supper” with his guests.

5. ZARATHUSTRA AND THE CHARACTERS IN THE CAVE: “THE LAST SUPPER”

In Zarathustra’s cave, the men prepare for a dinner with wine and lamb. The voluntary beggar is the only one to refuse the meat and wine and Zarathustra drinks only water. Scholars agree that “the last supper” is a parody of the Biblical last supper, lending again to the religious theme of Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Throughout the dinner they speak of only the higher men. In the section that follows the last supper, “On the Higher Man,” Zarathustra recounts his early days when he visited the mob in the marketplace. Now more wise, he has lost concern with the herd of the marketplace and warns the men assembled in his cave, who he now refers to as “higher men,” to stay away from the marketplace where they believe that all men are equal and do not believe in “higher men.” Zarathustra then gives the higher men an illuminating speech which sheds light on their place in Nietzsche’s philosophical vision, and which is worth quoting in full:

Before God! But now this god has died. You higher men, this god was your greatest danger. It is only since he lies in his tomb that you have been resurrected. Only now the great noon comes; only now the higher man becomes—lord.

Have you understood this word, O my brothers? You are startled? Do your hearts become giddy? Does the abyss yawn before you? Does hellhound howl at you? Well then, you higher men! Only now is the mountain of man’s future in labor. God died: now we want the overman to live.45

The most concerned ask today: ‘How is man to be preserved?’ But Zarathustra is the first and only one to ask: ‘How is man to be overcome?’ I have
the overman at heart, that is my first and only concern—and not man: not the neighbour, not the poorest, not the most ailing, not the best.46

The above two passages are particularly important because they show not only that the higher type is not the overman. They also show that the overcoming of man (or the sacrifice of man) is not about aristocracy or rank, but a testament against self-preservation in the name of a sacrifice as a gift in the service of this world. Furthermore, we can see here that the death of God does not leave us with rank, as some of the literature suggests, but rather we are left with possibility; in particular the possibility of the overman and the creation of new values. The higher men can thus be seen as stuck in a state of active nihilism as described in the late notebooks.47 They each have something of the destroyer, of the negator or the no-sayer, about them and Zarathustra admires this, which is why they are invited to his cave. The destruction of old values is a necessary step to the creation of the new. However, though the day has come the higher men are not the solution. Nietzsche requires the creation of new values and for this he needs both no-sayers and yes-sayers. In the Antichrist, Nietzsche sums this up poignantly when comparing modern man’s happiness to what a higher type requires: “In our atmosphere was a thunderstorm; the nature we are became dark—for we saw no way. Formula for our happiness: a Yes, a No, a straight line, a goal.”48

This goal is the overman. The higher men represent an intermediary state and are thus necessary, but nonetheless must themselves be overcome. When Nietzsche calls for the overcoming of man he does not wish to merely sacrifice the herd type. This is not about rank or aristocracy. In pursuit of the overman, Zarathustra has only this in his heart, and not man, not even “the best.”49 After all, for Nietzsche there is no doer behind the deed and to make such an assumption would be to fall into the belief in “being” where there is only becoming: “It is belief in the living and thinking as the only effective force—in will, in intention—it is belief that every event is a deed, that every deed presupposes a doer, it is belief in the ‘subject.’”50 Nietzsche, however, wants to overcome this dichotomy of “being” and “becoming.”

6. CONCLUSION

Nietzsche’s dislike for the “pity, self-abnegation and self-sacrifice” underlying Christian values is well-known. For Nietzsche, they represent self-denying and life-negating values which ultimately destroy the human spirit and hinder the cul-
tivation of greatness. However, there is a kind of sacrifice that Nietzsche does advocate. We can see a self-sacrifice that Nietzsche admires in the Dionysian man because unlike its counterpart in the ascetic man this type of self-sacrifice is life affirming. For Nietzsche, the overman is not a goal to be realised, there is no end-state. However the process of continual self-overcoming itself is what Nietzsche argues allows for life-affirming creativity, as seen most evidently in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. And self-overcoming always involves a kind of self-sacrifice:

> The difference between the self-sacrifice of the overman and the Christian self-sacrifice is that the overman does not sacrifice himself in the herd’s stead, but in order to emerge from it. Or, better, he sacrifices himself by emerging from it, for the overman, if he really is an overman, cannot avoid his own sacrifice.

Christian self-sacrifice, therefore, is a kind of renunciation because its goal is to gain access to the “other-worldly.” The self-sacrifice characterised by the overman’s self-overcoming, on the other hand, is life-affirming because it accepts the “death of God” and sacrifices only for this world, thus affirming it and ultimately giving it meaning: “The overman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the overman shall be the meaning of the earth! I beseech you my bothers, remain faithful to the earth, and do not believe those who speak to you of otherworldly hopes!”

While the self-sacrifice of the ascetic man can be differentiated from the self-sacrifice of the overman, the necessity of self-sacrifice becomes clearer when compared to what Nietzsche calls the “last man.” The “last man” does not sacrifice anything. The last man risks nothing, seeking only comfort in the logic of the same. He seeks pleasure and avoidance of pain. Conversely, Nietzsche’s Dionysian man seeks risk in the creation of the new. Rather than avoid pain, he affirms life in its entirety, including its suffering.

The Dionysian man’s affirmation of life in its entirety shows an acceptance and love of life and all that comes with it. In the Nietzschean view, life is becoming, which includes constant generation and degeneration, continual coming to be and passing away. The Dionysian man turns his Dionysian principle towards creative projects but as one who affirms the entirety of life he understands that degeneration is just as much a part of life as creation. He sees destruction as an opportunity to create something new, despite the natural pain or suffering de-
A coming to be and passing away, a building and destroying without any moral valuation, in eternal selfsame innocence, belong in this world only to the play of the artist and the child. And as the artist and the child play, so the eternal living fire plays, builds up and destroys in innocence—and this game the *aion* plays with itself. Transforming itself into water and earth it piles up sandcastles like a child beside the sea, piles up and tramples down: and from time to time begins its game anew.\(^{53}\)

While Nietzsche is actually referring to Heraclitean flux here, it is not difficult to imagine that the Dionysian man is a spirit akin to an innocent child creating sandcastles by the sea while knowing they will be swept away and destroyed—only to start his game anew. Sacrifice can be seen as a kind of surrender to the innocent becoming of this world. There can be strength in surrender, insofar as it is a type of surrender which is life-affirming and symbolises a “fullness of life.” As Nietzsche puts it:

> He that is richest in the fullness of life, the Dionysian god and man, cannot only afford the sight of the terrible and questionable but even the terrible deed and any luxury of destruction, decomposition, and negation.\(^{54}\)

While Nietzsche began by thinking in terms of the dichotomy of vitality and decadence, he soon overcame this duality, as he so often did. Nietzsche realises that vitality is dependent upon some forms of non-vitality. That is to say that vitality arises from suffering, decadence and decay which, in the truly great, is used to refine the spirit and to add style to their character. In this sense, sacrifice plays an important role along the way towards self-mastery. For Nietzsche, growth is never attained by peace and good fortune, but by conquest, striving and continual overcoming. Indeed, self-overcoming cannot be performed without sacrifice, although as seen in the instance of slave morality, not all sacrifice leads to self-overcoming. There are thus both healthy and unhealthy forms of sacrifice. Nietzsche views sacrifice as he views all things. Nothing is good or bad in and of itself, but a thing’s value is judged on whether it leads to enhancement or decay. Christian self-sacrifice is an example of the type of sacrifice which leads to decadence. In the higher type, however, healthy sacrifice is necessary in order to achieve self-advancement. But in the Dionysian man, sacrifice is for affirming life; it is solely a Yes to life as becoming and becoming as life. Like Dionysus, Nietzsche’s Dionysian man forms
himself in a continuous process of self-overcoming, whereby he constantly sac-
ifices himself. This is not an elitist sacrifice of the lower for the sake of higher
humanity. Rather, it is self-giving from an overabundance of life; a healthy conse-
quence of the Dionysian man’s affirmation of life in its entirety.

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NOTES

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1. I am using the term self-formation to signify the kind of artistic self-creation Nietzsche often advocates when he encourages one to “make poets of ourselves,” “become who we are” and in particular “giving style to one’s character.” See Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1974, §290, p.232 for the best illustration of Nietzsche’s views on self-formation.


4. For this reason, I will be using the term “Dionysian man” instead of Nietzsche’s “overman.”


11. This is based mainly on the distinction Nietzsche sketches out in On the Genealogy of Morals. For example he argues in slave morality “…an attempt is made to employ to block up the wells of force; here physiological well-being itself is viewed askance, and especially the outward expression of this well-being, beauty and joy; while pleasure is felt and sought in ill-constitutedness, decay, pain, mischance, ugliness, voluntary deprivation, self-mortification, self-flagellation, self-sacrifice.” See Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals, Third Essay, §11, p.118.


22. Nietzsche views egoism like he views sacrifice; neither good nor bad in and of themselves but as healthy (life-affirming) or unhealthy (life-denying). For example, Young notes “Nietzsche repeatedly described the beneficial effects for others that emanate from the self-realized individual who pursues a noble egoism in terms of ‘overflowing’ or well-being from the self-contended individual to those around him.” See Julian Young, *Individual and Community in Nietzsche’s Philosophy*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, p.171.


43. Ibid, p.178.
47. Nietzsche, *The Late Notebooks*, §9[35], p.146-147.
feeling in the flesh: approaching an ecological ethic through whitehead and merleau-ponty
andrew kirkpatrick

AN OVERVIEW OF THE FLESH

The most important concept in Merleau-Ponty’s late ontology is the concept of “flesh,” which seeks to detail a fundamental continuity between the self and the world. This continuity is simultaneously stark and ambiguous. It is stark in its literal sense, whereby Merleau-Ponty claims that we are ultimately made from “the same stuff,” yet thoroughly ambiguous in both its immateriality, and the generality with which it is employed. Compounded by the unfinished nature of Merleau-Ponty’s work, this ambiguity has led to multiple interpretations and emphases of the flesh within Merleau-Pontian scholarship, especially in regards to its usefulness as a concept to ground an environmental ethic. However, as this paper seeks to show, such ambiguity need not be seen as an obstacle standing in the way of developing an ethical stance based on the flesh. Rather, such “confusions” ought to be seen as a virtue of the flesh and a necessary component when thinking in terms of the flesh.

Despite this resistance to an absolute and static definition, when approaching the flesh it is useful to employ what Lawrence Hass identifies as the three “primary” senses of the flesh, characterised as carnality, reversibility, and general being. Flesh as Carnality can be understood in the least metaphorical sense of the word,
as associated with notions of substance, visibility, animism, materiality, and tangibility. The presence of this sense of flesh in Merleau-Ponty’s work is identified by Hass in words such as “surface,” “density,” “mass,” “body,” “weight,” “thickness” and “presence.” This sense of flesh has a heavy connotation, as an earthy substance, or the real “stuff” of which the actual world is made. This sense of flesh is typically understood as that which is “visible.”

Unlike carnal flesh, flesh as reversibility is unsubstantial. This sense of flesh is understood in terms of the chiasmatic intertwining or folding over of the flesh, which Merleau-Ponty describes as the “exchange between me and the world.” Hass identifies this in words such as “possibility,” “latency,” “cohesion,” “coiling over,” “folding back,” “prototype,” “style,” and “paradox.” Etymologically, the metaphor of “chiasm” refers to the “crossing over” that occurs when, from two monocular images, we attain the unity of a thing in binocular vision. Toadvine argues that it is through this notion of chiasm and binocular vision that we are provided with an affirmation of the pre-given unity of the world. The flesh as chiasmatic reversibility maintains what could be termed a “dissipative structure” or “constitutive paradox” that is located at the juncture of perceptual exchange.

Flesh as an element of general being is something more general than matter, mind, and substance. Hass associates this sense with the words “general principle,” “exemplar,” and “concrete emblem of being.” While not carnal, this sense of flesh is understood as the most primordial and “elemental” sense of flesh. As Merleau-Ponty describes it:

To designate it, we should need the old term ‘element,’ in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a general thing midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea … The flesh is in this sense an ‘element’ of Being.

It is worth noting that Merleau-Ponty states that the “most difficult point” in conceptualising the flesh is “the bond between the flesh and the idea, between the visible and the interior armature which it manifests and which it conceals.”

Flesh as general being is the most difficult sense to pin down and can thus be said to span the other two senses of the flesh, as the general principle that underlies all senses and expressions of the flesh.
These three senses of flesh are not final, static, hierarchical, or absolute; they are closely interrelated and simultaneously structure, support, and co-create one another. For instance, while general being can be considered primordial, it relies on visible, carnal flesh for its articulation. Conversely, general being becomes a meaningless category without some visible manifestation. This articulation is achieved through chiasmatic intertwining and reversibility, which speaks to the manner in which elemental flesh is situated “between” the individual and the idea.\textsuperscript{12}

The flesh, then, must be understood as having multiple, inexhaustive meanings, of which these three styles merely represent dominant identifiable patterns, layers, or “sides” of the flesh.\textsuperscript{13} For instance, another characterisation of the flesh that Hass identifies is the flesh as Mother,\textsuperscript{14} which itself has important environmental implications relating to the familial bond between self and world, mostly in terms of the dependence of the former on the latter.\textsuperscript{15}

Despite being perpetually incomplete—and always entailing more than can be directly stated—these three “primary” senses of the flesh identified by Hass provide a useful framework through which we can approach and understand the flesh in all its guises. While all three senses of the flesh are interrelated and co-constituting, this paper seeks to show that there are important ethical implications based on the movement or direction we take when thinking the flesh as a basis for environmental ethics.

THE FLESH FOURFOLD: ABRAM, TOADVINE, BARBARAS AND BANNON

In his book \textit{The Spell of the Sensuous}, David Abram understands the flesh in two principle ways. First as the “mysterious tissue or matrix that underlies and gives rise to both the perceiver and the perceived”\textsuperscript{16} and secondly as “an intertwined, and actively intertwining, lattice of mutually dependent phenomena … of which our own sensing bodies are a part.”\textsuperscript{17} The first of these descriptions speaks to the carnal sense of the flesh, while the latter description expresses a sense of reversibility and general being in the flesh. Abram demonstrates both these senses of the flesh in the following passage:

Each of us … is both subject and object, sensible and sentient. Why, then, might this not also be the case in relation to another, nonhuman entity? … Even an ant crawling along my arm … displays at the same time its own sentience … why might not this ‘reversibility’ of subject and object extend
to every entity that I experience? ... I find myself forced to acknowledge that any visible, tangible form that meets my gaze may also be an experiencing subject, sensitive and responsive to the beings around it.\(^{18}\)

Following Merleau-Ponty’s own trajectory derived from a philosophy of embodiment, Abram emphasises the material continuity between self and world. We are able to experience the world, Abram says, because we are a body in and of this world; such an experience is unavailable to “a wholly immaterial mind.”\(^{19}\) He argues that we “might as well say we are organs of this world, flesh of its flesh,” and adopt the view that “the world is perceiving itself through us.”\(^{20}\) Abram hopes that this approach to nature, which emphasises the material continuity of the touching/touched, will provide a “renewed attentiveness” to nature and the grounds for a new environmental ethic based on the “rejuvenation of our carnal, sensorial empathy with the living land that sustains us.”\(^{21}\)

The passage by which Abram traverses the flesh—from carnality (my arm), to reversibility (the ant’s sentience in relation to my own), to general being (the earth itself, the reversibility of every entity)—expands outwards from embodied, lived experience towards a general sense of being. Because of this, it runs the risk of anthropomorphising the flesh and dissolving all differences in nature.\(^{22}\) This is problematic for an environmental ethic based on the flesh, as Brown and Toadvine have pointed out, because it runs the risk of collapsing humanity and nature into a “predictable, continuous, and homogenous unity,” from which we cannot make any distinctions, ethical or otherwise.\(^{23}\) It is for this reason that Toadvine argues that any ethical response to nature requires recognition of its unpredictable, non-homogenous and non-continuous character. This is something Merleau-Ponty sought to emphasise in his late works through a recognition that along with continuity there must be a sense of difference in the flesh, that is, a gap or an écart between the touching and the touched. However, such gaps need not imply total discontinuity and externality. As Merleau-Ponty puts it:

\[
\text{[T]his hiatus between my right hand touched and my right hand touching, between my voice heard and my voice uttered, between one moment of my tactile life and the following one, is not an ontological void ... it is spanned by the total being of my body, and by that of the world.}^{24}\]

From this we can understand that general being spans carnal flesh, and that, though carnal flesh might be our inevitable starting point when experiencing the flesh, it
cannot be our starting point when thinking or conceptualising the flesh. Therefore, it is not so much the sentiment of Abram’s account that is problematic as it is the movement itself. What is required is some distance between ourselves and the flesh—not an extreme pensée du survol but a more modest suspension or epoché that is provided by the notion of gaps.

Whereas Abram emphasises carnality first and reversibility second, characterised by his movement from a shared animistic substance to a touching/touched relationship, Toadvine places an emphasis on the chiasmatic reversibility of the flesh whereby the carnal face of flesh must be understood as the product—rather than producer—of reversibility. Toadvine understands human life and sentience as expressions of the flesh, which only take on the status of carnal manifestation through the self-reflexive nature of flesh. In doing so, he recognises that it is only through differentiation that something like carnal substance can emerge. In this sense, reversibility must be seen as the pre-requisite for expression; that is, there can be no expressive qualities without difference; there can be no carnality without reversibility. In this sense, Toadvine’s interpretation of the flesh primarily follows Hass’ second sense, whereby flesh is understood as the folding over of itself into expressive styles or manners of being.

Where Abram stresses and explicates animistic flesh as a continuity of humans in nature, Toadvine emphasises expressive flesh as a flesh of difference and emergence from within nature. However, this shift in emphasis—from anthropomorphising nature to naturalising human being as an expressive mode of nature—ultimately leads Toadvine to conclude that there can be no ethical conclusions derived from Merleau-Ponty’s ontology. He maintains that although we may be “folds of the world’s flesh” this “points to no particular ethical consequences, environmental or otherwise.” This echoes Merleau-Ponty’s own working notes for the The Visible and the Invisible in which he points out that “the distinction between the two planes (natural and cultural) is abstract: everything is cultural in us ... and everything is natural in us.” That is, there is a tautological impotence inherent to the concept of “the natural” as an ethical category. If we begin with reversibility, as Toadvine does, and emphasise les écarts, then we commit to a flesh of in-difference—difference for the sake of difference with no possible way of valuing any kind of difference or expression above any other.

The most forceful argument against the flesh as a basis for an environmental ethic is found in Barabaras’ critique of the flesh. However, it is not the apparently val-
ueless cul-de-sac of the flesh that Barbaras criticises, but the notion of the flesh itself. Barbaras rejects Merleau-Ponty’s ontology on the grounds that it is internally inconsistent, insisting that there is “an irreducible incompatibility between a phenomenology of perception and a philosophy of flesh.” Barbaras’ concerns are somewhat interrelated to Toadvine’s, insofar as he emphasises les écarts and is concerned about the place of the human subject in a world where subject and object become invariably blurred. He argues that the blurring of the subject and the object simply results in the dissolution of the subject, whereby “there is no longer an ontological difference between matter and organic beings.” In order to embrace the philosophy of flesh, Barbaras holds that we must give up not only “the distinction between perception and perceived object” but also “the phenomenology of perception itself.”

Nevertheless, Barbaras holds that Toadvine’s position entails another form of anthropomorphism from which we cannot escape. According to Barbaras, we cannot escape this anthropomorphism because we always prescribe meaning to nature from a uniquely human perspective. As embodied subjects, Barbaras argues that we are forced to accept a “positive anthropomorphism” as a fundamental “truth with which we must reckon.” This inescapability from our human situation extends to Barbaras’ critique of the flesh in general, which he sees as incompatible with Merleau-Ponty’s subjective starting point in the Phenomenology of Perception. This “positive” anthropomorphism is of a different kind to that found in Abram, and is one that exaggerates the gap between human being and nature. Rather than emphasise our continuity with the flesh of the world, and dissolve the subject into a greater unity, Barbaras reinforces the boundaries between them, embracing the privileged subjectivist position whereby man is “the measure of all things,” and our bodies “the measurement of all reality.” Ultimately, Barbaras rejects the flesh as a viable ontology due to what he sees as Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological commitments to a philosophy of consciousness; that is, he holds that the flesh cannot be reconciled with perception, and that there can be no blurring between Merleau-Ponty’s object (ontology) and his subject (phenomenology).

The most promising interpretation of the flesh for an environmental ethic is found in Bannon, who provides what could be termed a “process-relational” interpretation of the flesh that seeks to avoid the shared sense of anthropomorphism—whether advocated for or not—found in Abram, Toadvine and Barbaras. According to Bannon, this apparent inevitability of anthropomorphism stems from the phenomenological starting point of consciousness and “basing ontol-
ogy in perceptual experience.” Following Galen Johnson, who describes the flesh as “event and process” and an “ontology of verbs and adverbs,” Bannon provides a relational interpretation of the flesh that challenges the assumption “that flesh is fundamentally a perceptual structure originating from a sentient body’s lived-perception.” Rather than perception, Bannon maintains that we can understand the flesh “through the idea of internal relations” and what he terms a general theory of affectivity. He argues that such an ontology must begin with a “general conception of experience” in which every natural body can be said to be both experiencing and sensitive to its environment in different ways. Therefore, what Bannon seeks is a kind of “inhuman” phenomenology concerned with the experiential relationships that exist between all things, living and non-living. Bannon’s flesh posits things as characterised by interiority rather than exteriority, whereby “to be” simply means “to be open to affection.” “The flesh,” on Bannon’s account, is not a word for “being,” but “the manner in which a body relates to other bodies.” However, Bannon maintains that “to attribute interiority does not require the attribution of consciousness or even sentience,” as Barbaras or Abram seem to suggest. On this understanding, “a thing” is considered to be a “nexus of flesh relations that constitute it as an individual.” Bannon argues that it is through such an approach to the flesh that we can avoid the “anthropomorphising position that Barbaras suggests is … inevitable,” given that there is “nothing inherently anthropomorphic” about the idea “that a being is a nexus of relations.”

The flesh becomes a lot less like a “thing” of animistic substance and more like a metaphorical fabric that is woven out of many threads—relations—of which the visible flesh is seen to represent a “knot.” It is worth noting that the French word étoffe is translatable to English as “stuff,” “cloth,” or “fabric.” So when Merleau-Ponty says that we are “made of the same stuff” in reference to the flesh, we can equally understand this as being “made of the same fabric.” The benefit gained from this shift in metaphor is that “fabric” better encapsulates the language of the “folding” and “crossing” over of the flesh. Unlike the homogenous and substantemonistic implication of “stuff,” it is generally the nature of fabric to be composed of individual threads, which also speaks to an understanding of a unity in and from difference. This relational understanding of the flesh as an ironically immaterial fabric helps us to guard against a movement that would iron out the differences in the flesh and dissolve the subject and the object into one. Rather, this conception of the flesh would understand that it is the folds in the flesh that add to its depth and quite literally enable it to increase itself beyond itself. Rather than breaking down the flesh, it is a conceptual movement that builds it up.
However, Bannon concedes that even if we overcome the anthropomorphism of the flesh “it remains unclear how this ontology provides a basis for normative judgements.”

Therefore, in order to develop a relational ontology and subsequent environmental ethic, Bannon notes that a “lingering” question remains: that is, “what transformations are necessary within phenomenological methodology in order to adapt it to a more general theory of affection?” Such a transformation can be achieved through Whitehead’s philosophy of organism.

WHITEHEAD’S PHILOSOPHY OF ORGANISM

In Whitehead’s philosophy of organism we are presented with a metaphysical scheme in which both affectivity and perception are blurred at the most basic level of reality. In Whitehead’s metaphysics, actual entities are the “real things” that make up the world. Interchangeably referred to as “actual occasions,” these entities are understood to be durational processes of becoming. It is through these actual entities that Whitehead is able to attribute a notion of subjective experience throughout the whole of nature, with actual entities also understood to be “subjects” or “drops of experience.” Whitehead notes that “experience involves a becoming, ... [which] means that something becomes,” with that which becomes involving a “repition transformed into novel immediacy.” Simply put, experience denotes change. In accordance with Bannon, such a conception of experience is understood in the broadest possible terms, and is not to be confused with consciousness. Experience remains “existentially prior” to consciousness, with all processes of change intrinsically involving “experience.” Hence, a rock can be said to “experience” the world around it, actively becoming that rock through hundreds of thousands of years of experience involving sedimentation, erosion and interference by animals and events. Similarly, a coastal rock formation will experience erosion caused by the waves that crash into it. In turn, those waves will experience and yield to the stopping power of the cliff-face.

If we understand actual entities as units of experience and transitory processes of becoming, then we can begin to think about the “life,” as it were, of actual occasions. This life span of actual entities is understood as a process of attaining “satisfactions” or “achievements,” with “concrescence” the word used to describe the phase of growth that entities undergo in achieving their satisfactions. Concrescence signifies the growing together of the many into the unity of one, and this is achieved through acts of what Whitehead calls positive and negative prehension. The word “prehension” comes from the Latin verb *prehensio* meaning...
“to seize,” with the act of prehending understood as the process of seizing data, the taking up of past actual occasions (the past actual world) and internalizing them in present occasions. It also involves the taking up of future possible worlds, with the becoming of an actual entity effectively understood as a synthesis of the actual past and possible futures embodied in one momentary satisfaction of nature. What Whitehead calls the satisfactions of actual entities then serve as the efficient causes for new entities, making up what is termed the “physical pole” of a concrescence. This involves the passive reception of what is “given” in past acts of becoming, while the second half of prehension is a self-directed component called the “mental” or “conceptual” pole of prehension. This consists of the subject determining its own act of becoming as a creative process. That it is termed “mental” again does not imply consciousness, but rather the prehension of what Whithead calls “eternal objects.” These eternal objects provide the “subjective aim,” “lure,” or final cause of an actual entity. There is, then, a two-fold potentiality. There is a “general potentiality provided by eternal objects” and a “real” potentiality “conditioned by the data provided by the actual world.” In the becoming of an actual entity, there is a dialectical synthesis of constraint and freedom, of conditions and possibilities, which facilitates the passage of nature. It is the role of eternal objects, as essences or styles, to help determine the potential pathways of becoming, and to serve as the final causes that guide an actual entity in selecting and rejecting the prehensions available to it.

The attainment of satisfaction signifies both the birth and death of an actual entity, whereby upon perishing, an actual entity will achieve its “immortality” as the objective datum available for prehension in new acts of concrescence. It is this becoming and perishing of actual entities that provides the continuity of nature, as well as the rhythmic pulse of reality. Like the beating heart of bodily flesh, the notion of a “pulsating” and “rhythmic” reality indicates the presence of temporal écarts in nature. Actual entities become “immortal” because each actual entity entails and requires the embodiment of the entire actual past within it; no actual entity is isolated from the relational network of becoming, and each must be understood as a product/producer of nature as a whole. Perished entities become quasi-causal, with causation understood as the transference of experience that results in the “re-enactment” of the feelings of causes. An entity is in this sense compelled to reiterate what came before it, without necessarily replicating it exactly. This is not a monistic replication of nature whereby each actual entity is understood as displaying the same nature, but something that can be understood in terms of difference and divergence. As per the philosophy of organism, this trans-
mission of immortality can be understood as a genetic process, in the sense that we are products of, and carry within us, the experience of our ancestors. However, we do not simply replicate their experience; we have new experiences as a result of their experiences. Our ancestors achieve their immortality not only in us, but also in the cultural artifacts they leave behind, and the far-from isolated impact that their “mere” existence has had on the natural world. However, negative prehensions—those eternal objects not taken up and actualized in concrete reality—also play a role in the constitution of reality as unrealized “invisibles” that remain latent in nature. To again use a genetic metaphor, negative prehensions could be seen as those recessive traits that are not expressed in an organism but remain “invisible” within it, awaiting the facilitative conditions to achieve their satisfaction. Thus, they haunt the actual world as unrealized potentials.

Concrecence and prehension imply that actual entities are not atomistic objects externally related to one another, but experiencing subjects that are open and internally related to one another. Unlike Leibniz’s windowless monads, we cannot have an isolated actual occasion. This is because a new actual entity will require other past actual occasions to serve as the “object” or “material” that will help to constitute its own process of becoming. Thus, Whitehead’s actual entities are thoroughly “windowed” and open to one another—as momentary, ephemeral knots in a web of relations. As with the language of reversibility, actual entities co-constitute and envelop one another, seizing and grasping one another in order to become “visible” as a satisfaction and objective datum. In this sense, carnality is achieved through reversibility. Furthermore, they are affectively related to one another, with positive prehensions also termed “feelings.” Feeling is understood by Whitehead to be analogous to perception, whereby to feel is also to perceive. So when an actual entity, as an experiencing subject, prehends an external object, it is perceiving, experiencing, and feeling that object. It must also be stressed that the actual entity is a unitary whole that houses within it its physical (objective) and mental (subjective) poles. Furthermore, these poles are not “parts” of the actual entity, but abstractions from the whole. Nature itself is an holistic entity within which all other subjects/objects exist in a constituting/constituted relationship as abstractions from this whole. The reversibility expressed through the constituting/constituted relationship of actual entities is thoroughly “chiasmatic” insofar as it involves the folding over and in-crease of nature that results in the achievement of momentary “satisfactions”—instances of visibility that come to the fore as objective datum available for further acts ofprehension. This entails recognition through perception and ultimately, the constitution of other visibles;
visibles that are not wholly contemporaneous but products of an ineliminable and temporal écart implied by the durational nature of process.

Thus for Whitehead, the very fabric of nature, both living and non-living, is composed of perceptual processes. It is in eternal objects that we are provided with the subjective aims of actual entities, which corresponds to Bannon’s idea of developing an “inhuman” phenomenology. That prehension involves “seizing” speaks to the “touching/touched” quality of the flesh. Each actual entity is touching and touched, grasping and grasped, and this process implies a durational and temporal écart. Thus, we can understand that each actual entity is a minute, temporal and rippling “fold” within an overarching sense of the flesh, which can be characterized as general being.

Through a Whiteheadian reading of the flesh we thus arrive at a sense of general being characterized by a general, in-visible, potentiality, followed by the perceptual reversibility of actual entities, which attain their actualization in visible carnality. While this is opposite to the movement that Abram makes, it is worth noting that when we experience the flesh it is necessarily embodied and therefore carnal. Hence, it is important to acknowledge the necessity of both movements, which compliment each other. The movement from self to world, from carnality to general being, and back again requires a continual oscillation between these poles. Like Merleau-Ponty’s own œuvre, which can be characterized as a movement from phenomenology to ontology,62 there remains within the incomplete pages of The Visible and the Invisible an unfulfilled intention to return to the phenomenology.63

CULTIVATING INTENTIONAL POTENTIALITY

Whitehead’s metaphysics opens up the possibility of conceiving a subjective flesh of relational interdependence. However, where does this leave us in terms of an environmental ethic? Given that Bannon “would prefer to imagine a nature in which humanity collectively cultivates beauty rather than facilitates its destruction,”64 the importation of Whiteheadian metaphysics into a relational conception of the flesh may provide the grounding for the kind of ethic that Bannon seeks. Further to this, by modifying Bannon’s position through the introduction of Whitehead’s pansubjective metaphysics, wherein every entity in nature is said to have both a subjective aim and the capacity to feel and be felt, we can preserve the notion that the flesh as experienced is inherently perceptual, as in Abram,
Toadvine and Barbaras, while also emphasizing the relational, affective status of the flesh prior to human consciousness. From this, we can approach an optimistic ethic based on creativity and the cultivation of higher, more complex kinds of feeling. This is in accord with Toadvine, who argues that a “change in our thinking about what is can lead to an entirely different conception of ethics ... that circles less around principles of moral obligation and that instead concerns our dwelling within the world,” whereby to “encounter nature ... is also to creatively express it, [and] to take up its rhythms as our own.” This is consistent with a Whiteheadian approach, which can help to overcome Toadvine’s resignation towards deriving an environmental ethic based on the flesh. In part, this arises from Toadvine’s resignation towards a “renewed philosophy of nature” as opposed to an “environmental” philosophy. According to Toadvine, any “environmental philosophy” is implicitly anthropomorphic, since it “connotes the surrounding world ... for human beings.” By contrast, he argues that a shift towards a philosophy of nature provides a “rich ambiguity” concerning “the being of nature, the being of humanity, and the relation between the two.” That is, it is necessarily relational. However, the very notion of an “ethic” is concerned with how human beings should act in the world, and thus any ethic will be implicitly anthropomorphic; we are not passive bystanders in nature, but active producers of nature who dwell within it. Since Barbaras has pointed out that Toadvine’s interpretation of the flesh simply leads us to a different kind of anthropomorphism, perhaps a different shift in terms is needed. Given that we exist at the chiasmatic crux of nature, rather than adopting a strictly “natural” philosophy—which implies neutrality—or “environmental” philosophy—which implies situated dwelling and anthropomorphic projection—what we ought to be aiming for is an “ecological” ethic that acknowledges both the “natural” and “environmental” while emphasizing the relational bonds that exist between the human and non-human world. An ecological ethic would then seek to overcome the neutrality of nature along with those positions that would render it an indifferent producer of meaningless and arbitrary differences. In developing such an ethic, nature must be shown to have ends independent of human consciousness. Therefore, what is required is a sense of agency or intentionality in nature.

Given that Whitehead’s philosophy is primarily concerned with the creative advance of nature, a Whiteheadian reading of the flesh can provide us with the means to develop an ecologial ethic based on the cultivation of what I term the “intentional potentiality” of nature. Intentional potentiality is found in the mental pole of an actual occasion and denotes the degree of openness that particular
subjects have to act and become in the world. This speaks to the creative potential of nature and the inhuman intentionality that is found in Whitehead’s eternal objects. Intentional potentiality in its most developed form is found in the mental pole of a society of actual occasions. Nature, as a society of actual occasions—or a society of societies—has intentional objects towards which it strives, with these intentional objects provided by the mental poles of subordinate societies, expressed in terms of a general intentional potentiality. The differences that occur in nature can then be understood as expressions of intentional potentiality, which indicate a particular valuation of one possible world over other possible worlds. On this understanding, value is not only inherent in nature, but is also the means by which it produces itself. Is it problematic to attribute a typically human notion of intentionality to all of nature? Not when understood in terms of pre-reflective intentionality. Intentional potentiality can thus be informed by Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of the body-subject and being-in-the-world not as a matter of “I think,” but of “I can.” For Merleau-Ponty the experience of being is not reliant on consciousness, and thinking is not a pre-requisite for existence. It is not a matter of “je pense, donc je suis,” nor even “je suis, donc je pense.” Rather, it is a matter of “je suis, donc je peux” or “je suis parce que je peux.” It is matter of existing because one can, because one exhibits a style or a manner of being as a verb. A rose has its own manner of being, in the sense that even a rose “roses.” Likewise, a rock can be said “to rock”—that is, “exist.” Therefore, an ethic grounded on the notion of intentional potentiality is concerned with providing the conditions in which nature can not only actively become, but actively become different—that is to say, become novel.

Despite the inherent significance of non-living things as intentional accomplishments of nature, such an ethic would inevitably grant a special place to human beings as those expressions of the flesh that possess highly complex and sophisticated degrees of intentional potentiality. However, it would also understand that such occasions are essentially relational, and would therefore value those non-living expressions of the flesh that contribute to and facilitate higher forms of intentional potentiality. On this understanding, it is an ethic that would value the conditions for autonomy more so than the explicit exercise of autonomy. However, this does not mean that we are condemned to revert to an anthropocentric position, wherein the cultivation of “beauty” that Bannon advocates would necessarily be an exclusively human kind of beauty. The notion of cultivating beauty accords with process ecologist John Cobb Jr’s affirmation of greater value in a world that is beautiful to human beings. This is based on what Cobb identifies as a “consider-
able correlation between what we find beautiful and the sort of environment [that is] hospitable to higher forms of life.” In contrasting a “beautiful world” consisting of birds and animals with an “ugly world” of worms and insects, Cobb notes that the feelings of birds and animals are more valuable than those of insects and worms. In terms of intentional potentiality, the feelings of such entities could be regarded as more value-able, in terms of their capacity for making complex selections. Nevertheless, insects and worms are important for such a beautiful world because they participate in the ecosystem that makes all these things, including bird songs, possible. Thus a beautiful world of birds and animals cannot be abstracted and isolated from an “ugly” world of worms and insects. Further to this, given that conscious human existence is understood as an accomplishment of nature that is squarely rooted within nature, this apparent anthropocentrism is equally an eco-centricism. Therefore, it becomes an ethic based on what kind of nature we want to participate in co-creating. This acknowledges both the creativity of human beings along with the autonomy of non-human nature. As Bannon puts it: “rather than seeking to preserve nature, we should be asking what sort of nature we should collaborate in the production thereof.” Though some might argue that we have too often had a say in what kind of nature we produce, what intentional potentiality tells us is that human beings can exist in many possible styles; as either ecologically destructive or ecologically augmentative. Neutrality is not an option.

An ecological ethic based on a Whiteheadian reading of the flesh is fundamentally a relational ethic, the ends of which is the cultivation of intentional potentiality, or the cultivation of those relational conditions that enable and facilitate the emergence of novel creations, qua achievements, in nature. In short, it is the cultivation of nature’s creative potential. A necessary difficulty with this is that we cannot always tell when we are cultivating intentional potentiality, with the notion of cultivation far more ambiguous than that of control. This ambiguity demands a certain openness to novelty and uncertainty. A general rule is that an increase in nature’s intentional potentiality is always better than a reduction of intentional potentiality. However, the promotion of “novelty” alone is not sufficient. A cerebral lesion is certainly “novel,” as is a cancerous growth. What these achievements undermine, however, is the creative potential of individuals. Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of Schneider in *Phenomenology of Perception* provides insights into this. Schneider’s reduced intentionality and his inability to perform abstract movements provides concrete reasons why we should, and generally do, guard against cerebral lesions and the shrapnel that causes them. We do this because
we value the autonomy provided by our access to higher degrees of intentional potentiality. Such autonomy is not the same as freedom. Suicide, the ultimate exercise of freedom, is also the ultimate undermining of intentional potentiality. It is therefore an illusory freedom, whereby one possible action completed serves to undermine an infinite number of possibilities. Hence, suicide limits autonomy and is not a condition of it. From this perspective, the development of nuclear weapons—whose horrid and dormant potential for destruction haunts the actual world—could not be considered an advancement of nature’s potentiality. While we now have the potential to create a nuclear winter, any realisation of that potential would extinguish a far greater number of possible achievements. Thus we cannot expect that the cultivation of intentional potentiality will always be linear or progressive, nor can we guarantee it at all. In fact, to have a net increase in the creative potential of nature is to equally have an increased potential for destruction. This is evidenced by the environmental crisis, which is wholly the product of intentional selection and valuation in nature brought on by human potentiality. Despite the technological advancements of industrialization and the “commodious” living standards we enjoy today, to have the earth’s ecosystem on the cusp of collapse speaks to a net reduction in intentional potentiality.

Therefore, an ethic based on intentional potentiality, with its emphasis on cultivation, is not a laissez-faire approach to nature. Cultivation implies some kind of purposeful, ends-driven activity, and this is the antithesis of laissez-faire. A laissez-faire approach to intentional potentiality, of novelty for the sake of novelty or change for the sake of change, does not distinguish between what kind of change we should engender and augment; it ignores our own autonomy as expressions of the flesh. Contrary to this, we should take up our role as conscious, self-regulating agents of the flesh. For instance, we should act to avoid a post-climate change world in which only one species flourishes at the expense of all others, as this would not be an expression of the flesh’s intentional potentiality, but a disavowal of it. This is because the flesh does not strive to iron out and dissolve differences. Rather, it seeks to build them up through a process of creative becoming. We can understand that the flesh is capable of achieving much more than homogeneity, and that nature’s autonomy is expressed most vividly in difference. This is why, borrowing Whitehead’s terminology, expressions of the flesh can be deemed “achievements” that are the outcome of creative, purposeful activity. Therefore an ethic based on intentional potentiality would seek to maintain diversity and heterogeneity as pre-conditions for divergent potentialities and new achievements. This is consistent with the goals of process philosopher and speculative
naturalist Arran Gare, whose holistic principles for the creation of an ecological civilization include the need to maintain heterogeneity.  

Hence, the ambiguity of the flesh itself speaks to an inherent ambiguity for any ethical system that can be derived from it. Though we are seeking a net increase of intentional potentiality, such a net increase cannot be gauged by utilitarian calculation. Rather than quantifiable calculation we should take seriously the notion of feeling our way towards increasing the intentional potentiality of nature. This is positively vague, but the vagueness of intentional potentiality should not render it any less valuable or useful as a general basis for making ethical decisions. Accordingly, there is a necessary tension that must be felt in an ethic centered on intentional potentiality, and this tension requires constant vigilance. In acknowledging the impossibility of control, rather than an outcome-based ethic grounded on the cultivation of “things” or even “occasions,” it is importantly the relations and conditions that sustain these things that must be cultivated. Ultimately, such an ethical stance is concerned with the autonomy of the flesh, which is partially expressed through human intentionality without being reducible to it. In characterizing the flesh in this way, as agentic and self-determining with the capacity for freedom, we can embrace and temper Barbaras’ notion of “positive anthropomorphism” through a humble acknowledgement that man is not the measure of all things, but a significant measure nonetheless. In light of this, we can consider ourselves as self-regulating and semi-autonomous agents of the flesh, with such a stance no more arrogant than that of the white blood cell that maintains and cultivates its own environment. Of course, white blood cells can become problematic—for themselves and others—in the event of autoimmune diseases, wherein they actively undermine their environments. A key difference between human beings and white blood cells is that our greater degree of intentional potentiality enables us to make more complex valuations to imagine and enact different potentialities. While it is difficult to blame the white blood cell for any self-destructive behaviors, our power to abstract and reflect means that we can certainly hold ourselves to account and address our own tendencies towards self-destruction.  

The claim being made is ultimately a modest one: that a Whiteheadian approach to the flesh can lead to the development of an optimistic ecological ethic. Though it may seem unreasonably weak given the stakes, this need not diminish the importance of the claim. It would be too presumptuous to say that the notion of intentional potentiality “will” or even “should” lead to the development of an
ecological ethic. Such determinate language fundamentally goes against the idea of intentional potentiality itself, which is based on possibility. As a result, it is important that any claim based on such a concept remains cautious. Though modest, “can” signifies the provisional nature of intentional potentiality. More importantly, it also carries within it an imperative to act—it demands something of us; namely that we take up and enact possibilities. We cannot take for granted that any philosophical theory—no matter how compelling or well thought out—will ever be enough on its own. However, the urgency of the environmental crisis dictates that we rapidly adopt a general stance that can orient all our actions as entities becoming-in-the-world. As an orientation, intentional potentiality provides us with vaguely defined ends en pointillé—in outline. This vagueness is necessary given that the world and future—as we actively co-create it—is itself uncertain, provisional, and subject to change. As with the flesh, an ethic based on intentional potentiality is condemned to ambiguity. It requires humble acknowledgement of our lack of control over the natural world, while at the same time demanding that we do not abdicate our awesome responsibility as conscious agents of the flesh. It is a call to do the best we can in recognition of both these limits and capabilities.

As it stands, this paper only provides a preliminary outline of intentional potentiality as a basis for developing an ecological ethic. While there is more work to be done in developing the notion of intentional potentiality, it is hoped that from this outline we can begin to “feel” our way towards an ecological ethic. How are we to act practically then? To use a crude metaphor, we can lead a horse to water but we cannot make it drink. Still, it is better that we at least give it that option. Since leading a horse to water inevitably implies human intervention, an ethic based on intentional potentiality is condemned to be anthropocentric to some degree. It naturally affords a special place to human beings who display immensely complex, if disproportionate, degrees of intentional potentiality. Thus for human beings, it is not simply a matter of passively accepting “what is natural,” or “what is,” but of cultivating “what could be”—of cultivating intentional potentiality.

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NOTES

1. French: *La même étoffe.*
5. Merleau-Ponty, VI, 214.
7. As described by Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, dissipative structures are new types of emergent, non-linear structures that originate spontaneously in far-from-equilibrium thermodynamic conditions. This involves transformations from thermal chaos and disorder into order. See: Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, *Order Out of Chaos: Man’s New Dialogue with Nature.* New York: Bantam Books, 1984, 12-13. According to Merleau-Ponty, a “constitutive paradox already lies in every visible,” and “what we call a visible is ... the surface of a depth ... a grain or corpuscle borne by a wave of Being.” Merleau-Ponty, VI, 136. The non-linear and seemingly paradoxical emergence of dissipative structures reflects this “being in latency.” Using the metaphor of ocean waves, which rise up and dissipate against a background flux, dissipative structures could be conceived as temporarily ordered/structured waves that emerge on the surface of a “chaotic” ocean (latency/depth).
8. Merleau-Ponty, VI, 139.
10. Merleau-Ponty, VI, 139.
11. Merleau-Ponty, VI, 149.
12. As Alphonso Lingis writes in his preface to *The Visible and the Invisible* “the chiasm effected across the substance of the flesh is the inaugural event of visibility.” lvi.
13. The flesh “unveils” itself through these senses, just as the visible sides of a cube tend to unveil its hidden sides: “The sides of the cube are not projections of it, they are nothing other than “sides”. When I see them, one after the other and according to perspectival appearance, I do not construct the idea of a geometrical plan that would account for these perspectives, rather the cube is already there in front of me and unveils itself through them.” Merleau-Ponty, *PhP,* 211.
15. Unfortunately, this was never fully explored by Merleau-Ponty and is mentioned only once in his working notes: “Do a psychoanalysis of Nature: it is the flesh, the mother.” Merleau-Ponty, VI, 267. However, it is from Smohalla (c. 1815-1895), a former leader of the Nez Perce peoples indigenous to the Pacific Northwest of America, that we find the most moving expression of this relationship. In resistance to the US government’s attempts to force farming upon his people, Smohalla argued: “You ask me to plough the ground; shall I take a knife and tear my mother’s bosom? Then when I die she will not take me to her bosom to rest. You ask me to dig for stones; shall I dig under her skin for her bones? Then when I die I cannot enter her body to be born again. You ask me to cut grass and make hay and sell it and be rich like white men; but how dare I cut off my mother’s hair?” Quoted by Brian Easlea in *Witchcraft, Magic, and the New Philosophy,* Sussex: Har-


17. Abram, 85.


19. Abram, 68.

20. Abram, 68.


25. “High-altitude thinking.”

26. Toadvine, 134.

27. Merleau-Ponty, VI, 253.


29. Barbaras, 23 (emphasis in original).


33. Barbaras, p. 22.


42. Bannon, “Flesh and Nature” 344.


44. In the final words of *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty quotes Saint-Exupéry in saying that “Man is a knot of relations, and relations alone count for man.” 483.

45. Johnson, 32.


47. Thus it is a flesh of emergence rather than a flesh of “the One” or of “the Many.”


50. For an excellent and detailed account of the relationship between Whitehead and Merleau-Ponty see: William S. Hamrick and Jan Van der Veken, *Nature and Logos: A Whiteheadian Key to
53. Hooper, 292.
54. Hooper, 301.
56. While they are implicitly aimed at by all actual occasions, it is only in the most complex societies of actual occasions, such as human beings, that eternal objects are explicitly aimed at.
58. This view of eternal objects as “styles” or “possibilities” attests to the “pre-given unity” of the world that Toadvine identifies in the chiasmatic reversibility of the flesh.
59. Hooper, 297.
60. Perhaps in future generations or iterations of the cosmos.
61. Hooper, 288.
62. As “mental” and “physical” poles respectively.
63. In *The Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty frequently indicates the need to revisit problems he considered “insoluble” in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, such as the consciousness-object distinction. In revising this, he sought to “show that what one might consider to be “psychology” (*Phenomenology of Perception*) is in fact ontology.” VI, 176, 200.
65. For Abram the flesh is encountered in sentient experience, for Toadvine it is based in chiasmic reversibility, while Barbaras’ emphasis is on the separation of the perceiving, phenomenological subject and its ontological object.
67. Toadvine, 6.
68. Toadvine, 7.
69. “Consciousness is originally not an ‘I think,’ but rather an ‘I can.’” Merleau-Ponty borrows this notion for Husserl’s unpublished materials *Ideas II* and *Cartesian Meditations*, Merleau-Ponty, *PhP*, 139, 523.
70. See: Merleau-Ponty, VI, 174, and Hamrick and Van der Veken, 107.
71. A rock does not need to “think itself” into existence, or even significance—though we may say that it feels itself into existence.
73. In a similar vein to Arne Naess’ argument that “human fulfillment seems to demand and need free nature. ‘Homocentrism’ and ‘anthropocentrism’ which so often have been used in a derogatory way should be qualified by an adjective, ‘narrow homocentrism’ etc. … the prospect of protecting the planet as a whole … is seen as one of the greatest challenges ever. And it certainly is a specifically human task.” Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 141.
75. As Lynn White points out, “All forms of life modify their contexts.” Lynn White Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis” *Western Man and Environmental Ethics*. Ed. Ian G. Barbour. London: Addison Wesley, 1973, 18. In a Buddhist sense, this amounts to saying that all living sys-
tems necessarily imply some kind of “violence” towards their environment—though it is the duty of “man to aim at the idea of nonviolence in all that he does.” See: E.F. Schumacher, “Buddhist Economics” *Valuing the Earth*, 179.

76. See: Merleau-Ponty, *PhP* 105-140.
77. Whitehead argues that contrasts provide “new existential types”, *PR*, 24.
79. This will require a more complete integration of Whitehead and Merleau-Ponty into a fully-fledged Process Phenomenology.
80. Thereby avoiding the is/ought problem of Hume.
Engaging with numerous philosophers of divergent persuasions throughout his lifetime, Jacques Lacan may be said to have been principally interested in the possibilities of the extension of certain philosophical concepts and ideas as such, and less so in their thinkers’ total systems or theoretical positionings. Emblematic of this, a consistent preoccupation with the precursor/influence (founder?) of the analytic philosophical tradition, Gottlob Frege, throughout his series of Paris seminars over a number of years attests to the fact that Lacan held in esteemed regard the mathematician’s insights into language as well as the (convoluted) place of subjectivity in the performance of logical analyses. Along with his psychoanalytic students who were involved with the publication *Cahiers pour l’Analyse* in the mid-60s, Lacan approached Frege in regard to three main issues represented by three key texts: conceptual variations and forms of inscription in his early *Begriffsschrift* (1879); the function of number outlined in *Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik* (1884); and the nature of naming in his 1892 paper ‘Über Sinn und Bedeutung’ wherein factors such as the subjective and objective representation of objects and their denomination were supremely relevant during this ‘high structuralist’ period. With his own forays into formalization and logic, Lacan was fascinated by the difficulties in ascribing any simple role to the function of thought, similar to the stumbling blocks enumerated by Frege in attempting to determine a logical structure of/through language. In the following discussion, we will return to the latter of Frege’s original German texts to examine some of these complica-
tions in detail while scanning the Lacanian seminars to tease out his dealings with Frege (a thematic underdeveloped to date in scholarship). Ultimately we hope to determine whether Lacan’s additions, particularly on the role of the unconscious, make impossible the attempt to conceive of a ‘pure’ logic of thought. Based on the illuminations Lacan and his entourage discovered in Frege’s work, we will also indicate the future avenues wherein these cross-currents may be further elaborated and synthesized.

SYMPTOMS AND SOURCES

If, in the beginning, there was the symptom, then it was incumbent upon Freud to add that it must possess sense, *Sinn*. Namely, that symptomatic actions have “a motive, a sense and an intention”; which also possess a “relation to something unconscious”; and which “are related to the patient’s experiences” (and thus that even ‘senseless’ symptomatic behaviours, such as those found among obsessionals, actually “have a content of the most frightful kind”).

Further, as intermediaries, other important concepts must enter into consideration, namely *Darstellung*, the presentation/representation of things/events and *Vorstellung*, ideational representations, as these intervene between symptom and sense. Seemingly random obsessional actions, for example, for Freud, consist of, on one level, a “representation, a repetition, of the significant scene”; further, an intention, namely to put something which had gone wrongly right again; and a motivation (or *wish*) to fulfil something that is or was not the case ‘in reality.’

To use one of Freud’s examples: a man on his wedding night suffers from impotence and cannot deflower his wife, running back and forth between rooms trying to accomplish this act and then giving up each time. Ashamed of what the housemaid will think in the morning, he spills red ink on the marital bed to simulate the shedding of blood. His wife later develops the persistent behaviour of running into a particular room of their house (in which a stained tablecloth is clearly visible), summoning the housemaid to complete an errand (or to merely dismiss her again), and then running back to the original room she was in.

The *sense* of the action, they established (i.e. the analysand with Freud, in line with the above formula), was based on a representation of the original, traumatic, scene; the intention, the kernel of the symptom, was to summon the maid and not feel ashamed, as the husband would have been *without* stained bedsheets (i.e. she was correcting the scene itself); but ultimately, she was addressing the originally
shocking fact, the encounter, of the sexual, as well as her husband’s incapacity, i.e. establishing a more agreeable reality as such.³

The original trauma or scene in such symptomal behaviour is usually from childhood, i.e. what Freud calls the typical case, and thus he notes that the above example is atypical. But on the other hand it allows the succession of events, and hence the structure of symptomal expression (how the newlywed came to sustain a form of substitutive enjoyment in this way), to come into better focus via forms of representation and their senses.⁴

Taken from the Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, the case was emblematic of how sense could not be discounted in respect to psychical issues and indeed was intertwined in their elaboration. Hence, explanatory frameworks could be established to account for diverse phenomena traditionally eschewed, ignored or suppressed. The crucial questions of sense, meaning and representation then were always at the forefront of the psychoanalytic endeavour, clinically and theoretically, and continue to be treated variously with regard to different formations: dreams, symptoms, fantasy, etc.

Thus, it is no wonder that for the ruminations of Jacques Lacan in his weekly Parisian seminar, in his return to Freud, the ‘meaning of sense,’ the status of the subject in relation to symptomal behaviour, and the role of (re)presentation, in particular with regard to ‘the object of psychoanalysis,’ would be recurrently approached and significantly situated thematics.

SENSING SENSE

Edging into the ‘high structuralist’ era, at the beginning of his twelfth seminar on December 2, 1964, Lacan turns to Noam Chomsky to initiate a discussion of sense, meaning and grammar which he would continue to develop over the mid-60s. Chomsky had attempted in his first major text Syntactic Structures in 1957 to create a “completely non-semantic theory of grammatical structure.” Contra Chomsky, and with respect to the sentence “colorless green ideas sleep furiously,” the famous example of a supposedly semantically nonsensical yet grammatically correct sentence,⁶ Lacan argues that grammar (as opposed to random, ungrammatical statements) presupposes a relation to meaning or at least to the effects of sense (for example in the simple act of adjoining a substantive and an adjective).⁷ For him, this distinction is essential as “grammatical structure is absolutely correlative to
all the first appearances of language.” He thus sided with linguist Roman Jakobson who contended that it is only “[t]horoughly degrammaticalized utterances” which can be nonsensical. Lacan noted that,

Undoubtedly meaning is completely extinguished where there is no grammar, but where there is grammar, I mean a grammatical construction, sensed, presumed by the subject, the subject who is being questioned, who here is called on as judge … can one say, that there is no meaning?

For Jakobson, moreover, the ontological and the sense-possessing could not be conflated in linguistic analyses, thereby problematizing denotational correspondence theories of language (as is the case for Lacan when, for example, a signifier is used as a bi-univocal “iron brand on the referent” which clashes with connotative aspects introduced at the level of the concept). Jakobson argues in relation to the ‘sleeping’ ideas:

... even if we pedantically censor any image-bearing expression and deny the existence of green ideas, also then, as in the case of ‘quadrature of the circle’ or ‘pigeon’s milk’, the nonexistence, the fictitiousness of these entities has no bearing on the question of their semantic significance. The possibility of questioning their being is the best warning against a confusion of ontological irreality with senselessness.

For Lacan, the primary interest is, of course, the work of analysis of speech acts in the clinical environment (as “psychoanalytic action develops in and through verbal communication, that is, in a dialectical grasping of meaning”) as well as, crucially, forging the traces of the unconscious which emerge. So what status do ‘ideas,’ green or otherwise, have here and in which form are they able to ‘move’ between systems such as the unconscious and pre-conscious/conscious in the psychoanalytic account?

Firstly, unconscious ‘truth’ seeks a path of procession:

What is the unconscious, if not precisely ideas, thoughts, Gedanken, thoughts whose faded greenness, does not Freud tell us somewhere, that like the shades summoned from hell and returning to the sunlight, want to drink blood, to recover their colours. Is it the thoughts of the unconscious that are involved, that here sleep furiously?
Expressed differently, these ‘colourless,’ furious, sleeping, unconscious ‘thoughts’ or Sachvorstellungen, thing-presentations, in Freudian/Lacanian parlance (as the only form of representation available to the unconscious), return to regain their ‘colour’ in the transition and retranslation involved between un-, pre- and conscious systems, within differing forms of presentation and representation. These must then be bound with Wortvorstellungen (word-presentations) to be able to enter conscious comprehension and result in utterable material.

And yet their meaning is by no means fixed. As for Jakobson, anything can be semantically significant; and as for their submission to an objective test of truth (do they exist, these ideas?) Jakobson and Lacan are indeed at odds with the opinions (and intentions) of Chomsky. And yet these representations produce senses, in a seemingly endless proliferation. Psychoanalysis thus has to account for these representational scenarios “in which scholastic psychology sees only nonmeaning.”

Added to this is the fact that what someone says, as Lacan notes, “may, in fact, ‘have no meaning’,” but what is said to the analyst “conceals one anyway.” That is to say, human communication, as extending beyond the verbal and the unequivocal, is prone to reveal despite its concealed forms.

Indeed, and this is a key issue in the psychoanalytic treatment as conducive to the elucidation of ‘subjective truth’: any meanings can be produced (or found). Lacan as such notes in his seminar that “to search for meaning in a signifying, grammatical chain is an undertaking of extraordinary futility” and that the “unconscious has nothing to do with these metaphorical meanings, however far we may push them”:

For if, because of the fact that I am before this audience, I was able to give it that meaning, I could just as well have given it a completely different one, and for a simple reason, which is that any signifying chain whatsoever, provided it is grammatical, always generates a meaning, and I would go further, any one whatsoever.

Hence, no simple equation between act and meaning can (or should) be substantively quantified. Indeed, the making of sense arises during the processes of transmission as ‘knowledge’ as such; it is not inherent in the unconscious except as related to truth (it is of course also shrouded due to distortive processes, subject to laws of repression). Thus Lacan will say that “sense is never produced except by the translation of one discourse into another.” And hence one of the functions of

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analysis, as Mladen Dolar astutely notes, is “not making sense of non-sense, but the making non-sense of sense.”

One must of course also note the important role played by Unsinn, or nonsense (as opposed to non-sense, or senselessness), in this theory, introduced as early as Lacan’s 1950s work on the psychoses: nonsense is not seen as the privation of sense; in psychotic patients it is “very positive and organized.” And thus one can listen to a delusional patient’s speech, and take indications from it, without falling into the traps of dismissal. Sinn, as Lacan would later explain, is “fundamentally marked by the fissure of Unsinn.”

Lacan also argues (with regard to the distinction thinking/being, invoked in the famous proposition of the Cartesian cogito) that the “supporting point, the navel” of the term subject, which is for him split due to the introduction of language, “is properly only the moment at which it vanishes beneath sense, where sense is what makes it disappear as being, for this Therefore I am is only a sense.” He would later further locate (or complicate) the philosophical import of the tension by explaining that “being does not have of itself any kind of sense” in opposition to the meaning-making functions of thought. Hence his various, differing, attempts to rethink or re-establish the cogito, playing on the shifting function of the I, and the different senses of thinking (foremost the results of the addition of the unconscious register) in psychoanalysis, in relation to being, throughout the 60s in particular.

Ultimately, for the analysand, split as they are into subject and (sexed) being, sense is interpretable in terms of knowledge, but the truth of analysis comes from difficulties, stumbling. For this, he states, is “what is involved in psychoanalysis”:

If Sinn, if what is sense is interpretable, belongs to the subject from the side of knowledge, in the difficulties of discourse, in the stumbling of the signifier, the signified which thus comes, comes from elsewhere; it comes here from underneath, not at all through a detour of knowledge, but through this direct relationship of the subject with the sexed being.

Hence it is no simple account of meaning which Lacan is postulating. And indeed, if in the above the terms ‘sense’ and ‘meaning’ could be used almost interchangeably, it would become further necessary for him to demarcate them in order to detail the muddied relations between language and thought. Thus finding the
meaning of something is not the domain of psychoanalysis. And Lacan is often at
odds with analysts such as Jung and Jones (et al.) due to this. As Annika Lemaire
concluded within her thesis on Lacan’s ‘system,’ “the limit of the perpetual sliding
of the signifier over the signified,” which Lacan calls ‘Frege’s paradox,’ “cannot be
reduced to a phenomenon of inter-human understanding.”31 With the emerging
notions of the Lacanian object and its placement in respect to the real, this para-
dox would come further into sight.

WHAT MEANING CAN MEAN

The previous all leads to the question the reader may have been wondering since
the introduction: what is the precise role Frege has in all of this? The Lacanian–
Fregean ‘relational project’ may indeed be said to be in the infancy of its elabora-
tion, despite the maverick interventions of Lacan’s students affiliated with the
journal Cahiers pour l’Analyse which sought to explore, through psychoanalysis
and the structural method, wider questions about epistemology. We will indicate
further below the avenues of this exploration and the areas in which they need
further teasing out. For the purposes of the current discussion we will restrict
ourselves to examining one article of Frege’s (which Lacan draws upon often to
develop his ideas on the object and representations of psychoanalysis and their
relation to sense and meaning throughout the 60s), namely ‘Über Sinn und Be-
deutung,’ usually translated as ‘[On] Sense and Reference.’

Frege’s article begins with the concept of Gleichheit [identity], which he had de-
defined in his earlier text Begriffsschrift as a relation “between names or signs for
objects” [Namen oder Zeichen für Gegenstände].32 This is based on the fact that,
following Kant’s analytic/synthetic distinction, sentences proposing a=a33 are a
priori analytic but those proposing a=b34 cannot be comprehended in this manner
as they involve the further work of our individual Erkenntnis, usually translated in
Kant scholarship as cognition (or “representation with consciousness”).35 When
sign a is said to equal sign b, it is presumed that these terms have the same Be-
deutung or referent (also translated as meaning/nominatum); yet the distinction
is arbitrary, for Frege, as it is impossible to forbid the assignation of different
objects to different terms, i.e. names or signs, or to use objects and terms in-
terchangeably to refer to different things. What is distant, again following Kant,
is the object ‘itself.’ What the different determiners a and b and c etc. can offer,
however, are different ways or modes of ‘presenting’ and representing the same
‘thing’...and here sense comes in.
Frege thus separates actual objects from their designation in a process of reference (which he also calls Bedeutung or assignment of meaning) when establishing connections between the sign, its sense, the reference and the referent. In his definition, “[b]y means of a sign we express its sense and designate its referent.” If it is a perceptible object, moreover, it connects with “memories of sense perception,” internal and external performed activities, and an associated idea to form a Vorstellung, a conception or representation, which is saturated with feeling. Multiple senses are then evoked by a conception, which is to a large degree purely subjective. As he argues, “Die Vorstellung ist subjektiv: die Vorstellung des einen ist nicht die des anderen”—the conception or representation we have is ours (subjective) and not the same as that of someone else. And thus “on account of the uncertain connexion of ideas with words, a difference may hold for one person, which another does not find.”

Frege equates what he calls the referent of the proper name with the object itself (in the form of denotation) which is combined however with the purely subjective conception we have of it, between which lies the sense (or that which is expressed and related to thought), which is less subjective but isn’t the object itself. “The same sense,” he says, “is not always connected, even in the same man, with the same conception.”

In everyday speech, our thoughts, conceptions and associations do not correspond exactly with those of any other interlocutor. There is a component which is purely individually overdetermined. Commonalities arise however due to the types of shared sense (reflected in context, conventions, culture, etc.).

Yet, a sentence must contain what Frege calls an objective thought, i.e. something that multiple thinkers can share. ‘Thought’ however is identified with the sense. Hence there can be sentences with no referent, as in literature, and thus these representations involve the “coloring and shading” of “poetic eloquence” (hence, the very possibility of meaning anything at all by the greenifying of furiously sleeping ideas). The truth value lies ultimately in the referent: it can only be true or false for Frege (and thus the problem of the ontological/semantic distinction mentioned above returns). Signs which only have sense but no referent can still be called representations nevertheless, Frege notes; as, similarly, we see that psychoanalytic representations have a discordant relation with things ‘themselves,’ due to the addition of ideas, memories, distortion and other subjective ‘colour.’
A judgment for Frege moves from thoughts to objective referents and assesses their truth values. Yet the thing-in-itself always lurks as a ‘presupposition’ in his theory. Taking his example of the Moon: it can be verified, visually at least, by multiple parties (despite complicating factors such as retinal differences resulting in different images for each individual, as he argues), and compared with its reference point; and yet “for scientific purposes,” he says, “we do not intend to speak of our idea of the Moon, nor are we satisfied with the sense alone, but we \textit{presuppose} a referent.”

Thus we see a tension between his hope for a formal language (based on the stability of individuated referents) and the ‘psycholinguistics of everyday life’ as it were. Most organizations of speech, and he lists many, such as subordinate clauses, quotations, analyses of words themselves, etc. have \textit{no recourse to a direct referent}, he admits. And yet his hope for and conception of a ‘pure’ symbolic code, which he attempted to initiate in the \textit{Begriffsschrift}, requires an \textit{assured} referent combined with a \textit{defined} name (reflecting the tension between subjective and objective representations). Indirect indicators, then, are seen as opposed to proper names.

Yet, if one defines the sense of the sentence as the thought expressed by it (as he does), the issue of cognition again enters into the picture. While one may establish that a=a, in the case of a=b different senses are expressed, and therefore the cognitive value is different. Human judgment must then go from thought to truth value, and thus a thought about a=b, influenced by its sense, will produce a different judgment. Hence “the sense of the sentence,” that is “the thought expressed by it,” is “no less relevant than its reference, i.e. its truth value.”

To summarize briefly: the effects of sense take place within language itself and within the subjective \textit{Vorstellungen} following encounters with objects in the world combined with products of the mind; reference deals with this relation between language and the world (i.e. the process), referent being the object explicitly referred to but not always (or ever) directly present. Moreover, as there is little constancy of reference in language, any fixity usually comes from the context. Added to this, even if a proper name has a direct referent, a concept must intervene \textit{for} other ideas, or common terms, in which there is no direct referent (e.g. between \textit{the idea of} planet and \textit{that particular} planet there seen through the telescope, in his example).
FREGE’S INSIGHTS WITHIN LACAN’S EXPLICATION

To return to Lacan (and re-establish a connection to Frege): the object of psychoanalysis is defined as that “which can never be attained,” i.e. “the CAUSE of desire rather than that towards which desire tends” which the drives, through expression in representations, circle around. It exists as “the leftover, the remainder... the remnant left behind by the introduction of the symbolic” and undoubtedly has a questionable ontological status (which does not mean, however, that it does not produce effects in/on the subject, as we already argued).

This Lacanian object is directly equated with Fregean Bedeutung in the fourteenth seminar (it is “the first Bedeutung, the first referent, the first reality, the Bedeutung which remains because it is, after all, all that remains of thinking at the end of all the discourses”) counterposed against the Fregean concept of Sinn: i.e. it is sense or signification which “comes to fill in” the gap in between the subject and the object, and which acts as the “syncopation of the Bedeutung.”

Lacan had already introduced, in the early life of the child, and in the establishment of the unconscious through the entry into language, a series of fantasmatic part-objects (as they are called in the early seminars and in the psychoanalytic tradition), in the initial stages akin to processes of hallucination, which have a status between substance and appearance, reality and irreality. This relation subsequently affects all following, adult, interactions of subject and object. Over the late 50s and early 60s in particular, he would add nuances to the status and shaping of the psychoanalytic object, eventuating in the fundamental concept of the objet petit a.

This object, in fulfilling “precisely the function that Frege distinguishes from Sinn under the name of Bedeutung”: .... gives its veritable sense to what Freud says about the unconscious, namely, that it is constituted by thing-presentation, Sachvorstellungen. It is in no way an obstacle to the unconscious being structured as a language, for what is at stake is not the Ding, the unsayable thing, but the perfectly articulated affair, but in so far, in effect, as it supersedes—like Bedeutung—anything whatsoever that may order it.
For Lacan, then, Frege opens up a realm between any actual objectal ‘thing’ and our consciousness of it, due to the layers of representation (unconscious, pre-conscious and conscious) introduced in every act of judgement. For visualization purposes, we may posit the following synthesis (see Fig. 1) showing how Frege’s insights on sense and reference could be thought to fit into the psychoanalytic model (without however privileging the vertical structure or anticipating limitations between levels):

**Psychical Reality**
Primal Repression
Vorstellungsrepräsentanz of the Drives Denied Entry to the Conscious System
(Somatic/Psychical Representatives)
Psychical (Unconscious) Thing-Presentations (Sachvorstellungen)
Darstellung (Presented Images Revive Traumatic Memory Traces)

(Return of the Repressed)
(DrivesExpressed by Unconscious Representation and Conscious Affect)
Conceptions/Ideas/Thought (Gedanken)
Word-Presentations (Wortvorstellungen)
Sense (Sinn)
Reference/Bedeutung as Process

Referent/Bedeutung, objet a

*das Ding* (The Thing)
Object as Such (Unknowable Material Substrate)
**Material Reality**

**FIGURE 1: FREGEAN TERMS WITHIN A PSYCHOANALYTIC MODEL**
At issue, however, is the version of reality adumbrated by each of these thinkers. For Lacan, of course, the two ends of the above schematic would be inexplicably linked, due to the imbrication of the psychical and material levels. To what extent the psychical and material are co-influential in determining representations, which are then subject to attributions of sense, relies on the stability of the Referent/Bedeutung level which is of course complicated by both thinkers due to the status of the Thing an sich. The distinctions between the real and reality developed by Lacan further complicate, moreover, the truth attributions (T/F) which can be made in regard to certain propositions.

As Roger Perron notes, in his excellent précis of the representational dilemmas of psychoanalysis, Freud early in his career encountered the following problem in relation to psychical states and the establishment of reality criteria: “By what criteria can the subject distinguish a true perception (the German verb for perceiving is wahrnehmen, ‘to take to be true’) from an illusion or hallucination?” Ultimately, what Freud discovered, and which Lacan of course draws on, is that “every perception, every memory trace, and therefore every representation, is ‘constructed’ by the dynamics of the psyche itself and undergoes a constant process of retroactive reworking.” Lacan adds to this his insights on the possibilities of symbolization as well as an irreducible connection to the register of the real, drawing on his own theory of language linked to Frege’s:

The relation of the signifier to the subject, in so far as it involves the function of meaning, passes through a referent. The referent, that means the real, and the real is not simply a raw and opaque mass. The real is apparently structured. We have moreover absolutely no knowledge of how as long as we do not have the signifier. I do not mean for all that, that if we do not know it, we have no relations to this structure.

Thus our very relation to the real is structured within a representable relationship (in both senses of the term: i.e. representative and representation). And what is touched on in Lacanian theory is the object as “semblance of being” at level of the real.

Can the addition of the register of the unconscious to a theory of language, augmented by Frege’s insights, then help better articulate the subjective interactions at the core of sense production and thus one’s inherently indirect, mediated relation with the world of objects, whatever their ontological status? Can the analogy
between referent as incomplete object and process and objet a as remainder of the real shine more light on the linkages between the concepts of psychoanalytic theory, such as Vorstellung, and the philosophical tradition from which they emerged? We believe the answer is yes and that it may provide explanatory power to some of the less developed interconnections imbibed within Lacanian theory. To this end, the above, very brief, analysis needs to be further developed in the form of closer attention to the works of Frege that Lacan draws on, tracing the conceptual developments of the subject and object as well as their interrelations which are central to his work.

How would this be envisaged? As indicated in the Abstract, Lacan approaches Frege from three different directions across his oeuvre, only one of which is language, which we have outlined here. The issues of conceptual variation and the function of numbers are also subject to close treatment in his seminars. Each of these elements are interrelated in Lacan’s work (as they are, crucially, in Frege’s) and as such it would be rewarding to explore further what he said about these texts; examine their content (in general terms, but also in regard to what he specifically takes from them); and explore his relation to this other, fascinating, thinker in greater detail and with of course more depth than is possible here.

Indeed it was in these directions, as also noted above, that other thinkers in the Cahiers group were motivated. Alain Badiou, Yves Duroux, Serge Leclaire and Jacques-Alain Miller each entered into discussions of the more mathematically orientated works of Frege (most gave presentations of this work in Lacan’s seminar in fact) and came to conclusions usually complementary to Lacan’s. As the most significant exception, perhaps, Badiou argued against the conception of the subject he found in Miller’s work on Frege (and, by extension, he sought to critically appraise Lacan’s formulation) from the viewpoint of the function of representation in ideological discourse and toward a critique of the logical status of the signifier (i.e. “the system of concepts through which the articulation of the subject is conceived”) in his paper ‘Mark and Lack: On Zero.’ In questioning the notion of ‘suture,’ i.e. the relations between subject/discourse and lack/structure, which Miller introduced and found to be implicit in Lacan’s work, furthermore, Badiou was interrogating each thinker’s compositions on the status of science (most notably, in Lacan’s case, ‘Science and Truth,’ which was published in the first issue of Cahiers and read out during his thirteenth seminar), their definition(s) of the real, and ultimately, also, their logical and mathematical credentials (particularly with regard to Gödel, Frege and Boole). No doubt, both Frege and Lacan remain cen-
tral figures within Badiou’s subsequent and current theory. As such, in addition to the necessary exegesis merely sketched here, it would be fruitful to examine this legacy.

Hence we see a complicated yet exciting field of enquiry open up, the surface of which has been breached but the implications and senses of which still remain to be further negotiated and represented.

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NOTES

3. See Russell Grigg, Leonardo Rodriguez and Diane Wieneke, “Fantasy and Foreclosure,” Analysis 1 (1989, 210) for other potential consequences of this. In Lacanian terms, one can also question the representability (or non-existence) of the sexual relation as such, which always eludes or complicates symbolization.
4. He also notes that there is a brand of symptom that is ‘typical’ in another sense, namely those which are “approximately the same in all cases” and in which “individual distinctions disappear” (Freud, Standard Edition: XVI, 270).
10. Nevertheless, nonsense, as will we soon see, also has specific roles in the clinic. Therefore it may be of necessity to further demarcate nonsense and the nonsensical, including what Lacan would later call ab-sens, or lack-of-sense.
11. Lacan, Seminar: Book XII, 3: “at the place, at the locus of the Other, to reintroduce the term inscribed in my presentation last year as a reference, where there is a grammatical construction.”
16. In the sense of both Vetretung, representative, and Vorstellung, representation.
20. Lacan, Seminar: Book XII, 5. The subject has to grapple with meaning nevertheless in order to be able to change in any ‘meaningful’ way. Depending on the era involved, the symptom acts variously, as Evans points out, as “signification”; “truth taking shape”; a “metaphor in which flesh or function is taken as a signifying element”; an “enigmatic message which the subject thinks is an opaque message from the real instead of recognising it as his own message”; and finally “pure jouissance which cannot be interpreted” (sinthome). Dylan Evans, “Symptom” in An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis. London: Routledge, 2006, 205–206.
25. Namely, *je pense, donc je suis*.
26. See Matthew Sharpe, “Jacques Lacan (1901–1981)” from the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, available at http://www.iep.utm.edu/lacweb. He notes “the subject is not an object capable of being adequately named within a natural language, like other objects can be”; instead it is split between ego, ‘I’ as shifter, and what contradicts the ‘I’ (hence also the distinctions of the subject of the enunciated and the subject of the enunciation).
33. Today’s sun is also tomorrow’s sun in his example (it is the same ‘thing’).
34. E.g. is the ‘sun’ exactly the same referent as the ‘flaring star’ you talk of in your sentence? If the same object, then true.
35. See, for clarification, Howard Caygill, “Cognition [Erkenntnis]” in A Kant Dictionary. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000, 113. For example, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant writes: The genus is representation in general (*representatio*). Under it stands representation with consciousness (*perceptio*). A perception which relates solely to the subject as a modification of its state, is a sensation (*sensatio*), an objective perception is a cognition (*cognitio*). A cognition is either an intuition or a conception (*intuitus vel conceptus*).
37. Frege, „Über Sinn und Bedeutung,“ 29.
40. Frege, “Sense and Reference,” 213. If truth comes into literature, then it interferes with aesthetic appreciation for Frege. We will have to leave this comment untouched due to space for now.
42. Gottlob Frege, “Sense and Reference,” 230. The condition of fulfilment for Frege is that the sense be interchangeable while not affecting the truth content of a statement, which follows Leibniz.
43. As Frege’s early translator Max Black describes it.

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47. Lacan, *Seminar: Book XIV*, 99. (His concept of *das Ding*, a conceptual offshoot on the way to his fuller development of the *objet petit a*, is moreover often linked to the Kantian *Ding an sich*.)

48. Lacan, *Seminar: Book XIV*, 99. E.g. in fantasy “these ideas with no colour and nevertheless green, why not—.... ‘sleep furiously!’ That is what breasts are!” The unconscious, moreover, “in its poetic and *Bedeutung* sense comes to the place of this ‘I do not think’,” in the split being/thinking at the level of the real, i.e. in the inversion of ‘I think ...’: “either I am not or I am not thinking.” *Seminar: Book XIV*, 78.


56. Badiou, «Marque et manque: à propos du zéro». Here, the specific terms ‘identity,’ ‘representation,’ ‘logic,’ ‘lack’ and, indeed, ‘true’ need to be strictly defined in each of their works before an analysis is undertaken. One must also interrogate the subjective/objective distinction at the core of the theories of representation.
The relationship between psychoanalysis and other forms of thought, including philosophy, has always been fraught at best. As a student, Sigmund Freud himself was deeply interested in philosophy, not least the work of Franz Brentano. Brentano is of course well-known for his revivification of the scholastic concept of intentionality as essential to all mental phenomena, insofar as they are discriminated from physical phenomena: each mental act is about something, an object of some kind, even if that object is inexistente; that observational or empirical psychology does not unite the study of consciousness with a first-person view; and that perception is always necessarily a kind of mis-taking too. Among Brentano’s famous students were such luminaries as Edmund Husserl, Alexius Meinong, and Rudolf Steiner.

Freud, however, never did a doctorate in academic philosophy: he moved into neurophysiology, and spent some time dissecting eels, shooting and snorting coke, before coming to focus on a psychotherapeutics which, as we know, rapidly led him to a unique appreciation of the powers of common language. While he never lost his enthusiasm for “hard” science—from his neurological Project for a Scientific Psychology to the late, slightly wistful remarks about his abiding hopes for placing analysis on a scientific basis—Freud also always acknowledged the necessity of fictional descriptions in the practice of analysis. As he famously writes in Studies on Hysteria:
The fact is that local diagnosis and electrical reactions lead nowhere in the study of hysteria, whereas a detailed description of mental processes such as we are accustomed to find in the works of poets enables me, with the use of a few psychological formulas, to obtain at least some kind of insight into the course of that affection.

Furthermore, as Freud puts it in “An Outline of Psycho-Analysis,” implicitly invoking while fundamentally distorting the spirit of Brentano:

We know two kinds of things about what we call our psyche (or mental life): firstly, its bodily organ and scene of action, the brain (or nervous system) and, on the other hand, our acts of consciousness, which are immediate data and cannot be further explained by any sort of description. Everything that lies between is unknown to us, and the data do not include any direct relation between these two terminal points of our knowledge. If it existed, it would at the most afford an exact localization of the processes of consciousness and would give us no help towards understanding them.

What we therefore find instead between consciousness and its material substrate is not a locale of process but the de-localizations of the unconscious. Temporally divided yet eternal, singularly effective yet unavailable to observation, and more cunning than any reason recognizable to either philosophy or science, the unconscious poses the greatest possible challenges to knowledge of the self. The closest one can come is through the writings of the poets. Yet, in doing so, this is not to depart science altogether: it is to create a third way, in holding psychoanalysis between the two, in a position of the greatest possible tension. Following Jacques Lacan and Alain Badiou—two thinkers quite foreign to Talia Morag’s own proclivities—this fundamental operation of psychoanalysis should be considered a kind of “antiphilosophy”: whereas philosophy begins and sustains itself precisely by injecting science into poetry, psychoanalysis inverts the direction, injecting poetry into science. If psychoanalysis is not a science, it is not not a science, either. Yet psychoanalysis is only possible under the conditions of a science from which it continually re-departs without ever entirely abandoning.

So it’s no wonder then that scientists, philosophers, and ideologues of all kinds still find the key propositions and methods of psychoanalysis impossible to swallow. The pill is too bitter, too poisonous. Hence commences the grand tradition of Freud-bashing still lively today, from the spasmodic reactions of Freud’s own
contemporaries through Karl Popper and Adolf Grünbaum ("Each accused the
other’s principles of being so weak that they allowed even psychoanalysis to be
called a science, when their own of course did not"), up to the monotonous obses-
sional rantings of Frederick Crews and beyond.  

That said, certain philosophers—even hard-core analytic philosophers—have
sometimes found that psychoanalysis has unique challenges to offer philosophy,
and might even, perhaps, provide some indications from which philosophy can
learn. Morag’s book is a contribution to this marginal if important tradition. Yet I
find her attempt—as I suppose any card-carrying ambivalent Freudian should—
both highly agreeable and disagreeable at the same time. As her title proposes,
both emotion and imagination are crucial aspects of human life, which, in their
own ways, open up the problematic of the limits of reason. Here Morag reprises
some important basis points regarding psychology:

1. The spontaneity of emotional response: not only do people differ, of-
ten wildly, in their emotional responses to the same circumstances,
but the same person can differ at different times to what are essentially
the same circumstances. Indeed, this variability establishes the pos-
sibility of psychology at all: thinking, judging, and emoting may have
no necessary prime cause, stability or referent;
2. The relation between reason and emotion is not only variable, even
unstable, but emotions and reason expressly often part company in
experience, even as their relation does not seem to be simply opposition-
al;
3. The basic recalcitrance of individual psyches to ‘external’ or ‘objective’
observation and intervention is a fundamental factor of psychology as
such.

So: irreducible spontaneity, rational unreliability, and essential resistance to em-
pirical research all present abiding issues for any putative scientific psychology.
Here, Morag offers a nice formula for what psychoanalysis can bring to the ta-
ble: non-scientific empiricism. Not that I agree with this: as aforementioned, I
think psychoanalysis is an antiphilosophy; it’s not simply non-scientific but anti-
scientific, with the proviso that the “anti-” here designates not a rejection but a
paradoxical affiliation. Yet Morag’s formulation remains very suggestive, along
the lines of what we might call post-Humean associationism (to which I’ll return
shortly). For Morag, it’s important to snap apart the assumed linkages between
reports and what they report on, in order to contradict the only-too-prevalent dogma that, on the one hand, belated accounts of emotions can ultimately be correlated with emotions themselves; on the other, that one can simply put normative pressure on emotional responses by forcing behavioural change at the level of verbal expression.

The common fantasy that emotions are common, stable entities across times and cultures is of course not entirely false, but we need the reminder that such stabilities are rather the outcomes of what we could call “royal command performances,” analysed so incomparably by Homer in his account of Briseis’s weeping for Patrocles in Book XIX of the Iliad, or in Freud’s description of the weeping schoolgirls in Mass Psychology. Here, the intuition is of the (un-conscious) opportunism of possibilities of expression: for Homer, the utter misery of slaves means that their only opportunity to weep for their own plight comes when they are publicly compelled to mourn the death of their master, and they do it so well, so authentically, because they are doing it for themselves…. It is therefore at the very least misleading to start from “common,” “normal,” or “usual” forms as occasions for emotion as if these could simply function as evidence of shared purpose or function.

So I also agree with Morag that the various critiques of psychoanalysis which seem to clamour for its rejection should rather induce us to return to Freud, instead of departing from him—not least to verify whether the critiques are actually aiming at Freudian propositions rather than a received image of them. And if I can sort of agree that “the psychoanalytic explanation for certain behaviours consists in or rather has the potential to consist in an extension of common-sense psychology” (6), I can’t agree that concepts such as “repression” are currently murky or obscure. Our differing convictions in this regard can be directly correlated with our different intellectual-institutional situations: essentially, “analytic” versus “continental” philosophy.

It has always struck me as symptomatic that the emphasis on the “ordinary” and “everyday” in analytic philosophy has often been a justification for recondite stripping-away of the rights of ordinary language, whereas the recondite language of continental philosophy (perhaps, above all, the rebarbative obscurities of G.W.F. Hegel) has often been far more attentive and amenable to the world of daily experience. But then, as Jacques Lacan put it: for a good portion of analytic philosophy, no new space was able to be imagined that wasn’t ego-based; as he
says, inverting Freud’s famous assertion to Jung as they sailed into New York, America brought the plague to psychoanalysis. To attempt an escape from the more constraining and unjustifiable elements of that space but without leaving behind its rigour is part of Morag’s project here.

Hence Morag points out that the allegedly scientific individuation of emotion is usually done through verbal reports, or behaviours, or brain activity of the test subjects. Even if these verbal reports are treated as suspicious by the researcher, ordinary language is still at stake; if behaviour is the focus, that behaviour still has to be classified in ordinary language, and salience cannot be entirely denied to the subject without undoing the very basis of the experiment; in the case of brain activity, “previously established correlations with verbal descriptions of emotional states through self-report or observer interpretation” (10) cannot be entirely foreclosed. Such supposed “science” requires, in other words, some rather suspiciously unscientific presumptions in order to get itself off the ground.

In her rejection of the more reductionist tendencies of physicalism and causal fundamentalism, Morag announces her adherence to “Liberal Naturalism”: that, given the existence of multiple explanatory contexts, there may be, in David Macarthur’s words, “a plurality of complete causal explanations for the same event” (cited 11), not all of which need to be nomological. On this methodological basis, Talia proposes a different kind of conception of the unconscious, one which is quite persuasive in a number of important ways.

Yet Morag’s confessed self-restriction to the describable elements of emotions is not without difficulties of its own. After all, what are emotions? Are they to be considered different from moods or feelings or affects? If not, why not? If so, what relations do they bear to each other? Are emotions best modelled on beliefs or judgements, or indeed something else? What if, as Friedrich Nietzsche proposes, that “we only ever find words for what is already dead in our hearts”? That is: to speak is to speak of vanished, non-existing entities as if they still existed. Or, again, not only is the in-principle describability of emotions a somewhat hopeful enterprise, but common parlance is not necessarily a good or adequate criterion of identity. “But surely another man can’t feel like this—,’ someone says, striking his breast” Wittgenstein imagines somebody exclaiming, before adding: “Striking one’s breast is not an adequate criterion of identity.” Talia knows this, moreover, since, as she puts it, we cannot dispense with the possibility of restrospective “look-alike reasons,” which, while conforming at every point to the verisimili-
tude of rationality, are themselves illusory ex post facto justifications. An orthodox Freudian might start mumbling here about “secondary revision,” before adverting to the doctrine that the products of the unconscious may well be communications, but they were never intended to be understood.....

So orthodoxy could certainly affirm Morag’s critique of the “dogma of emotions,” or what she also calls the “tracking dogma,” that is, that certain emotions are allegedly age- or context-appropriate, which, as she explicitly points out, is an Aristotelian dogma, that of the Phronismos. Still, I agree and disagree yet again: emotions and their descriptions are surely intimately connected in a non-Aristotelian way, even if it is still not very clear to me how Liberal Naturalism might deal with two strictly contradictory causal explanations of the same event. In the end, I probably don’t even believe, unlike Morag, that there are some preprogrammed emotions in humans—fear of bears, for example—not least given that human history is full of counter-examples, whether it’s little Alcibiades staring down a bull, or the notorious recurrence of wolf-children from Romulus and Remus to Lyokha. Yet at the same time, I think we should maintain that emotions are always already biophysically-materialized. Nietzsche, again: the rabbit’s giant ears are terror incarnate. In this view, every organ would be an organization of ancestral affects, an assemblage, a multiplicity, constantly on the verge of malfunctioning, debouching to, or creating entirely new relationships with other organs—and hence with other emotions, etc.

Yet Morag has a clear commitment to affirming the idiosyncrasy of individual humans. As she puts it: “Science may be able to explain or even predict statistical distributions of emotional reactions across certain classes of people, but it cannot answer the question that is the focus of this book, namely, what makes this particular individual emote in a certain way in a certain specific situation” (13). Surely this is true, and Morag’s emphasis on the concatenating contingencies of emotion as creating personal forms of associative pattern-programming is persuasive and productive. Hence her account that “associative patterns are not pre-existing rules that the mind follows, but rather a matter of retroactive and synoptic identification” (269), which entails “we engage in this self-deceptive activity without self-awareness” (270), producing our unique personalities as networks of “alienating aversion” (a great phrase btw).

For Morag, moreover, our personalities can never become altogether conscious. For her, the unconscious is composed of at least two different kinds of unaware-
ness: 1) our distraction from our own emotions; 2) our ignorance of their cause. Psychoanalytical treatment would therefore ideally enable both a recognition of these emotions, a kind of recollection of their causation, and, finally, a kind of affirmation of the truth of causation itself.

For Morag, then, the field of psychoanalysis depends on the integral-yet-divergent relations each subject incarnates between affect, knowledge and action. Behaviouralist and contemporary cognitive modalities often seem to suppose that it is by re-fusing good affects with correct expressions that better action can be achieved, at once psychologically-satisfying and pragmatically-useful. Take the instances where common scientific psychology tries to dose individuals according to what is essentially a commonsense version of the good: MDMA for PTSD, or corrective pleasure-shocks when recollecting unpleasant events, or even the subsisting varieties of aversion therapy. At issue with such “psychologies” is something that I believe neither psychoanalysis nor philosophy should abide: without a recourse to thought or thinking as such (however that thinking is defined), any such alleged “treatment” will find itself violently consolidating inadequate ideas of the body in bodies themselves; moreover, that such treatment will occlude if not compound the obscurity of causation in humans; finally, that individuality as such will be assaulted and, with it, any putative “mental health.”

But it is here that one can start to discern a well-defined genealogy of “modern philosophy” lurking behind Morag’s own proposals, from Spinoza to Kant. For Spinoza, the mind-body distinction is only formal not real, and the mind is always the idea of the body; in being so, one can have more or less adequate ideas concerning the chain of causes in which one is inserted; and it is through thinking the larger contexts in which we are inserted that one can ultimately come to the mind of God itself, aka the thought of the whole. Spinoza is of particular importance here because of his refusal of a distinction between will and understanding: contra Descartes, for whom it is one thing to have an idea and another thing to reject or assent to it, for Spinoza, to have an idea is necessarily to affirm it.

Separating and radicalising this idea of the idea of association, David Hume and his fellow-travellers, such as David Hartley and Dugald Stewart, emphasized the contractions of ideas of cause through the contingent associations of individual habits: Hume thence focuses upon similarity, contiguity and causality, while Stewart emphasizes resemblance, vicinity and contrariety. As Gilles Deleuze points out in *Difference and Repetition*: “the constitution of repetition already implies
three instances: the in-itself which causes it to disappear as it appears, leaving it unthinkable; the for-itself of the passive synthesis; and, grounded upon the latter, the reflected representation of a ‘for-us’ in the active syntheses. Associationism possesses an irreplaceable subtlety.” If one can agree with this Deleuzian judgement, it must also be said there is a problem with the standard versions of associationism to which Deleuze is responding, which Morag also teeters upon: associationism already presumes the differentiation and unity of what obtrudes in repetition (whether the sequence AB-AB-AB or even simply A-A-A-A-A), without being able to account for the genesis of the very trait that repeats/is-repeated.

And this is precisely why Kant, both with and against Hume, revivifies a kind of faculty psychology in which something like a transcendental must be presumed in order to enable us to pass from sensation through imagination to understanding and to reason. This is what Kant offers associationism: an account of prior operations by which anything is able to be picked out at all, what must always already have had to have been at work in order for a trait to be individuated, let alone repeatable. Morag’s own associationism seems to be located between Humean and Kantian kinds, without being fully able to seize its own dependence upon the latter. Without it, however, she has no account of how repetition can manifest at all, let alone be contracted into patterns of un-awareness; yet, with it, there turn out to be pre-existing operations that organise principles of linkage that contravene the radicality of the associationism she is essaying to promote.

In contrast to such classical philosophical views, certain versions of psychoanalysis insist that affects are never quite correlated with their causes, which are lost; and that knowledge itself is a lure that betrays the truth it purports to desire. Above all, the determining cause for human psychology—and cause has to be taken in a very particular sense here—is sexual difference as such. This difference, which of course has been cashed out according to so many competing descriptions, nonetheless reduces to the following in most orientations of psychoanalysis: a child is produced from two; these two are irreducible and irreplaceable; each child has to construct its relation to this doublet upon which it is dependent or belated with respect to its own position and from its own experience; since its own infant ratiocinations are at once forged on the basis of its singularity of experience, insufficient information, and untutored thinking, and oriented by pleasure; and, since these infant ratiocinations are part of the process of embodiment itself, they come to be wired into the sensorium in such a way that the adult itself is the outcome of this process. In a particular sense, then, the “trauma of being”
cannot ever be representable as such. In classic psychoanalytic treatment, the remembering, repeating and working-through of the trauma demands a protracted process of free association in a relation between analysand and analyst.

In Morag’s version, which seems to give the question of sexuality no particular authority in ontogenesis, she remarks:

> According to the associative account, the patient’s problem in life is not caused by just one well-individuated emotion that the patient is alienated from, but by an imaginatively interconnected bundle of such unconscious emotions (243-44).

Now, for Morag, introspection requires that we pay attention to our inner mental states (images, feelings, ideas); we then need to find words for these states, to express them verbally; finally, it’s vital that we report honestly about these states. This is already a triple act of attention-nomination-transmission: quite a process! Moreover, in pursuing it, the very process goes “hand in hand with the gradual breaking of patterns of inattention,” that is, resistances (244). Analysis enables a transformation in our forms of inattention to ourselves; concomitantly, that we otherwise act as if we were distracted from ourselves, that is, we are ourselves habituated processes of self-distraction. Yet even if it’s not just one well-individuated alienating emotion that’s at issue, Morag still seems to retain a commitment to a well-individuated emotion somewhere … as opposed to the possibility of an irremediably inconsistent, incoherent, or indistinct obscurity of fundamental affects …

So what could possibly make us pay attention to ourselves given our constitutive inattention to ourselves? Morag offers some intriguing suggestions, such as the sequence: laughter, art, being-interrupted, and daydreaming (224). Such interruptions may, in one way or another, enable us to pay a new kind of attention to ourselves but, as she notes, the vocalizing of such associations is itself only rarely proposed and thematized as such. Analysis is one of those situations. Otherwise, we continue to find and lose ourselves simultaneously in the drift of inconsistent or apparently unmotivated synonyms.

So the obligations to pay attention to such a drift and to speak of such a drift in ways that are not simply self-misleading or repetitions of such is a fundamental problem for any analysand and analyst (and everyone else besides). While I like
certain features of Morag’s account of the analytic situation—for example, that
the neutrality of the analyst helps render visible that the analyst is not a cause of
emotions in the analysand, but a trigger and an object of sets of projective identi-
fications, that the end of analysis might be best considered on pragmatic grounds,
and so on—she still gives us a Freudian unconscious that squats uneasily between
a Humean theory of association and a Kantian theory of the imagination. Why
do I insist on such historical nominal markers as if they were of any importance
here? Because they establish an unconscious that is already a little too conscious
for psychoanalysis, an unconscious that in the end is a little too philosophical for
my own convictions, an unconscious that is going to resist you a little—but in the
end comes round.

If I have gone on at length about Morag’s book, it is because it does what such a
book should do: induce a process of thinking that is at once enthusiastic and dis-
enchanted, that is implicated in and then beyond the immediate data of the text
in order to return to find itself estranged from the real. This book does not shut
down dialogue, but encourages dissension. I can recommend this book highly,
then, for anybody interested in contemporary philosophy and psychoanalysis. It
is a difficult book; it is closely argued; and it offers propositions that demand at-
tention and response. One thinks a little differently for having read it.

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NOTES

1. It is possible, of course, that Brentano’s influence has been overdrawn. See Freud’s letter to his friend Eduard Silberstein, in which he recounts a visit to the great man: “you might flatter yourself on having a friend thought worthy of the company of so excellent a man, were it not that thousands of others have been invited to his home or to converse with him, which greatly detracts from our distinction....Over the next few semesters, I intend to make a thorough study of his philosophy, and meanwhile reserve judgment and the choice between theism and materialism,” S. Freud, “Letter from Sigmund Freud to Eduard Silberstein,” March 13, 1875 in The Letters of Sigmund Freud to Eduard Silberstein 1871-1881, pp. 99-105. For his part, Siegfried Bernfeld remarks that “It is impossible that Freud at that time, or at any time for that matter, was a follower of Brentano. One even wonders whether he would have cared to understand the finer points of his arguments. This does not exclude the possibility that Freud was impressed by some of Brentano’s polemics and statements, that he preserved them in his preconscious and that they influenced his thoughts twenty years later when he, disappointed in the existing psychological theories, ventured into this broad field on his own,” “Freud’s Scientific Beginnings,” American Imago, No. 6 (1949), pp. 190-191.


6. “[P]erhaps indeed there was nothing more fearful and uncanny in the whole prehistory of man than his mnemotechnics: ‘If something is to stay in the memory it must be burned in: only that which never ceases to hurt stays in the memory’—this is a main clause of the oldest (unhappily also the most enduring) psychology on earth,” F. Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo, ed. and trans. W. Kaufmann with R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 61.

7. “I have seen a person in a discussion on this subject strike himself on the breast and say: ‘But surely another person can’t have THIS pain!’—the answer to this is that one does not define a criterion of identity by emphatic stressing of the word ‘this,’” L. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), n. 254, p. 91.

Slow Philosophy is a timely meditation upon the possibility of practicing philosophy within the limits of an institution (the corporatised university) that more often than not actively inhibits the enabling conditions of philosophy. It is now a commonplace of contemporary academia to rail against the direction of higher education and the restrictions it places on intellectual work. Indeed, a number of recent books already occupy this space. Richard Hil’s Whackademia: An Insider’s Account of the Troubled University captures academics’ frustrations with the university’s bureaucratic, efficiency and PR-driven imperatives, which operate blindly and to the detriment of its most vital functions. Likewise, intellectual historian Stefan Collini’s polemical work What Are Universities For? examines the risks to thinking wrought by universities’ managerial turn in the United Kingdom. Maggie Berg and Barbara Seeber’s contribution to this genre, The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy, perhaps approaches most closely the tone of Slow Philosophy, in its plea to remain true to the temporality of profound thought in resistance against institutional mandates to run faster, jump higher, and produce a greater quantum of research, even while this speed erodes the quality of academic work.

What distinguishes Slow Philosophy from these attempts is its attention to questions of what philosophy is, how it understands itself, and how certain styles of philosophising either resist or contribute to the institutional tendencies currently
endangering the humanities. Boulous Walker poses a question unfortunately too familiar to anyone who engages in academic work, whether securely or precariously: how does one revive the love of wisdom that animates a desire to engage philosophically? How does one find again the instilling moment of philosophy within an institution that alienates, reifies, and perverts philosophy into a “forensic desire to know;” an ends-directed enterprise that too hurriedly settles upon answers and disciplines thought into systems (“aims,” “outcomes,” “outputs,” “impact pathways,” “stages of research,” all determined and measurable in advance). All surely must have asked themselves this question at some time or other, while hurrying to meet a deadline for an article, or undergoing an annual performance review, or rushing through a lecture in full knowledge that a bare minimum of students have even looked at let alone read the materials (you can even quantify their reading, or at least whether they’ve accessed it, on the TELT platforms we now use).

Over the course of the book, Boulous Walker presents an integral critique of philosophy in order to remember to philosophers the love of wisdom (and wisdom of love) that galvanises readers’ attachment to “the discipline,” while further bringing to the fore the tendencies within “the discipline” that close thought and engagement, and thus work against philosophy’s animating principle. In this way, Boulous Walker initiates a thoroughgoing exploration of philosophy in its relation to the institutional forms that currently most challenge professional philosophy, or philosophy as a profession: the imperative for larger classes, faster turnaround times, and clearly delineated outputs—imperatives that foreclose genuine engagement with students and with the materials we read. By contrast, *Slow Philosophy* brings philosophy into contact with its own instilling moment: the moment that breathes life into one’s activity qua philosopher, and connects that activity to life rather than abstract, detached, formulaic reasoning. It is a book that puts its reader in mind of the reason she decided to engage with philosophy in the first place. It reminds her to be affected by what she reads, and to engage in an open-ended mode of reading: to read like the *flaneur*, embracing curiosity and aimlessness; to allow oneself to dwell in the text’s ambiguity and uncertainty, to recognize the value of complexity, to relinquish control and even orientation—to forget oneself in the text’s otherness.

To this end, Boulous Walker traces a rich seam throughout the history of philosophical writing in which an ethical relation to otherness is expressed: whether this otherness refers to those whom a more rigid and programmatic style of phi-
losophy would exclude; or an otherness that would challenge rusted-on interpretations of key texts; or an otherness that must be embraced if philosophy is to continue to adapt and grow into the future. This ethics of reading draws on traditions in which Boulous Walker has been immersed for some years: specifically, the French phenomenological tradition and feminist philosophy that, through Boulous Walker's careful reading, show us at once how to read and how to live as philosophers. The book draws out the inextricable connection between living and reading ethically, in the sense that just as one lives tacitly articulates a relation to others or otherness, so too, how one engages with others in textual interpretation has ethical implications. Boulous Walker navigates her reader through the question of how to revive a loving relationship to philosophy (philosophy as a love of wisdom, and as a wisdom of love) through her impressively diverse readings of the thinkers who have most challenged and shaped her own philosophical attitudes. Her response to philosophy, and recommendations regarding philosophy’s future, develops in dialogue and through dialectical exchange with the philosophers she identifies as formative of the discipline’s most productive self-relation: Nietzsche, Benjamin, Adorno, Merleau-Ponty, Hadot, Levinas, Lyotard, Gumbrecht, as well as Beauvoir, Le Dœuff, Irigaray, and Cixous (each of whom is rendered through their relation to other philosophers who deepen or enhance their powers). “Slow philosophy” is in this way a readerly approach to philosophy, formed always through an encounter with difference.

Chapter one begins with a consideration of Michèle Le Dœuff’s approach to philosophy as a form of reading, and as an institutionalised form, or “discipline,” that founds itself in the act of excluding its “other:” that is, by demarcating itself from literature, poetics, history, sociology, etc. This chapter performs a number of significant moves in setting up the approach that Boulous Walker will sustain throughout the book. First, she emphasises Le Dœuff’s methodology of foregrounding the habits of reading that various approaches to (or of) philosophy embody. The first of these is Le Dœuff’s ethics of reading the history of philosophy as revisionist, or as “re-reading,” which transgresses against received interpretations of a work in order to open it to other, hitherto unexplored significances, and so as not to take the work as already read, so to speak. Boulous Walker characterises as “feminine” this mode of reading, drawing out Le Dœuff’s reflections on the styles of reading that philosophers most valorise or disparage. Vaunted styles of reading Boulous Walker designates, with Le Dœuff, as “masculine:” this is the so-called “strong reading,” that violently (or creatively) subordinates the work to one’s own philosophical purpose. This is counter posed against the kind
of close and faithful reading that is characteristically associated with women philosophers, and is demeaned as less creative or “seminal” than masculine habits of reading. Boulous Walker urges that we evaluate these habits differently, in order to recuperate significant readings that have been performed by women. Moreover, she suggests that these “faithful” readings have themselves been under-read, and that perhaps “a polite demeanor hides something altogether more provocative and engaged” than we may at first give credit to (45). Rather, fidelity as a strategy of reading may yield a more thorough and interrogative interpretation of the text than the “masculine” reading, which is so distant as to leave the work virtually unpenetrated. This formulation of reading as both gendered and habitual contributes to a further shift in our understanding of reading as embodied or corporeally elaborated. Boulous Walker situates this idea with reference to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of “habit” as a bodily discipline from which consciousness withdraws, and urges the reader to pay heed to these habits and what they entail for the stance we take with regard to philosophy—what a philosophy is and what it can do. Such consciousness would involve returning to texts in order to read them differently, breaking habits in order to find a new ethical relation to philosophical works (a relation that is more engaged, open, and dynamic). Slow Philosophy in this way also prepares philosophy’s future, as an open-ended, experimental activity, unburdened by a self-image (or self-imagining) that forecloses against change and growth. Both the re-reading and the orientation to philosophy’s future is situated in pedagogy, understood as a collaborative activity, encouraging new interpretations rather than disciplining them with “red ink in the margin” (another reference to Le Dœuff’s corpus).

Chapter Two takes up Levinas and Adorno, in order to explore further the ethical implications of reading through consideration of Adorno’s favoured form, the essay. Here Levinas’s ethical imperatives of openness to the other and reciprocity are elaborated in terms of the essay, which Boulous Walker characterises as the form most conducive to slow reading: as untimely or anachronistic, open-ended, and explorative rather than the manner usual to contemporary philosophical discourse of limiting the kind of questioning that is possible. Adorno critiques modern philosophy after Descartes, as precisely a disciplining of philosophy to only the most certain, calculable ends: an instrumentalisation of thought that is countered by the kind of essayistic reading that resists institutional (ends-directed) reason. The untimeliness of the essay is again key to its capacity to open to a future philosophy, unhurried by the demand to simplify thought so that only the most certain truths are brought to light. Boulous Walker then again emphasises
the corporeal dimension of reading through Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s approach of reading for *Stimmung*—the mood, energy, or intensity of a writing—through which the reader registers the otherness of the text through an intimate and vital engagement with it. This attention to reading, according to Gumbrecht, affectively responds to the work in a manner that risks one’s certainties, or preconceived attitude to the work.

In chapters Three and Four Boulous Walker engages with Luce Irigaray’s approach to reading, which will further inform the affective and temporal elements of her conception of “slow philosophy.” Chapter Three explores Irigaray’s approach through the passions of “love” and “wonder,” both of which Irigaray had emphasised in her volume of re-readings of classic works of philosophy, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference.* Here Boulous Walker showcases Irigaray’s somewhat idiosyncratic interpretations of Plato and Descartes as paradigm cases of slow reading, by drawing attention to the manner in which Irigaray’s critical intervention in these works releases significances suppressed even by their own authors. Contrary to the orthodox reading, then, Irigaray’s explorative reading technique interrogates the text for the meanings that resist the received understanding of either work or author. Thus, Boulous Walker shows, Irigaray reads Plato against Platonism, and Descartes against Cartesianism, to bring to light a new appreciation of these philosophers and philosophies. This method in itself exemplifies slow reading, to the extent that it opens to otherness, to the unexpected that dwells already within philosophy, as the germ of philosophy’s future. However, Boulous Walker further develops the passions Irigaray retrieves from these philosophers—love and wonder—to bring to the fore the embodied disposition of slow reading. Irigaray’s recuperation of the *daimonic* character of love in her reading of Diotima’s speech (which is retold by Socrates at the Symposium, in Diotima’s absence) makes available an affectively situated concept for the movement between two opposites that not only conditions the possibility of change, growth, and communication between the two, but, importantly for Boulous Walker, also institutes philosophy as a love of wisdom and a wisdom of love.

Turning to Descartes, “wonder” is for Irigaray a passion that places into abeyance the greater (or more conventionally recognised) tendency of Cartesianism to circumscribe knowledge in advance as only what can be conceived of with certainty. Wonder, the first passion, instead registers the strangeness of whatever is encountered, and far from assimilating it to what is already understood, in wonder one suspends judgment in order to appreciate the other in its otherness. Such a
moment is fleeting for Descartes, whose tendency accords more to the derivative “forensic desire to know” than the instituting love of wisdom. Yet, as Boulous Walker shows through Irigaray, each of these moments signals a different possibility for philosophy, either as tending towards the kind of instrumental reason that presently dominates the discipline (and institution), or a contemplative, open, explorative, and untimely approach that relinquishes the desire to exhaust thought in its search for truth.

Chapter Four stays with Irigaray’s approach to reading as a mode of attention, or “listening.” Here Boulous Walker brings out a further embodied register of reading through consideration of the sensory dimension of how we read, through a critique of the conventional evaluation of perception embedded in Irigaray’s “elemental” readings of the philosophers. A particular target of critique here is the privilege customarily afforded to “sight” over other senses, where reading is (mis)understood to be purely visual. Drawing on Hans Jonas’s account of perception, Boulous Walker argues that this overreliance on sight engenders a tendency to isolate, analyse, and render abstract whatever one encounters, at the expense of a mode of attention that would take account of sound, smell, texture, and bearing, to open to other ways of apprehending the world or text. Reading should engage us as mortal, embodied, and sexuate beings, so that reading that is sight-centred to the exclusion of other modes of sensing incorporates rather than encounters others, ignoring not only the other’s embodied specificity, but also that of the reader. This mode of reading, according to Boulous Walker (after Irigaray), aligns to the masculine approach characteristic of contemporary philosophy. Bringing into play these marginalised senses also challenges the active/passive dichotomy that structures masculine orientations to “objects”: an orientation that evaluates listening to be passive, whereas seeing is understood as active, penetrating, and transcendental. Thus, a reading that emphasises listening resists the disengaged abstraction of conventional philosophy, favouring instead a philosophical practice attentive to particularity, and which engages in dialogue with its subject matter. To see reading as a form of listening also involves a different temporal and spatial relation to texts than reading conceived in terms only of sight. Rather than occupying a superior and separate aspect that characterises its objects as discrete, encapsulated, and a-temporal, listening receives and organises phenomena sometimes simultaneously, according to complex rhythms that can slow down and speed up experience, and which registers in the spectral “voice” of the text traces of corporeality (such as breath, timbre, mood, relation to the reader, and gender). As Boulous Walker states, “the idea of attentive listening reminds me that the
philosophical work that we do always involves us bodily, that it always engages us as embodied—and necessarily sexually embodied—beings” (116). Here, again, Boulous Walker returns to the question of teaching, and the part of listening in fostering dialogue in the classroom.

Chapter Five brings us to Simone de Beauvoir’s analysis of love, which Boulous Walker deploys to distinguish two approaches to reading that accord to Beauvoir’s ethics of ambiguity. Beauvoir’s critique in The Second Sex of women’s tendency to subordinate their tastes and judgment to their lover’s in “romantic” love, as opposed to a more critical and self-affirming “authentic” love, is developed as a means of articulating the affective dimension of particular styles of philosophical interpretation. On the one hand, according to Beauvoir’s dichotomy, the interpretation under the rubric of romantic love cleaves too faithfully to the text, and thus fails to differentiate itself and become critical, to build upon or transcend the work that it reads. On the other hand, authentic love belongs to the more mature reading that is able to appreciate the work both in its transcendent or subjective nature—as something other than and beyond me—and in its objective nature—according to its limitations, and as constituted within a particular history or situation (its facticity). Boulous Walker compares the first, immature mode of reading to the reductive, “masculine” style of reading addressed already in chapter One, in that it also fails adequately to appreciate the text’s otherness. But she then problematises the opposition between “romantic” and “authentic” readings by bringing into play Michèle Le Dœuff’s complex interpretation of Beauvoir’s relation to Sartre as both “romantic” (wherein she overestimates Sartre’s philosophy and subordinates her own to it), and as overcoming Sartre’s work in a more “authentic” mode, by recognising and overcoming its limitations. Beauvoir’s philosophy, the chapter concludes, is developed through a reading of Sartre that is both faithful and unfaithful, loving romantically on its way to a more authentic love/interpretation that attempts to improve upon Sartre’s ethical failings: his incapacity to conceive of intersubjectivity outside of the master/slave dialectic, for instance. Ultimately Beauvoir’s philosophy is offered as both explication and demonstration of a form of relationality that engages the “instituting” moments of philosophy, by taking seriously its ethical task as a form of engagement with others.

The book culminates in a reflection, in the final chapter, on love as readerly relation and philosophy’s genetic principle through French feminist philosopher Hélène Cixous’s practice of “intimate reading.” For Cixous, Boulous Walker argues, the relation to otherness precipitates a process of reciprocal transformation
between-two [entredeux], respecting both other subjects and the otherness within oneself: that is, the unconscious. Driven by a different economy of desires and pleasures from the conscious self, the unconscious unmoors the ego from whatever it takes to be certain. The unconscious is thus understood as a reservoir of sense that confronts the ego-self as if from another place, principally the maternal body in intimate relation to which each self had emerged. In her account of this unconscious otherness, Cixous sketches two rival economies: the conscious, symbolic of language, which keeps count of exchanges in vigilance against potential loss, attempting instead to accumulate; and the unconscious, instituted through loss, mourning, and fundamental displacement, and which gives of itself generously rather than accumulating. These differences are themselves sexuate: the former being “masculine,” the latter “feminine,” each designating not so much biological necessities, but rather a relation to authority and to law (160-61). For Cixous, writing as écriture féminine forms an intimate, corporeal relation to texts to which it responds because it picks up this unconscious register, and brings one into contact with the deep ethical dimension of text that eludes its surface, symbolic level. Boulous Walker thus elaborates “slow philosophy” in terms of Cixous’s writerly practice, picking up again the themes of generosity, “feminine” approaches to reading, and the corporeality of reading and thought.

All the while, what might perhaps be called Slow Philosophy’s “inhibited aim” is to place into fundamental question the tempo of university (institutional) life, and, through the practice of slow reading, to create space within the university once again for “the instituting moments of a love of wisdom and philosophy as a way of life” (178). It must be said that the realities of academic work sometimes betray the ethical imperative to read slowly. It is tempting to read Slow Philosophy as backward looking... nostalgic for a bygone day when “old boys” could work at their own pace and in safety afforded by tenure ... as not facing up to the realities of the contemporary academic industrial landscape... and even as perpetuating a mythology that renders academic workers vulnerable to exploitation by promising, to those willing to wait, the kind of security that allows time for reflection. I think that on balance the book is doing something more radical than this, and it helps to remember that even as early as 1881, Nietzsche was already guarding against the encroachment of haste as a threat to thought, in a refrain that recurs frequently throughout Boulous Walker’s book.

But for precisely this reason it is more necessary than ever today, by precisely this means does it entice and enchant us the most, in the midst of
an age of ‘work,’ that is to say, of hurry, of indecent and perspiring haste, which wants to ‘get everything done’ at once, including every old or new book: this art does not so easily get anything done, it teaches to read well, that is to say, to read slowly, deeply, looking cautiously before and aft, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers.\(^5\)

With this memento in mind, to understand philosophy as slow reading may be countercultural, and by regularly reaffirming our commitment to it as such, we may also commit to support one another in putting into place practices to help slow time down. The imperative to slow philosophy down speaks not only to its future as a profession, however, and it is worth considering that philosophy as slow reading may not survive its struggle with the institution... So, keeping in mind the critiques of the institution offered by so many at this moment, what are the implications of this book, Slow Philosophy, for the profession, and the industrial and cultural context in which philosophers work in Australia and elsewhere?

First, throughout the book, Boulous Walker very deliberately connects the imperative to read slowly and engage with otherness to teaching, and asks readers to consider how they might cultivate philosophy and a love of reading slowly in their students—to find time in teaching to impart that love to them. This reaches right to the heart of a concern for philosophy's future not only as a poetical return to philosophy's instituting moment—the love of wisdom and wisdom of love. Rather, in a time and place that measures the value of programs of study according to graduate attributes, there is a need to convey the worth of philosophy in ways that undercut that discourse, and moreover, in ways that convey to students directly the good of philosophy as a transformative practice, which actually helps them see the world—and evaluate life—differently. To achieve this in the classroom would take forethought and a feeling of freedom around time: it would need an excess of time to plan classes and to teach them, without anxiety about the quantum of “content” that needs to be conveyed within a ten to twelve week teaching period. Sometimes a “slow teaching moment”—in which students are brought to comprehend the complexity and otherness of a text—happens fortuitously, but the time we could rely on happenstance is over. Universities are tightening the thumbscrews on philosophy as enrolments fall and, when surveyed, one of the most common complaints students make about philosophy courses is the reading: its difficulty, its volume, its irrelevance to their lives. Increasingly, it seems to me, students do not read, do not know how to read, or do not have the patience not to know in advance what a text is about, and what the point of reading it is.
There are various reasons for this: as Boulous Walker observes in the book’s introduction, online technologies have transformed literacy, and particularly the tempo of reading, as skim reading becomes normative. Students Google the précis before they read the text, and there is more pressure than ever to understand quickly, and to bypass reading altogether, to stick with the most surface interpretation available. Once a certain threshold of non-readers is reached within one class, teaching as a collaborative enterprise between teacher and students becomes very difficult. When students fail to read it also changes the quality of the lectures: teachers find themselves having to convey “content” rather than how to interrogate the material, how to bring different interpretations into conversation with one another, how to identify audience and communicative object... how, in other words, to read.

Add to this industrial innovations such as the institution’s increasing reliance on casual labour: precarious workers who are not only time poor, but whose time is also measured precisely and frugally by the institution. In this context, time saving has become the institution’s core business. My university and others are now flipping classrooms and introducing 10-week trimesters, with no reading week, and six days to submit final grades, inclusive of the weekend after teaching finishes. We are discouraged from setting essays because they take too long to mark. How will philosophy that needs to be read slowly—that is not already trained to the forensic desire to know—survive this latest corporate attempt to eliminate teaching? There will be more restructures to come, and more tinkering of courses to make them less challenging and quicker to grade. But in order to take up the challenge issued by Slow Philosophy, perhaps we should simply not attempt to comprehensively cover a whole region of thought in one teaching term. Perhaps we should halve the quantity of reading material, and even force students to read it during class time if they are not prepared to read it in their own time... studying the most complex and challenging paragraphs together in “real” time, that is, in the classroom: interrogatively, slowly, with delicate eyes and fingers... “staging,” as Boulous Walker quotes Gumbrecht, “our students encounters with the inevitable oscillations these instances entail” (19-20). Staging philosophy as reading—in an age when students prepare for class with the aid of Wikipedia and YouTube—is a wager for philosophy and against the ever-accelerating stopwatch of history.

Second, and to again invoke Nietzsche, God is dead... and email killed him. Many days, the greater volume of the text philosophers read takes the form of email rather than the great thinkers of the tradition. However absorbing philosophical
work is, or ought to be, that little “ding” that heralds the arrival of a new message beckons with an irresistible urgency. The absorption that allows the reader to forget herself and become insensitive to time’s passing is abruptly destroyed, as one is subjected instead to calls for papers, requests from students, library notifications... usually something, in any case, of little consequence or which at least could have waited. The thought of email piling up and becoming unmanageable is intolerable, its call upon us more insistent and immediate than the call to philosophy. Making time for philosophy requires turning one’s back on email and for a period of hours every day—to actually turn it off, disengage from its distractions, and ignore the call of administrators, students, and managers upon us. And while this on the surface may feel antisocial and selfish, withdrawing from email must be done collectively to be most effective. It is ultimately for the good of the community, and it must become a communal norm not immediately to reply to email. While the reading privileged in Slow Philosophy requires an opening to otherness, and relinquishment of control over meaning’s destination, at least it preserves within it a relation to self that enables one to be transformed in positive, edifying ways. The call of email opens instead to alienation. It fritters time away. It accords to the tick-tock rhythm of clocking on and clocking off. Unlike a reading absorption that opens to others in their otherness, email—the paradigmatic form of institutional reading—cannot create time.

Finally, if we are to take Slow Philosophy seriously as an opening to an otherness held already in potential within philosophy, this otherness must include death as well as rebirth. What if philosophy within the university is unsalvageable? What if the only god that can save us heralds from elsewhere, without the institution? Is time for engaging deeply with an otherness that would shock us out of complacency to be found instead in the community meeting, or café, or concert hall, or the homeless tent city, or a union meeting? Upon discovering last semester that I could no longer make time to participate in reading groups—perhaps the last bastion of slow reading—without giving up something else of value, I chose to give up my reading group. If one has to choose between fulfilling intellectual activity and time spent with one’s children, or exercising, or playing music, or political activism, perhaps sometimes we have to find something else to do that is creative, that opens us to otherness, and that fulfills our love of wisdom. There are many ways to do philosophy, and the question seems to be not only “how does one sustain philosophy outside the walls of the institution?,” but even, “how can we sustain philosophy within them?” I take it that this is also Boulous Walker’s question, and it is a question that, as a community, we need to confront honestly,
and perhaps transformatively.

To this end, it must be said that Slow Philosophy is beautifully written, the better to inspire faith and transformation. This book invites precisely what it recommends: slow reading. It was written to be read slowly, and as such brings pleasure to reading. Slow Philosophy is a love letter to the “philosophy” from which professional philosophy risks becoming estranged, and a suggestion that perhaps this love may be rekindled. Unlike my ruminations above, Boulous Walker’s book is decidedly not an obituary: faith is maintained throughout that there may be a reunion; that there may be opportunities again for the “unhurried time” that philosophy requires, and even within the institution of philosophy. Absorbed by this beautiful and hopeful text, I found myself able to believe that we might slow time down, pause the system, even break the acceleration of time that accompanies the taylorisation of academic work. Retaining access to this moment of belief in the capacity to steal back time for philosophy is important, even essential to the possibility that we continue to do philosophy. After all, how else do we write books? In a time where research administrators need convincing that writing a book is a worthwhile thing to do... at a time when it would be better rewarded and take less energy to use that time to write a series of articles... Michelle stands by her principles by writing a book, a carefully written book that rewards slow reading. Whatever future awaits philosophy, the rewards of slow reading will continue to beckon us to that horizon.

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NOTES

Contemporary phenomenological texts tend to rely on close reading of a handful of key figures in the history of the phenomenological movement. This is true generally but not universally of course. If you travel in certain circles you are likely to hear other philosophers wonder why, if contemporary phenomenologists have something important to say, they don’t just say it instead of subjecting us to another version of “Merleau-Ponty on Heidegger on Husserl’s departure from realist phenomenology” or some such thing. Some contemporary phenomenologists have responded to this challenge by claiming that the endless reading, re-reading, re-counting, re-imagining and re-interpreting of historical moments in the phenomenological literature is an essential part of doing phenomenology. Phenomenology as a discipline can’t help but depart from a circuitous taking up of its own history as a discipline. A host of other responses are possible as well. Some might point to the balance achieved by canonical figures who, while not ignoring history, certainly are not scared to carve out new paths. Others might take a few well established phenomenological insights (e.g. the shallowness of a phenomenalist picture of experience, the irreducibility of the lived body, etc.) and apply them to contemporary debates. Whatever the response, there is a standing challenge to anyone writing phenomenology today, that is, how to balance the reading of phenomenology with the doing of phenomenology. Interestingly for what is to follow, there is a parallel challenge faced by contemporary Wittgensteinian philosophy.
Andrew Inkpin’s *Disclosing the World* treads the uneasy line between two positions, that of a constructive phenomenologist and a scholarly exegete, or in the author’s words, the aim is “to strike the right balance—that is, to do justice to the merits of each position while maintaining sufficient direction to avoid mere commentary.” (p.15)

Inkpin’s constructive phenomenology is both ambitious and restrained. It is ambitious in offering nothing less than a philosophical grounding for the study of language in general by means of an examination of speakers’ experience of language. Inkpin attempts to explain how linguistic events mean what they do and function the way they do by having a particular formal structure and by being a certain kind of meaningful behaviour. This project is restrained insofar as the author tries to avoid the transcendental speculation, the stylistic excesses and the too-eager condemnation of science that is not infrequently found in the genre. He calls out the heroes of the text - Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein—for exaggerations, ambiguities, missed opportunities and unnecessary complexities.

The ambition and the restraint of this project is exemplified in its stated aim, to advance “a *minimalist* conception phenomenological method, defined by the basic commitment ... to describe accurately how things appear or manifest themselves.” (p.6) More specifically, the aim as it is related to phenomenology of language will be “to identify factors that make language what it is.” (p.8) However, since a minimal phenomenology limits itself to features of language that are noninferentially accessible, the product of this kind of phenomenological description will have limited or no explanatory power, though it will provide the explanandum that the science and metaphysics of language must account for. This means that while the phenomenology of language may and should operate as a constraint on explanatory linguistic theories, it cannot replace them or choose among them (except insofar as some theories explain the phenomenological data and some do not).

This minimal phenomenology of language unfolds exegetically. The scholarship is dense, elaborate, and satisfying for those who have a taste for it. Defence of the main ideas is never far from the close reading of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Saussure and Wittgenstein, which means that there is arguably very little that is dispensable in the book. You can’t skip the sections devoted to the finer points of translating Heideggerian terminology and still expect to understand the substantive claims advanced.
First, a phenomenological framework is established from a detailed consideration of Heidegger’s treatment of language as both continuous with other forms of meaningful behaviour and at the same time as something uniquely linguistic (p.89). If this dual aspect is taken seriously, it results in a picture of language as possessing a dual function: pointing to features of the world and achieving things in the world. The former, termed the “presentational sense,” is fleshed out with a consideration of Merleau-Ponty’s remarks on style and his appropriation of Saussure. The latter function, termed “pragmatic sense,” is fleshed out by tracing Wittgenstein’s journey from a rules-based conception of meaning to a practice-based conception of meaning, concluding in his “language-game” device.

The basic function of language, of which the presentational and pragmatic senses are parts, is termed “disclosure.” Language is embedded in “the broader phenomenon of disclosure” (p.25) which relates to “how the grasp humans have of the world around them takes on a determinate form—that is, how particular entities are picked out or individuated against the background of Significance.” (p.30) The interpretive question which eventually gives rise to the dual function account of language is this: how deeply are linguistic structures embedded in the disclosure? The question is resolved by showing how language participates in understanding and is not just a tool used to express an understanding of things, that is, language is simultaneously a way of achieving practical feats and a way of grasping the world.

Initially, it is tempting to equate the presentational / pragmatic distinction with the present-at-hand / ready-to-hand, or at least to allow the former to piggy back on the latter. This is not quite right because linguistic structures, as I understand the argument, are meant to be operative prior to the present-at-hand / ready-to-hand distinction coming into play (p.50). Similarly, the present-at-hand pertains to determinate and context-independent properties of objects, whereas the presentational sense works to disclose context-dependent features of the world as well. A close approximation to the presentational / pragmatic distinction might be the semantics / pragmatics distinction, given a specifically phenomenological interpretation. Thinking about it like that might be fruitful in understanding the central distinction in Inkpin’s phenomenology, though there are obvious pitfalls. It would be wrong, for instance, to suppose this phenomenology can be mapped onto contemporary debates in analytic philosophy of language, as it’s explicitly designed to undermine the foundation of those debates (see Chapter 9).
I admit to finding the presentational sense in particular quite difficult to understand. Part II uses Merleau-Ponty and Saussure to explicate the presentational sense, and contains some of the most difficult discussion in the book. The presentational sense is “a kind of sense that underlies [linguistic expressions’] capacity to present features of the world in an articulate manner” (p.84). The presentational sense accounts for the demonstrative function of disclosure, the way linguistic signs “point to” features of the world (p.69). My Wittgensteinian scruples lead me to suggest that if words “point to” features of the world, then they must do so in an ordinary sense. If that is the case, then these words are speech acts of a particular kind (“indications,” “pointings,” “demonstratives” or whatever) and one wonders why we should need an account of their meaning different from the pragmatic account. Inkpin does address this. He says, for instance, that while the presentational sense captures something important about language use, there can be empty and filled presentational acts, that is, some linguistic acts can simply fail to point to any features of the world (p.84). A pragmatic account does a good job dealing with this sort of speech - and Wittgenstein in particular is a connoisseur of the routine use of language in which the word’s “atmosphere” dissipates—but a different kind of account is required for novel or poetic forms of expression.

The pragmatic sense of linguistic signs is “the meaning or sense they have due to the respective roles they have as instruments in established practices.” (p.89) It is clear that Wittgenstein’s core ideas - language-games and forms of life—could bolster an account of pragmatic sense and assist in establishing its details. Inkpin provides an interesting and thorough route to this goal by following Wittgenstein’s trajectory from a rules-based conception of meaning (the calculus model) to a practice based conception of meaning (the language game model). My worry is that Wittgenstein sits only uneasily within a phenomenological framework. It is not so much a matter of fitting a square peg in a round hole as it is like fitting a large sponge into a small hole: it definitely fits, but doesn’t quite look the way it did before.

Inkpin writes “it is not necessary to establish that Wittgenstein understood himself as a ‘phenomenologist’. All that is required here is that his conception of language is compatible with a phenomenological approach.” He continues “Wittgenstein’s method of illuminating comparison generates an indirect commitment to the aim of phenomenological accountability.” (p.168) My contention is that many of Wittgenstein’s strategies do not meet the minimal condition of phenomenological accountability.
The story we are given in Disclosing the World regarding the transition from the calculus model to the language-game model goes like this: around the time of Philosophical Grammar, Wittgenstein was committed to a conception of language such that “what makes something ... meaningful is precisely the fact that it belongs to a rule-governed pattern of use” (p.178), or as Wittgenstein says, “Meaning is the role that word plays in the calculus.” At the same time, it was understood that this calculus model is only an idealisation, that it lacked fidelity to empirical reality, but that this was not a great problem. The model was not asserted as a systematic theory, but only an object of comparison, a schematic model designed to clarify misunderstandings. It is argued that “this nonthetic approach relies on an underlying conception of language as a means of comparison, which, although its empirical reality is not asserted, is obviously assumed to approximate well enough to the reality of language to dispel misunderstandings.” (p.180) By the time of Philosophical Investigations, the calculus model is finally abandoned because it is found to be incoherent. Incoherency is a different kind of problem from that of empirical infidelity, since “its intimation of ideal determinacy is precisely what sows the seeds of confusion.” (p.182)

That is the story presented, but here is the problem: although Philosophical Investigations does address severe confusions that might arise from an application of the calculus model, the text also implies that the incoherence of a picture is not that big a deal. If that picture is useful, if it dispels misunderstanding in some context (as we must assume it did if it was to be attractive in the first place), the fact that it creates confusion in some other context is not a reason to abandon the picture entirely, but it is a reason to prefer a different picture in that context. We see this frequently. The idea that thoughts are “in” the head is a picture repeated to us over and over in our language. Wittgenstein has a lot to say about its problematic characteristics but it is never abandoned or ruled out entirely (PI §427). Philosophy is not in the business of completely ruling out this sort of picture (§125). The same is true of the so-called Augustinian picture of language, which is given an appropriate context of use but not entirely repudiated. The same is even true of sense-data theory, the arch-bugbear of phenomenology, which is examined and acknowledged for both the situations it fits and those it doesn’t. The pragmatic principle that useful pictures do not have to have general applicability, which is a feature of Wittgenstein’s nonthetic methodology, means that theoretical incoherence is not fatal.
So what does this have to do with phenomenological accountability? The calculus model is acknowledged as an idealisation, and so has a tenuous relation to the phenomenological data irrespective of its general incoherence. If I am right about the situational applicability of philosophical pictures, their descriptive accuracy is an important consideration but may take a back seat to pragmatic usability or therapeutic effect. In other words, while perhaps some measure of phenomenological accountability is required to let the picture have enough intuitive force to be the least bit tempting, it doesn’t follow that the greater the accuracy the more useful the picture. We might sometimes prefer the less phenomenologically accurate because it produces the specific kind of situational understanding required in a specific context.

If I am right about Wittgenstein, then we can see in greater relief the tension between the goals of the constructive phenomenologist and the goals of the scholarly exegete. Inkpin is open about which identity gives way first:

Should it, however, turn out that this view is not Wittgenstein’s own, then my response would simply be that it should have been, that working out the implications of the language-game analogy ought to have led him to the view presented here. (p.164)

I think this attitude is correct and shows its author has his priorities straight. *Disclosing the World* uses Wittgenstein in interesting and fruitful ways, and the scholarship it contains on the work of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty can be quite exciting at times, if one is excited by that sort of thing. However, the final chapters dealing with the implications of Inkpin’s phenomenology for philosophical realism, contemporary philosophy of language, and 4e cognitive science leave one with a clear idea of what is at stake philosophically and scientifically. In light of this, I do wonder whether the advances made in *Disclosing the World* might be more accessibly presented unencumbered by fine-grained textual analysis of long dead philosophers.

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