Art critic Sister Wendy Beckett once said that before Picasso, painters took it for granted that their job was to produce works of beauty. What else is art to do, after all? It was only after Picasso—specifically, after 1907’s “Les Demoiselles d’Avignon,” with its squatting French prostitutes with faces like grotesque African masks—that painters realized they were not bound to beauty, that beauty was not a fate but, in a way, a limitation. Picasso showed that ugliness too could be the subject of great art, that artists could capture ugliness without rendering it beautiful, and this forever changed the course of culture. Like all truly deep assumptions, this one about beauty had hardly seemed like an assumption at all. It had seemed rather like an unquestionable, inescapable truth—until someone questioned it and thereby escaped it. What had seemed self-evident came to be seen as a self-imposed restriction. How much of the world, how much ugliness, how much mundanity had artists been ignoring? How much more could they now capture? This was perhaps the question of twentieth century art, with its depictions of hideous slaughter, its sliced-up cow carcasses, its snow shovels and urinals and soup cans, paint splotches and blank canvases.

As I pondered Sister Wendy’s insight into Picasso’s revolutionary discovery, I wondered about my own profession: what kind of self-bound limitation might philosophers have long labored under? It must be very deep indeed, since rooting out and questioning presuppositions is our very bread and butter.
What characterization of our subject-matter has seemed so self-evident to its practitioners that it hardly seemed like a characterization at all? This question leads us to that question that all philosophers seem enamored of: What is philosophy? Surely no other discipline is as narcissistic as ours, with virtually every great philosopher interrogating herself about what this strange occupation is that she is so preoccupied with. So let us turn to this perennial question.

We need a definition of philosophy that is as open-ended as possible if we are to find our other, our structural blind spot, the back of our head, so to speak. Well, whatever else it is, philosophizing means thinking about things. Of course, that’s not very specific—lots of disciplines think, despite what Heidegger said. So let’s sharpen our definition up a bit: philosophy means thinking hard about things—really, really hard. That’s better. Now, if that defines what we do in a maximally loose sense—and I’d say that’s pretty loose—does it contain a tacit limitation the way “producing beautiful artifacts” quietly bound art before 1907? How might this characterization restrict our subject matter?

If what we are doing is thinking, then it seems self-evident that whatever we are thinking about must, by that very fact, be thinkable. We must be able to think about it if it is to become the subject of our thought. That’s even more obvious than the idea that art produces beauty, as it seems to be logically necessary (we philosophers always try to outdo others—even in our limitations!). Following Sister Wendy’s account of Picasso’s strategy, the next step is then to question this definition, to view it as a restriction rather than an unbreakable necessity, in order to reveal what possibilities might lie outside of it. If philosophy has always been about the thinkable, could we extend it to what transcends that, to that which is un-thinkable? Is this as perverse as painting intentionally ugly works? If we try to think about that which we cannot think about, will we in fact be able to think anything about it? And if we do, wouldn’t any success thereby compromise the very quality we are trying to capture—namely, its unthinkability—and so actually constitute a failure, like the Liar’s paradox?

This is what has been occupying, or perhaps I should say troubling my mind these last few years, and today I want to share with you some of the thoughts I have been having, these thoughts on the unthinkable. They are, as is surely appropriate to the subject matter, tentative and exploratory.

One of the first things I found is that I am hardly the first to think about these questions. There is a long and rich vein of philosophical speculation on this topic,
going all the way back to Parmenides. In saying that thought and being are one, he seems to be declaring a rather extreme version of what we can call the Thinkability Restriction: this is the idea that we must limit thought to what can be and, going the opposite direction, limit what can be to what can be thought. However, he gets ensnared in his own interdiction, for in forbidding discussion of what cannot be thought or said—namely, the conceptual abomination that non-being is—he must discuss it! In order to specify what it is that we cannot say or think, Parmenides is compelled to say and think it, a common trap in this treacherous territory. The very act of laying down a limitation, as both Hegel and Wittgenstein later argue, transgresses itself by giving some specification to what lies on the far side.

Kant gives a fascinating spin to Parmenides’ idea. He both makes reality completely thinkable in regards to phenomena—the world as we experience it is knowable through and through—and completely unthinkable, or at least unknowable, when talking about noumena—the world as it really is, independent of our mind’s processing of it. He thus enforces both branches of Parmenides’ maxim simultaneously: “it is necessary to speak and think what is” phenomenal, but “not to be said and not to be thought/ is” noumenal being.

But while formally similar, this formulation actually marks a dramatic departure from Parmenides, for where Parmenides had said that it is non-being that is unthinkable, Kant makes being off-limits conceptually. Indeed, noumena represent what traditionally would have been considered the true world, the “really real” realm in Plato’s phrase (ontos on). Thus, on closer examination, Kant actually reverses Parmenides’ maxim—it is being that we cannot know or discuss; intelligible discourse must restrict itself to phenomena, which is ontologically peculiar—it both is and is not, bearing an unsettling similarity to mass hallucination. The object of knowledge is a shimmering subjective projection which we know is not how the world actually is; science becomes merely discerning the patterns projected on the wall of the cave by the transcendental fire of our minds. Kant binds us to Parmenides’ path of mortals, for goddesses no longer speak to us.

We reach with Kant one of the great insights into my topic: let us call it, somewhat ostentatiously, The Principle of Anthropomorphic Humility. Kant makes the very simple point, hashed out in extremely complicated conceptual machinery, that all we can do is think with our thoughts. When we try to make sense of the world, it is inescapably by means of our concepts. Pure empiricism from the bottom up, where the world teaches us how to make sense of it from the beginning, can’t work for Kant; the mind must prepare data for it to be digestible. To avoid dogmatic
assumptions, he has given up Descartes and Leibniz’ reliance on God as the Great Coordinator in the Sky, the one who harmonizes world and mind so that they are attuned to each other before they touch.

Without the rationalists’ strategy of a third party coordinating mind and world with each other, or the empiricist solution of the world imprinting its structure on our passive minds, the only other alternative is for us to make the world thinkable in order to think it. We have to make the world we experience over in our own epistemological image, structuring it like our mind to make it experienceable. The two clocks that Leibniz’ God calibrated have come apart; they can only be brought back together by setting one clock to the time of the other without checking what time it really is, the Greenwich-Mean Time of reality. For Kant, this conclusion is inescapable. Any attempt to check to see if the world really is the way we think it is would require us to think it, like trying to see the inside of the refrigerator when the light is off—we never reach it as unthought. There is no getting out of our own heads.

But this is precisely Kant’s mistake, according to Hegel, Kant’s greatest successor and critic. If we really can’t get out of our heads, then what exactly is this outside we’re talking about? That outside too must be inside if we are discussing it intelligibly, even just to say that it exists and is unreachably outside. Kant’s subjective idealism turns into Hegel’s objective or absolute idealism when thought through all the way. Kant shouldn’t feel bad about this; according to Hegel, everyone turns into Hegel when thought through all the way. Kant says that we cannot help but use our concepts in thinking and talking about the world, and that keeps us from ever truly thinking or talking about the world in-itself. But then, Hegel responds, this world in-itself is something we are thinking of too. Reality-in-itself is, necessarily, in-itself-for-us; indeed, all in-itself’s can only be for-us by Kant’s own reasoning, so there is nothing we are cut off from by our thoughts for in thinking something we are connected to it. Our thoughts cannot achieve escape velocity from the orbit of our concepts and vocabularies to touch on something genuinely apart from them. Even just saying that it is separate pulls it back into the gravitational well of our minds. Wittgenstein was right: that which we cannot talk about, we must pass over in silence, despite the fact that he himself, like most, went on about it at some length.

Hegel of course does not keep silent about it either, but he doesn’t have to—that’s because the very meaning of reality changes if we think this through. Without the contrast of an in-itself, the qualification “for-us” loses its traditional
meaning. If we can’t use our concepts to refer to something radically apart from these concepts, then the distinction collapses and the contrasting terms lose the meaning they had when they were used to contrast with each other. Nietzsche says it best, as usual: “The true world—we have abolished. What world has remained? The apparent one perhaps? But no! With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one.” The true world begins as transcendent, becomes a fable, and then turns imminent. We are not left with an imminent world, though, since imminence itself conceptually requires the contrast with transcendence. The world we experience simply is the world, full stop.

This restores Parmenides’ Thinkability Restriction but now made coherent because we have gotten rid of its illicit unthinkable side. Hegel’s formulation of the idea is: the real is rational and the rational is real. This is not the joining of thought and reality like two halves of a locket, so much as realizing that what we thought was one-half is actually the whole, so no matching is needed or even possible. Others share a similar view. Early Heidegger makes the same move when he argues that “only as phenomenology, is ontology possible” because “our investigation... asks about Being itself in so far as Being enters into the intelligibility of Dasein.” Merleau-Ponty makes the point nicely when he says, “we must not, therefore, wonder whether we really perceive a world, we must instead say: the world is what we perceive.” I call this The Principle of Phenomenological Ontology. The idea is that for us to say anything at all about something, we must have some access to it. This is why Heidegger identifies beings with phenomena, that which comes into the clearing or our awareness. This is also why, at the outset of *Being and Time*, the question of being immediately becomes the question of our understanding of being, for what else can we inquire into?

Let’s pause a moment to see where we have gotten. Parmenides started things off by trying to limit thinking to that which is, in what I called the Thinkability Restriction. This Restriction however violated itself by thinking about what lay beyond it, just to say that it was off-limits. Kant then gave us The Principle of Anthropomorphic Humility: the truism that we can only think with our own thoughts, which means that whatever we think about bears their stamp, and so is really the world as it is for-us, not the world in-itself. That—we can never know, because the only way we could ever know it is with these all-too-human thoughts, which leave their prints on whatever they grasp. We cannot see the world unseen, or know the world apart from the conditions that enable us to know it. Hegel followed this line of thought out until it became The Principle of Phenomenological Ontology. This applies Kant’s Principle even to that which
supposedly exceeds our thought, bringing the in-itself within the realm of thought and hence our ways of thinking, so that nothing can exceed it—not even nothing. This brings back Parmenides’ Thinkability Restriction but now without having to think something lying on the other side of the thinkable by forbidding it, because there is no other side. The world is entirely thinkable for the very good reason that the world simply is whatever is thinkable; that which is not comprehensible cannot be said to be for if it is incomprehensible, we don’t even know what we’re talking about when we say that it is not.

This represents an advance over Kant’s views by removing the contradiction involved in the Thinkability Restriction. But it also loses Kant’s Humility, an attribute rather lacking in Hegel, a philosopher who believes that his work brought humanity to the state of godhood, and himself before all others.

I admire Kant’s Humility and would like to preserve it. It’s an act of breath-taking hubris to say that the world must be cut to the measure of our minds, either with the rationalists that our thoughts line up with reality as they were made for each other, literally, or with Hegel that they encompass it exhaustively. On the other hand, the way Kant tried to accommodate this insight is deeply flawed, even self-contradictory. In positing a transcendent realm, he had to make use of immanent materials—our own transcendental concepts like substance, existence, arguably causality—thereby compromising its transcendence. It’s still us thinking about noumena, after all. Hegel is right to dismiss the notion of noumena, but the way he did it shrank the real to what is thinkable by us—what arrogance, what profligacy.

Moving forward would require taking these two ideas—Humility on the one hand and Phenomenology Ontology on the other—and performing what Hegel called an Aufhebung on them, that is, a combination of their best features that simultaneously prunes out their worst. As a matter of fact, I think that a powerful critic of both Kant and Hegel has given us just such a view, ironically a thinker with a personal antipathy for the very notion of Aufhebung: Kierkegaard.

Surely humility is one of the watch-words of Kierkegaard’s thought, outraged as he is by Hegel’s attempt to make humanity continuous with God. Kierkegaard resurrects in the ethical realm what Kant insisted on in his epistemology: that we don’t know everything, that we are limited to our concepts—here our understanding of good and evil—but that our line is surely too short to fathom the depths of the real. In Fear and Trembling, God asks of Abraham something that cannot be justified, something that by our best understanding can only be
considered evil. What good could possibly come of the death of this child promised for so long, the child of such promise who is to bring forth a nation? And if God wants him, why such cruelty in making the child’s own father, His faithful servant, do it? Even if it is a test and no murder takes place, we cannot skip to the end of the story, for Abraham could not. We are, like him, stuck in time; we must move through events sequentially, and decide without knowing the outcome.

When Abraham hears the command, he faces a decision: on the one hand, he can judge God by his own morality—this is what Kant tells us we must do. On Kant’s picture, we can only recognize what our minds are prepared to see, the single set of categories our mind is born open to, and this applies to morality and religion just as much as it does to science. We come into this world with morality hardwired into our reason, and Kant argues that if we encounter what we think might be God, we must match this apparent apparition against our pre-existing notion to see if He measures up to our standards: “Even the Holy One of the Gospel must be compared with our idea of moral perfection before He is recognized as such.” If the Lord of all creation fails the categorical imperative, then a rational being is obligated to disobey Him. Of course, by this measure, the being who commanded a father to murder his innocent son could not be God; if God isn’t a Kantian, He cannot be God.

This is bound up with the very meaning of autonomy—if I take the law from anywhere else, no matter the authority and no matter the content of the law, I have compromised myself and my actions. I must practice, as the title of one of his works has it, Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone, and that means within the limits of my reason and that means my self. Just as with science, we can only experience what we are transcendentally prepared to experience, learn what we already know—which of course, is not really learning. Even God has nothing to teach Kant about right and wrong. The humility I praised in Kant’s epistemology is wholly absent from his ethics. In his ethics, Kant has recreated a Leibnizian metaphysics where we are windowless; nothing from the outside may intrude.

Kierkegaard says, “for he who loves God without faith reflects on himself, while the person who loves God reflects on God.” We could extend this and say that he who loves God without faith, within the limits of reason alone, autonomously, loves a reflection of himself, for that is all he can ever encounter—reflections of himself, the same as we encounter in science. One who is unable to acknowledge even the possibility of goods that transcend our comprehension of the good cannot genuinely worship God, for to worship only a God that you recognize
according to your standards is no more than worshipping oneself. It is not to acknowledge any higher authority, which of course an ethics based on autonomy cannot. “The whole of human existence is in that case entirely self-enclosed, as a sphere,” Kierkegaard writes, “and the ethical is at once the limit and completion. God becomes an invisible, vanishing point, an impotent thought.” “But if one cannot say more one says in effect that really I have no duty to God. The duty becomes duty to God by being referred to God, but I do not enter into relation with God in the duty.”

What would it mean to actually enter into a relation with God? What does God mean? To ask the question that both Kant and Hegel try to disqualify, in different ways, what is the transcendent? Well, to state the obvious, it is that which transcends and, by transcending, shows that which is ours to be merely ours, contra Kant’s attempts to close off speculation about what exceeds our access and Hegel’s attempt to make “ours” into “all there is.” Abraham is commanded to do something that violates ethics—to murder an innocent. Does this violate ethics, or might it transcend ethics? Might it expose our understanding of good and evil as just that—our understanding—to which there may be others, than which there may be better but—and this is important—better in ways that we cannot comprehend or appreciate. Surely this possibility, blocked off in principle by Kant and Hegel, is at least part of what we might mean by encountering God, as John Caputo has argued. We do not praise Abraham for his willingness to do a heinous act, but for his sense of the limits of his own sense of right and wrong, his understanding that all of his understanding is underwritten only by an abyss of 70,000 fathoms of water.

If God could explain His reasons, that would imply that He owes us an explanation, but also that He can explain his reasoning to us, that we share a common form of reasoning, that, as Kant insists, understanding is so universal that it even spans the gap between finite and infinite. But if this is so, then there is no transcendence, and our reasoning reaches as far as far goes, and God is simply a very smart, very powerful Prussian gentleman in the sky. And indeed Kant does at times describe humanity “as analogous to the divinity.” When we obey the moral law out of respect and strip away all influence of inclinations, what separates us from the holy will, at least for the span of that decision? Kierkegaard, however, wants to preserve the godness of God, His transcendence, His strangeness, which simultaneously preserves the finitude of ourselves. “God’s love is for me,” he says, “incommensurable with the whole of reality.... In the temporal world God and I cannot talk together, we have no common language.” Or, as Derrida puts it in his
book on Kierkegaard,

    God doesn’t give his reasons…. Otherwise he wouldn’t be God, we wouldn’t be dealing with the Other as God or with God as wholly other. If the other were to share his reasons with us by explaining them to us, if he were to speak to us all the time without any secrets, he wouldn’t be the other.”

If encounters with the divine are at times sharp, if they burn us, if they are perhaps indistinguishable from the demonic—well, why wouldn’t we expect touching the infinite to hurt and confound? God may be loving and benevolent in His own way, but if He is also transcendent and mysterious, then we may not always find his benevolence gentle or his love recognizable.

When God calls to Abraham, Abraham does not employ his own categories to see if this voice matches his previous notions of what God and goodness must be, as Kant insists all rational autonomous beings must do; he answers “Here I am,” and he does what is asked of him. When Isaac calls to his father to ask him what they are doing, he answers “Here I am.” When the angel of the Lord calls to Abraham to stay his hand, he answers “Here I am.” When the angel of the Lord calls to Abraham to stay his hand, he answers “Here I am.” This extraordinary thrice repeated phrase represents Abraham’s willingness to answer his God’s call without setting down conditions or setting up transcendental preparations. He doesn’t hesitate to respond to the child he is about to burn or the God who commands such a horror. What are we to make of this?

In one way, it’s horrible, an abdication of responsibility, of the Enlightenment command to think for yourself, and Kierkegaard doesn’t shy away from this aspect. Abraham stifles his own reason, obeying without determining whether the command is just or not. But what more powerful demonstration of Humility can there be? Abraham is not simply silencing his reason, but submitting it to something greater, to a force who knows more about goodness than he ever can. This is impossible on Kant’s account, which renders God and humanity as commensurable on ethics as Hegel does on everything. God cannot know more about morality than we do for there is no more to it than what our reason can discover through its own efforts, for Kant’s ethics has jettisoned the Humility that his epistemology worked so hard to establish.

Kierkegaard rehabilitates Abraham’s Humility. Acknowledging God’s radical transcendence means accepting our lack of ethical omniscience, our ability and need to learn. Abraham’s “Here I am” is his opening himself up to what lies beyond his own understanding, what he can’t understand without something
outside himself breaking in and enabling him to think something genuinely new. This is how Kierkegaard understands the Incarnation, in contrast to Kant’s view of it as essentially unnecessary, and Hegel’s interpretation as an allegory of humanity’s rising to godhood: God had to break into time and human nature to change their course in order to allow something new to occur—salvation. For God to become human, bodily, temporal so stretches and distends these forms that they can never resume their former shapes; they now accommodate new contents, to which we must be receptive. Like Kant, the epistemological midwife Socrates gives us conscious possession of what we had without realizing it, thereby helping us become who we already are; Christ, on the other hand, lets us become “a new person,”5 enabling us to become what we are not and could not have been beforehand. “Here we see the need for a new category for understanding Abraham”,6 namely, the new category of new categories. God’s miraculous, incomprehensible entrance into time, space, and womb would hardly have been warranted were it just to tell us something we already knew or could learn on our own. In contrast to Kant, Kierkegaard’s religion is only justified beyond the limits of reason alone. This is the divine breaking into, and thus breaking us out of, the closed circle of Platonic recollection or Kantian concepts. This is the opening up of the transcendental by and to the transcendent.

This view, which I am calling Transgressive Realism, combines the best of Kant and Hegel, as an Aufhebung should. With Kant, we insist on our finitude, the smallness of our reach before the vast ocean of the real; with Hegel, we accept the further consequence of finitude that we cannot speak of what is completely beyond us with no possibility of access. On my reconstruction, Kierkegaard accepts Hegel’s Phenomenological Ontology which restricts us to what we encounter, but he combines this with a version of Kant’s Humility, so that what we encounter can transcend and transgress our best understanding. Transgressive Realism preserves a transcendent against Hegel’s absorption of all reality into rationality. But unlike Kant’s noumenon, this beyond makes contact with us, thus accommodating Hegel’s Phenomenological Ontology. The Beyond makes contact not through our concepts but by violating them, making them tremble and us fear. Indeed, our most vivid encounters are precisely when our preconceptions are shattered by recalcitrant, shocking experiences, when we run across things we just don’t know understand. And this is a realism because the world’s independence is vividly demonstrated by the radical alienness of what we experience. As Levinas, a thinker not particularly known for his taste for ontology, writes, “the idea of being does not therefore suffice to sustain the claim of realism, if realism is equivalent to affirming an alterity outside the Same. Only the idea of the infinite renders
realism possible.” What does he mean by the infinite?

“The idea of the infinite consists precisely and paradoxically in thinking more than what I thought [Transgression] while nevertheless conserving it in its excessive relation to thought [Phenomenological Ontology]. The idea of the infinite consists in grasping the ungraspable [Phenomenological Ontology] while nevertheless guaranteeing its status as ungraspable [Transgression].”

So what exactly does it mean to say that we experience the impossible, think the unthinkable, once we strip away the flashy rhetoric? I am an American, not a French thinker, so I tend to ask that slightly bothersome question—call it my pragmatist heritage. As I understand it, it means to think about things that have no place in our present understanding, ideas that don’t fit any concept in our intellectual arsenal, that don’t play by the rules of the language-games we’re now playing. They aren’t so much false as incommensurable—they’d have to make sense to be false, as Foucault argues. Now such ideas can be Relatively Unthinkable, which means that they don’t make sense by the standards we presently accept but we can construct a new system of thoughts around them with rules which render them sensible; presently unthinkable, but thinkable according to a future way of thinking.

Or they can be Absolutely Unthinkable. That would mean that they would continue to resist all attempts to tame or contextualize them, such that no matter how we frame them or what system we build around them, they just don’t make sense. Obviously, we can never know whether a particular idea is Relatively or Absolutely Unthinkable until we try to think it—seriously endeavor to understand it by constructing a conceptual edifice around it to accommodate its pointy angles. Picasso’s painting made aesthetic sense once we started getting cubism and African art. Lorentz’s ridiculously ad hoc contraction of space and time became scientifically respectable and true within Relativity Theory. Derrida’s bizarre writings became thinkable, teachable, the subject of entire conferences once a theory of deconstruction let us see why he was paying attention to such strange details of writings. This is why Nietzsche’s experimentalism is so important; I think this is why Deleuze says that the job of philosophy is to invent new concepts. First someone creates an unthinkable, then others weave a context that lets us think it. Then, when the idea, once shocking, has been tamed, when it takes its place in museums or university press catalogs, and we, once shocked, now sated, can gaze upon the understood with satisfaction and perhaps just a touch of smugness—we
seek out the next unthinkable.

And what of the Absolutely Unthinkable ideas? The ones that no matter what we do, will not go quietly into any system? Well, for many recent continental thinkers, those are the most precious of all. It is strange for a discipline devoted to thinking, but the more I have looked, the more I have struck me how enamored continental philosophers have been of that which we cannot think. For this is what opens us up to that which transcends us—to reality, to others, to the new, and to our own future selves. Once again, Kierkegaard: “this, then, is the ultimate paradox of thought: to want to discover something that thought itself cannot think.”

I have a mild philosophical condition: when I focus on a topic, I start seeing it everywhere. I wrote my first book on anti-realism, and while I wrote it, I saw it wherever I looked. The book’s subtitle could have been “Look! Everyone’s an Anti-Realist!” When I examined the connections between Heidegger and Wittgenstein for my third book, they just kept multiplying. And now that I’m writing about Transgressive Realism, once again it has become ubiquitous before my eyes. It’s the absurd that the existentialists see in life—the faith that Kierkegaard claims “is and remains in all eternity a paradox, inaccessible to thought”; the uncanny revealed by anxiety in *Being and Time*, the reason why Meurseault shot the Arab, why Gregor Samsa awoke from uneasy dreams as a giant insect and why Josef K was on trial, the way the tramps wait for Godot—they don’t know who he is, even Beckett didn’t know that, or why they should wait for him or whether he will come or what might happen if he shows up, and yet they wait, day after day. It’s Heidegger’s earth which “appears openly cleared as itself only when it is perceived and preserved as that which is essentially undisclosable,” Being’s mysterious sendings. It is being itself: “Being offers us no ground and no basis—as beings do—to which we can turn, on which we can build, and to which we can cling. Being is the rejection of the role of such grounding; it renounces all ground, is abyssal [ab-gründig].” It’s in the face of the other for Levinas that violates and commands us from on high. It’s in God for Marion, great works of art for Gadamer and Lyotard. It’s in Foucault’s excavations of past systems of thought which shattered... all the familiar landmarks of my thought—our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography—breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things.... The thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that... is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark
impossibility of thinking \textit{that}.\textsuperscript{23}

It’s all over the place in Derrida: in the gift that disrupts the economy, the future that breaks with the present, hospitality that welcomes the unknowable, absolute forgiveness that forgives the unforgivable. In general, he says, “the interest of deconstruction, of such force and desire as it may have, is a certain experience of the impossible.”\textsuperscript{24}

I started out this paper looking for philosophy’s other, what is hidden from it, what it must ignore, and what I have come to find, to my surprise, is that this topic is in many ways at its very heart. Continental philosophy, I put it to you, has been oriented towards that which it cannot think, that which is inaccessible to reason and concepts, because it brings us face to face with our finitude. Philosophy was for so long made as if for gods; now the task that falls to us is to make a philosophy for mortals, one that reminds us of how little we grasp while at the same time spurring us on to reach for more, to think new, heretofore unthinkable thoughts which change the very way we think. I don’t know about you, but that’s the experience that drew me to philosophy in the first place, as a freshman, in my first semester in college, in an enormous Intro to Philosophy class, reading, ironically enough, \textit{Fear and Trembling}. As you can see, I’ve never fully recovered from the shock.

Why is this topic so prevalent? Perhaps because of our attitude towards time and history, an attitude which almost defines Continental philosophy. Heidegger once said that in the ponderous title of his first book, \textit{Being and Time}, bookended by two such weighty words, the really tough one was “and.” That’s because for millennia, philosophers had been writing in an “or” instead: being and time were considered mutually exclusive. Either temporality, change, instability, and novelty, \textit{or} genuine reality, but not both. The really real is that which does not change, and knowledge sought the eternal, the stable, that which you can find and fix once and for all and you never have to revisit or change your mind about. Hegel recognized the importance of history, but he couldn’t accept history in all its unruly, unbound historicity. He had to force it into a controlled, fully formed circle that allowed in no absolute novelty. Yes there are new phases, but each of these emerges logically from the previous one, all of which are contained in embryo in the very beginning. This is time defanged, domesticated, bent back upon itself in a well-behaved infinity. The Transgressive Realists free time, allowing the wild thoughts that break in upon us in ways we could never have anticipated or prepared for. That is what it means to be in time. That is what it means to be finite, to give up
control, foundations, to relinquish the attempt to know things once and for all, to control the future, so that no one, not even yourself tomorrow, will revisit your conclusions. As Kierkegaard says in Fear and Trembling: “temporality, finitude is what it all turns on”\textsuperscript{25}

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NOTES

1. Here is how John Richardson, author of a highly respected three volume biography of Picasso, describes the work: “Picasso was out to shock, if need be appall. Hence the jarringly discordant fright-masks he contrived for the two right-hand heads. Familiarity has inured us to the horror that these dog-faced demoiselles caused when they were first unveiled, almost a century ago. It was as if Picasso had unleashed a new race of gorgons on the world…. His Demoiselles was an exorcism of more than private demons; it was also an exorcism of traditional concepts of ‘ideal beauty.’ The fright-masks constitute an assault as much on ‘beauty’ as on women.” He continues, “some scholars see these monstrous faces as embodying Picasso’s fear of syphilis” [John Richardson, A Life of Picasso: The Cubist Rebel, 1907-1916. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 32]. André Derain, an avant-garde painter and follower of both Matisse and Picasso, who was in fact the one who introduced Picasso to the African art exhibit that partially inspired the work, was so revolted by the painting when he saw it that he told one of their circle that, “painting of this sort was an impasse at the end of which lay only suicide; that one fine morning we would find Picasso hanged behind his large canvas.” Arthur I. Miller, Einstein, Picasso: Space, Time, and the Beauty That Causes Havoc. (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 124.


5. Rejecting the notion of an Aufhebung is part of the significance of the title of his first book, Either/Or, which insists on unbridgeable choices that inevitably leave essential things behind. Heidegger picked up this idea in what he calls nullity and guilt (Heidegger, Being and Time, 331/285).


7. Kant in fact concludes that Abraham must have “misheard” the command. In Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone, a title that gives the book away, he states that, “though it does indeed sound dangerous, it is in no way reprehensible to say that every man creates a God for himself, nay, must make himself such a God … For in whatever manner a being has been made known to him by another and described as God, yea, even if such a being had appeared to him (if this is possible), he must first of all compare this representation with his ideal in order to judge whether he is entitled to regard it and to honor it as a divinity. Hence there can be no religion springing from revelation alone” Immanuel Kant, Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone. Trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), 157n. See also Kant, Religion, 143. Extraordinarily, as an example of a possible revelation that fails our own moral test and thus cannot be of genuinely divine origin, Kant names the possibility of “a father ordered to kill his son who is, so far as he knows, perfectly innocent,” later even pointing to “the command delivered to Abraham to slaughter his own son like a sheep,” as an example of someone who must have misheard God’s command (Kant, Religion, 82, 175). “We… shall believe ourselves to be acting in conformity with the divine will in so far only as we hold sacred the moral law which reason teaches us from the nature of the actions themselves … Moral theology is thus of immanent use only… by warning us against the fanaticism, and indeed the impiety, of abandoning the guidance of a morally legislative reason in the right conduct of our lives, in order to derive guidance directly from the idea of the Supreme Being” Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason. Trans. Norman Kemp Smith. (New York: St. Martin’s, 1965), A819/B847.

8. “We may not, therefore, in reversal of such procedure, regard them [moral laws] as accidental and as derived from the mere will of the Ruler, especially as we have no conception of such a will, except as formed in accordance with these laws. So far, then, as practical reason has the right to
serve as our guide, we shall not look upon actions as obligatory because they are the commands of God, but shall regard them as divine commands because we have an inward obligation to them” (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* A818-19/B846-7).


14. “So let us either forget all about Abraham or learn how to be horrified at the monstrous paradox which is the significance of his life” (Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 81).


18. *ibid.*, 19; bracketed remarks added.


At first Husserl conceived phenomenology as descriptive psychology and then as transcendental philosophy. With the second conception, announced publicly in his lectures of 1907, phenomenology was presented as co-ordinate with what he often called “reduction” or even “the reduction.” Whether there is just the one reduction or several, whether there is an order of them that must be respected (the usual sequence being phenomenological, transcendental and eidetic), how they hang together (if they do), and whether his understanding of reduction is circular, are pressing questions that emerge over the course of Husserl’s writing life. They are sometimes accompanied by skeptical questions whether some reductions—the inter-subjective, for instance—are no more than promissory notes, whether reduction presumes a sort of Cartesian dualism, and even whether phenomenology really needs reduction of any kind in the first place. In addition, one might inquire whether other styles of philosophizing, including philosophizing undertaken in earlier periods and in other cultures, perform reduction of some sort, even if it is not asterisked for attention in their vocabularies; and, further, one might ask if reduction occurs in other practices: contemplative prayer and meditation, the production of art, and the writing of theology, for instance.

All these are questions I have considered elsewhere, and I shall not discuss them in any detail in this paper. Instead, I shall approach reduction from behind, as it were, and ask a question that Husserl does not himself pose. What is irreducible?
That is: what, in Husserl’s philosophical world, allows no purchase for reduction? That question may be answered by close reference to his writings from *The Idea of Phenomenology* (1907) to *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1938), but the response it elicits is not simply exegetical: it concerns the scope, the direction, the nature, and indeed the proper sphere or spheres in which reduction might be performed. The question can certainly be answered, but the more interesting questions hide just behind it: What resists reduction almost completely, and why? In answering these questions I set aside reservations made by realist phenomenologists—Roman Ingarden, in particular—as to whether reduction, regarded as a methodological precaution for epistemological investigations, can have any purchase on ontology. I remain solely with Husserl here, although I note at the outset that answering the questions I have posed touches on the very possibility of phenomenology in the Husserlian style.

Reflection on Husserl’s insistence on the need for reduction has had five main phases. To begin with, there is considerable perplexity and even defiance with respect to the idea by members of the Göttingen Philosophical Society—Roman Ingarden and Hedwig Conrad-Martius, among others—for whom reduction marks a decisive reorientation of phenomenology. It is not a productive reorientation in their view, for it truncates the project of a thoroughgoing anti-psychologist realism, as started in the *Logical Investigations* (1900–01) and, worse (they think), it opens a slippery trail back to the subjective idealism of Fichte and the young Schelling. This first phase is doubtless the most important for Husserl himself, since it prompted him to clarify the direction, extent and nature of reduction, which, in turn, led him to devise increasingly exacting accounts of it. His lectures on the theory of reduction in 1923 and 1924 are exemplary in this regard. Yet at the same time those lectures were being delivered other reservations about reduction were perhaps already being pondered.

Could reduction be rethought so that phenomenology may be situated on firmer ground? The young Martin Heidegger perhaps believed it could when in the Summer of 1927 he said that, for him, reduction was a leading back from beings to being; but we need to take this re-formulation with a pinch of salt, for while Heidegger felt it essential to master Husserlian phenomenology he had little interest in the transcendental. It is not even right to see the “Da” of “Dasein” marking place as a condition for human being. For Heidegger, it indicates “the openness where beings can be present for the human being, and the human being also for himself” and of course Heidegger does not appeal in the slightest to mental conditions.
His formulation of reduction is perhaps more prudential than methodological. What chiefly interests the Heidegger of *Sein und Zeit* (1927) and thereabouts is a way out of Cartesianism and Neo-Kantianism, and any hint of methodological primacy of a mental operation resulting in a pure philosophical gaze brings less his suspicion than his rejection. He is not invested in an epistemic distinction between subject and object, and is certainly no advocate of θεωρία as a model of human interaction with the world. His interest is in *In-der-Welt-sein*, and θεωρεῖν features only in terms of looking out on the world. “Reduction,” as the young Heidegger practices it, turns not on mental abstention from positing in order to survey the processes of constitution as much as Stimmung: a mood “comes over” one, and leads one from beings to being. Later, in his own way, he will rethink reduction more thoroughly, as a “step back” [Schritt-zurück] from the ontic to the ontological or as a meditation [Besinnung] into the truth of beyng, das Seyn rather than das Sein des Seinden. And finally, he will speak of releasement rather than reduction.

Perhaps the most disturbing reformulation of reduction, however, comes from Eugen Fink in his *Sixth Cartesian Meditation* (1932); and some of its force derives precisely from his careful attention to *Being and Time* (1927) and to the young Heidegger’s lectures, which he began hearing in 1928. Fink was especially taken by Heidegger’s reflections on Befindlichkeit. The “natural attitude,” for Fink, passes from a mode of mental ἄσκησις to Weltbefangenheit, a captivation of, by and for the world. Fink’s animating question is “not only how phenomenologizing comes about as the performance of the reduction but why it takes place at all.” Although Fink saw himself as pursuing a phenomenology of reduction, and so performing phenomenology to the second degree, the question is in truth more classically philosophical than phenomenological. The “how” is followed by a “why.” There is always a Hegel behind Husserl in the *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*, for Fink believed that epistemological idealism anticipates the transcendental idealism of phenomenology, and indeed he figures his study as “an anticipatory look at a meontic philosophy of absolute spirit.” In any case, his basic question raises the uneasy issue of whether reduction, as Husserl practices it, presumes itself, and whether the philosopher is therefore guilty of circular reasoning.
To forestall this criticism, Fink attempts to refigure reduction; and he does so with
great finesse. He distinguishes the three “I”s involved in reduction: the human
“I,” which continues to believe in the world as pre-given, the transcendental-
constituting “I,” which allows the constitution of the world to be viewed, and
the “I” of the phenomenological onlooker, who “has never lived in belief in the
world to begin with,” and who performs “the universal epoche” (42). As Fink
says later, “it is not properly man who performs the reduction” (121); and the
very performance of reduction signifies “the un-humanizing of man” (120). At
risk in this understanding of reduction is whether phenomenology opens higher
human possibilities, as Husserl believed it does, or whether it quietly affirms a
philosophical interpretation of Gnosticism, the belief in an uncreated life hidden
beneath created consciousness. A philosophical Gnosticism, as endorsed by Fink,
would be the belief in a purely transcendental consciousness behind an empirical
one, whereas Husserl affirms merely a transcendental aspect to an empirical
consciousness. That said, it must be acknowledged that Fink’s radical proposal
prompted some of Husserl’s most clarifying comments on ἐποχή and reduction.
In particular, it is salutary to hear that the phenomenological onlooker is not
totally distinct from the empirical “I” or the constituting “I” but is gradually
“freed” by the actions of an ἐποχή and reduction.

Doubtless influenced by his conversations with Fink at Louvain in 1939, Maurice
Merleau-Ponty sought to refigure reduction; but he certainly did not adopt Fink’s
way of doing so, and, we might say, held back from experiencing “the awful
tremor” of fully passing through it. Reduction, for him, was to be partial so
that phenomenology did not leak into the broad river of modern idealism, the
base flow of which begins with Kant. Paul Ricoeur and Jacques Derrida followed
his lead, though in their own ways and to different ends. Derrida, in particular,
drew deeply from Fink, and the German’s appeal to the pre-existent constitution
[“vor-seienden” Konstitution] of the phenomenological observer was cleansed of
associations with epistemological idealism and combined with Jean Hyppolite’s
suggestion that Husserlian consciousness might very well be understood as “a
subjectless transcendental field.” The younger Frenchman took both ideas and
put them in a new setting. The role of pre-existent constitution is detached from
consciousness and even from structure, as urged in structural linguistics, and
becomes la différence. There is no deconstruction without reduction, which is not
to say that reduction appears as a theme in deconstruction. Indeed, unless one
looks very closely it does not appear to be marked at all.
More generally, we might say that in French philosophy after the war there was always something that would resist bringing phenomena back to the pure immanence of absolute consciousness: a commitment to Gestalt psychology, an endorsement of hermeneutics, or an insistence on material inscription. All were motivated by a fear that thoroughgoing reduction of a mentalist kind, especially transcendental reduction, would animate an idealism that was better kept locked in the past of Königsberg, Jena or Berlin, or, closer to home, in uneasy memories of lectures by Léon Brunschvicg. Only with some philosophers associated with the “new phenomenology” has reduction been endorsed as something that needs to be undertaken as thoroughly as possible. (I emphasize *some*, not all: one does not look for reduction in Michel Henry or, among our contemporaries, in Jean-Louis Chrétien or Claude Romano.) Jean-Luc Marion, casting Heidegger’s prudential reformulation as a second reduction, proposes a “third reduction” that itself derives from Heidegger’s reflections on attunement in his 1928 lectures; and in the end reduction will lead us past being and past beyng to givenness [*Gegebenheit*].

Marion’s reduction is as radical as Fink’s, although it goes in precisely the opposite direction; rather than seek a transcendental consciousness distinct from its empirical counterpart, he looks to the self-giving of the phenomenon itself. Or, if you like, the two reductions contest Husserl’s view that phenomenality seems to be hybrid, divided between transcendental consciousness and the phenomenon, and distribute it in extreme ways: the one ascribes it to a transcendental consciousness distinct from empirical consciousness, and the other to the phenomenon itself. Not all contemporary revisions of reduction, however radical, go quite so far: indeed, one of them shows that rather than phenomenology having no limits at all it encounters a limit precisely by performing a new reduction. Such is Jean-Yves Lacoste’s “liturgical reduction,” which seeks to show that phenomenology cannot get to the bottom of what we mean by “human,” especially not if we understand the human state of living *coram deo* to be an essential determinant of being human.

Of course, it may well be doubted if Husserl, even after 1907, thought that all he did as a philosopher might properly be classed as “phenomenology.” Anyone who reads his collected writings will come across extended passages of epistemology, ethics, logic, and ontology. To be sure, these reflections on what we might call general philosophy are not simply contributions to it; they are inflected towards phenomenology. Husserl’s logic, for instance, is forever seeking transcendental grounds, and phenomenology in its genetic strain makes itself more and more felt, and is followed, finally, by generative phenomenology as sketched in the
That said, no one could plausibly interpret Husserl’s speculations on the all-encompassing monad, for example, as anything other than speculative metaphysics, even metaphysics prompted by theological ambitions. Certainly anything that must be construed to be “irreducible” must belong to general philosophy, if it is to belong to philosophy at all, and not phenomenology. But what does Husserl acknowledge as irreducible?

There are just three candidates for being irreducible —absolute consciousness, God, and natural language—although only the first attracts Husserl’s sustained interest because it is essential for the project of phenomenology. Reduction, we are told in *The Idea of Phenomenology* (1907), means “the exclusion of the transcendent as such as something to be accepted as existent, i.e., everything that is not evident givenness in its true sense, that is not absolutely given to pure ‘seeing’” (7). Indeed, “Our phenomenological sphere, the sphere of absolute clarity, of immanence in the true sense, reaches no farther than self-givenness reaches” (10). Now by the time we reach *Ideas I* (1913) we find a full account of reductions (§§ 56-62), which Husserl prepares for in his investigation of consciousness. In § 42, for instance, we find him placing an emphasis less on “evident givenness” and “self-givenness” than on two kinds of being, consciousness and reality, which are marked by “an essentially fundamental difference between the corresponding kind of givenness” (90). Both mental processes and spatio-temporal objects are subject to intentionality. Yet only the former can be perceived immanently, without adumbration, and so are entirely evident in their givenness. Spatio-temporal objects are transcendent, on the other hand, and their mode of givenness is co-ordinate with adumbration: they are given as oriented with respect to transcendental consciousness in one way or another, and consequently they can be oriented in many other ways, each of which has to be taken into account in an exercise of pure “seeing.” Physical objects are “merely phenomenal” in their being, Husserl insists in § 44, while a mental process is immanent and therefore absolute. An adequate grasp of it does not call for infinite reflection.

Although phenomenological reduction leads a transcendent object back to the immanence of consciousness, it cannot change the status of the object’s being: it remains “real” rather than “absolute.” Nowhere can we see this more clearly than in *Ideas I* § 49 when Husserl adapts a well-known principle set out by Descartes. Husserl is seeking to show that ἐποχή and reduction combine to yield “the annihilation of the world” and that what remains is “absolute consciousness.”
distinguishes absolute being from real being in two short italicized paragraphs:

*Immanent* being is therefore indubitably absolute being in the sense that by essential necessity immanent*al* being nulla “re” indiget ad existendum.

*In contradistinction*, the world of transcendent “res” is entirely referred to consciousness and, more particularly, not to some logically conceived consciousness but to actual consciousness. (110)

Descartes writes in the *Principia Philosophiae* (1644), “Per substantiam nihil aliud intelligere possumus, quam rem quae ita existit, ut nulla alia re indigeat ad existendum” [By substance we can understand something which exists so that it does not require something else in order to exist].26 Absolute being is nothing like Cartesian substance—such is the point of Husserl’s scare quotes around “re” and “res”—apart from the claim that it subsists entirely in itself, while real being, which is transcendent, depends wholly on absolute being. Unless one states this distinction with great care, and glosses “depends” in an appropriate manner, it will appear to commit its author to subjective idealism. So it is important to see that the distinction turns on phenomenality, not existence. Without absolute being, no entity can manifest itself; and, by the same token, absolute being requires entities in order to lay claim to being, which consists entirely in its power to render things manifest.

Once this distinction is firmly established it makes no sense at all to suggest that consciousness—at least in its constitutive role—could be reduced. It is irreducible precisely in that it is the condition of possibility for transcendent entities to be reduced to pure immanence. One cannot reach this level of clarity, however, without encountering an oddity. Phenomenality, for Husserl, seems to enjoy what I have already called a hybrid state; it is shared between an entity (insofar as it can be a phenomenon) and what allows it to be led back to immanence. Yet this sharing, if it is indeed that, is not at all equal. As Husserl puts it, “phenomenality, as a characteristic that specifically *belongs to appearing and to the thing that appears*, would, if understood in the broadened sense of the term, be the fundamental characteristic of the mental” [my emphasis].27 I take it that the term in question is “mental” and that the broadening is the addition of the transcendental aspect of consciousness to empirical consciousness. To say that phenomenality is the “fundamental characteristic of the mental” is to distance oneself from Brentano’s
well-known remark about intentionality being the mark of the mental; and it is also to step back from any claim about the primacy of intentionality, even in Husserl’s sense. By the same token, it is not to endorse intuition as basic to phenomenology. Rather, transcendental consciousness is characterized, first and foremost, by way of phenomenality. The ability of an entity to manifest itself is, counter-intuitively, assigned primarily to that to which it manifests itself.

The phenomenon’s capacity to manifest itself, as Husserl understands it, is therefore alienated from itself. This would be the case in all respects: perception, to be sure, but also anticipation, recollection, imagination, and so on. Phenomenality would be in the phenomenon, we might say, but only if we are careful to specify its mode of inherence: as a term “in” a relationship, and one that has been initiated by transcendental consciousness. The “essence of a phenomenon” is, it seems, to be found by way of an asymmetric relation of an intending consciousness with what has become a phenomenon. A clarification is immediately required, for the essence in question is not the noema, the intentional content of an experience, but the capacity that underlines the possibility of noetic-noematic correlation and that, if we follow Husserl to the letter, seems to be shared between the two, though only because of the ability of absolute being to capture real being through the structure of intentionality and the power of acts of intuition.

At this point a number of fundamental problems begin to impinge on the inquiry. I have already noted that one can eliminate some of these problems by declining to regard phenomenality as a relation. If we do that, we find Michel Henry on one side of a divide: phenomenality is primary, definitive of “life” itself. And we see Marion on the other side: phenomenality belongs by right to the phenomenon, and so intentional horizons are vulnerable to being breached, and a new class of phenomena, those saturated by intuition, comes into view. But providing a history of philosophy never serves well as a solution to philosophical problems; it simply generates problems of its own. In the case of this division there would be two main difficulties. With Henry there is the problem of establishing that the intentional actually derives from the non-intentional and, if it does, showing in what way or ways a consideration of the non-intentional can be of sustaining interest for a subject. And with Marion the quandary is in finding that the cost of enjoying saturation to the first or second degree is accepting the stripped down version of the self that is called l’adonné, the one born to the gift. It may well be that intuition rather than intentionality is the driving force of phenomenology as it was conceived, yet intuitions for Husserl are acts that rely on consciousness in order
to be performed; and, at first, l’adonné seems strangely bereft of consciousness, always an infant, as it were. Of course, an account of adult consciousness can be given, but it requires more of a finely grained genetic explanation than is readily found in Marion’s writings in and around Étant donné (1997).

Yet phenomenality, for Husserl, cannot be a relation between two terms that pre-exist it. For transcendental consciousness enables an entity to become a phenomenon. I think it would be a mistake to take Husserl overly literally and to assert a mental quality, phenomenality, which subtends intentionality and intuition. Phenomenality is indeed shared but not between phenomenon and consciousness; it is a name we can give to the combined operations of intentionality and intuition. The power of that combination is restricted to certain sorts of entity, namely those we can intuit and of which we can be conscious. We might say that some of these entities are amenable to reduction while, in principle, others do not require it in the first place. Let us consider the second case first. If we remain with Husserl, we have to say that mental processes are one with their phenomenality. To think a real number—say, 2—or to perform a basic arithmetical operation with regards to it (say $2 + 3 = 5$) is utterly to exhaust its phenomenality. There is nothing other than cognition at issue. Yet when I perceive, remember, anticipate or even imagine two pears, their phenomenality falls outside the immanence of consciousness, such that I am in principle required to embark on an infinite task of description, even though I may have very high levels of Evidenz at my disposal with respect to the pears if I can perceive them with more than one sense. The number 2, as I apprehend it in consciousness, does not need to be reduced; it does not give itself to me in any orientation with regard to consciousness at all. Yet the two pears make endless demands upon me because I can see them from different perspectives.

If Husserl tells us, time and again, about this, it is nonetheless to the painters, photographers, sculptors and poets that we must go for concrete testimony. Often when literature is at issue we are directed (and, first of all, by Henri Maldiney) to Francis Ponge, to elaborate texts such as “Le Verre d’Eau” or “Le Savon,” and with good reason. Here, though, I would like to cite Wallace Stevens’ poem, “Study of Two Pears”: 

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I
Opusculum paedagogum.
The pears are not viols,
Nudes or bottles.
They resemble nothing else.

II
They are yellow forms
Composed of curves
Bulging toward the base.
They are touched red.

III
They are not flat surfaces
Having curved outlines.
They are round
Tapering toward the top.

IV
In the way they are modelled
There are bits of blue.
A hard dry leaf hangs
From the stem.

V
The yellow glistens.
It glistens with various yellows,
Citrons, oranges and greens
Flowering over the skin.

VI
The shadows of the pears
Are blobs on the green cloth.
The pears are not seen
As the observer wills.
The poem is indeed a little lesson on how to see—color, shape, texture, surface sheen, and so on—and the first class we take with Husserl often consists of no more than this. We are to look at a phenomenon just as it appears and we can best do that by referring to exactly how it is intended and how it attracts our attention: “an Ego-ray, launched from the pure Ego, goes out toward the Object, and, as it were, counter-rays issue from the Object and come back to the Ego.” The “pure Ego,” note; we are not talking about ordinary acts of vision and certainly not solely about volition but about intentional acts, and hence of objects given just as intended.) As he says, each phenomenon addresses us, saying “Ich bin da!”; it “calls out to us,” saying, “There is still more to see here, turn me so you can see all my sides, let your gaze run through me, draw closer to me, open me up, divide me up; keep on looking me over again and again, turning me to see all sides. You will get to know me like this, all that I am, all my surface qualities, all my inner sensible qualities.” Stevens ends his poem after six stanzas; yet the great prose poem of phenomenology, even if restricted to two pears, would never end. (Long after they have rotted, one can reflect upon the noema of the pears.) In principle, reduction is infinite; transcendence can never fully be brought into immanence, for the intentional correlation between acts and their objects keeps shifting.

Once the distinction between absolute and real being is accepted, it is impossible even to conceive the idea of reducing transcendental consciousness. Not that this impossibility prevents one from fantasizing about such a thing. Maurice Blanchot does something like that in Thomas l’obscur (1941; 1950), although, to be sure, he has already adjusted the nature of consciousness. Thomas encounters “night itself,” and sees both its void and what enables this sight to occur. “Not only did this eye which saw nothing apprehend something, it apprehended the cause of its vision. It saw as object that which prevented it from seeing.” So far this is relatively straightforward, if metaphysically challenging: Thomas can see “night itself.” Yet the narrator continues, “Its own glance entered into it as an image, just when this glance seemed [était considéré] the death of all image.” So Thomas sees his own act of seeing. It does not occur by way of a reference to anything outside him (by way of a mirror or a darkened window, for instance), and indeed he is passive with respect to it. It is at that very moment, however, that the “obscure Thomas,” who is real only under the sign of death and who gives his name to the roman and récit, enters the living Thomas. That this obscure Thomas is taken to be rich in phenomenality is one of the disconcerting themes of the récit: as Thomas says, he enters “into absolute dispute” with himself (97). For Husserl, too, the phenomenality in play in transcendental consciousness cannot itself appear
unless, of course, one says (against Kant) that the cognition of a number, such as 2, is an appearance.

What strikes the reader of Blanchot’s powerful récit as a reverie, one that when interpreted along philosophical lines, much as one finds in his essays, seems incredible to anyone convinced by Husserl’s program of phenomenology. Yet Blanchot remains at the limit of phenomenology, and proposes an “infinite reduction,” one that would allow the approach of the Outside.35 Husserl himself also considers an obscure companion deep within the self. This happens in his acknowledgment of God, and it is introduced in Ideas I § 51, seven paragraphs before the deity is formally excluded from phenomenology in § 58:

since a worldly God is evidently impossible and since, on the other hand, the immanence of God in absolute consciousness cannot be taken as immanence in the sense of being as a mental process (which would be no less counter-sensical), there must be, therefore, within the absolute stream of consciousness and its infinities, modes in which transcendencies are made known other than the constituting of physical realities as unities of harmonious appearances; and ultimately there would also have to be intuitional manifestations to which a theoretical thinking might conform, so that, by following them rationally, it might make intelligible the unitary rule of the supposed theological principle. (116-17)

The first thing to consider here is what Husserl means by “God.” We remember his discussion of pagan deities in the fifth of the Logical Investigations: “If I have an idea of the god Jupiter, this god is my presented object, he is ‘immanently present’ in my act, he has ‘mental inexistence’ in the latter, or whatever expression we may use to disguise our true meaning.” Yet, as Husserl makes very plain, “the god Jupiter naturally will not be found” in my intentional experience, for he “is in truth not really immanent or mental” and “does not exist at all.”36 By the same token, Husserl is not thinking of the Judeo-Christian deity, at least not of any personal God, and he has no recourse to Scripture or any testimony as regards positive revelation of any sort. Rather, God is for him a monad, “all-consciousness.”37

Absolute consciousness is irreducible because of its thoroughgoing immanence. The Judeo-Christian God as ecclesiastically conceived would be irreducible, for Husserl, because of the deity’s radical transcendence of individual consciousness.
I can attend to the sight of a jet in the air, the sound of a sonata, the taste of a ripe mango, the smell of Cavendish pipe tobacco, and the touch of a cat as she rubs herself against my leg first thing in the morning; but no matter how long or how intently I direct my gaze to the Judeo-Christian God, whether I regard him as ontic, ontological, as event or person, I cannot lead him back to the immanence of transcendental consciousness. I must wait for a theophany, revelation, “mystical experience,” or look to inner dwelling, since neither intentionality nor intuition seems to be of any help to me. Yet it does not follow from the nature of the divine transcendence that God does not manifest himself. The Judeo-Christian God is above and beyond genus, as Lateran IV says (Denz. 432). There is no contrast between Creation and God, for his otherness exceeds any distinction we might draw between “same” and “other.” There is therefore no contradiction for him in transcending Creation and in being immanent in it. So God can manifest himself in terms of absolute being, not a mental process (which would render human beings divine) but in quite other ways. There would be intuitions of the divine always and already in absolute being, and these acts would have to be recognized before one could engage in theoretical thinking about them. That is, Judeo-Christian theology would turn on an acknowledgement of God as irreducible in his radical transcendence but not in his radical immanence, and a doctrine of God would have to disentangle the absolute character of immanent being from the absolute character of divine being. The same would be true, in quite another way, for phenomenology if it were to be pursued without reference to theology.

If we ask ourselves what these “intuitional manifestations” of the divine are, we might answer by way of Anselm’s ontological argument in the Proslogion, or, closer to home for Husserl, Descartes’s version of the same thought experiment in the third of the Meditations on First Philosophy (1641). So we recall Descartes testifying, that “in some way I have in me the notion of the infinite earlier than the finite—to wit, the notion of God before that of myself” [ac proinde priorem quodammodo in me esse perceptionem infiniti quam finiti, hoc est Dei quam mei ipsius] and we also recall his reflection on this claim:

[W]hen I reflect on myself I not only know that I am something [imperfect], incomplete and dependent on another, which incessantly aspires after something which is better and greater than myself, but I also know that He on whom I depend possesses in Himself all the great things towards which I aspire [and the ideas of which I find within myself], and that not indefinitely or potentially alone, but really, actually and infinitely; and that
thus He is God [hoc est, dum in meipsum mentis aciem converto, non modo intelligo me esse rem incompletam & ab alio dependentem, remque ad majora & majora sive meliora indefinite aspirantem; sed simul etiam intelligo illum, a quo pendeo, majora ista omnia non indefinite & potentia tantum, sed reipsa infinite in se habere, atque ita Deum esse].

This notion of God goes back to St Gregory of Nyssa’s blind sighting of Eunomius, namely in arguing that the defining trait of God is the infinite (ἄπειρον), not the unbegotten, but it is Descartes’s view that we have intellectual intuition that the infinite precedes the finite. Later, of course, Michel Henry will contest that the intuition is intellectual at all; for him, it is an intuition of phenomenality, understood as a primal movement of life, namely, pathos and joy.

Husserl implicitly draws from St Gregory of Nyssa in thinking of the deity as infinite, but it is not by way of event, as with Aquinas, or by way of substance, as with Descartes, but by way of infinite reason and, indeed, as a teleology directed to that reason. God, understood as “all-consciousness,” is the end point on which all human values finally converge. (The same thing is urged in the Kaizo essays.) So this is not “the infinite” in a positive sense but at best only in a regulative sense, kin to the Kantian Idea. “Naturally,” Husserl writes, “we extend the phenomenological reduction to include this ‘absolute’ and ‘transcendent’ being,” and then adds, “It shall remain excluded from the new field of research which is to be provided, since this shall be a field of pure consciousness.” Taken together, the two sentences seem more than a little peculiar. For how can one lead back to immanent consciousness that which transcends it so radically so as to evade any gaze, however well trained? One can bracket the deity as offering any explanation of phenomena, as part of the natural attitude (if the all-consciousness is conceived within the realm of the natural) or as part of what we might call the supernatural attitude (if the deity is imagined as supernatural). And perhaps there are ecclesial conceptions of the deity that are subject to reduction. (To go down that path is to encounter Rudolf Bultmann along the way.) Yet we must be careful. The deity, as Husserl conceives him, would be always and already within consciousness but not as consciousness; and so there would be a mode of transcendence that in principle would be open to reduction. God’s transcendence, perhaps unlike Jupiter’s, would abide in my intentional experience, as modus sine modo (as Bernard of Clairvaux might say). We would not be able fully to lead the Judeo-Christian God back to pure immanence by dint of the radical nature of his transcendence (at the very least it would be an all-embracing inter-subjectivity), but we would be able to
conceive him as a teleological limit, and in that restricted sense the reduction would extend to him, in principle although not in fact.

The third candidate for being irreducible is language, and Fink alerts us to the problem of language for Husserl more sharply than anyone else. The phenomenological onlooker, who has performed ἐποχή and reduction, must have recourse to language in order to express his or her cognitions. “He must take over from the constituting I the habituality of language and participate in the latter’s constitutive life, against his own wish to be non-participant. But this participation is merely apparent [scheinbare], inasmuch as in taking over language the phenomenologizing onlooker transforms its natural sense as referring to what is existent. If this kind of transformation did not occur, then the phenomenologist would slip out of the transcendental attitude with every word he spoke.”46 To which Husserl responds in a marginal annotation: “I always speak natural language, but in a transcendentally altered sense.”47 What could this change possibly be? How would it be marked? A moment later, in another marginal annotation, we are given an answer: “A phenomenological language in principle only has sense, only has possibility, as transformed natural language, just as the transcendental phenomenon, world, only has sense as the transformed sense-of-being” (86 n. 295).48 We are thus taken back to the *Logical Investigations*, and first of all to the warning in the “Prolegomenon,” that language “represents a most imperfect aid towards strict research. The pernicious influences of ambiguities on the validity of syllogistic inferences are familiar.”49 Then we recall Husserl’s early way of overcoming these “pernicious influences,” namely, by distinguishing expression from indication, and seeking a pure language of sense. We should also remember his stricture in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929) that not all of one’s psychic life is actually expressed in language: intentions are directed through words, and are not in and of themselves part of language.50

Finally, we find a fuller answer in Husserl’s late essay “The Origin of Geometry” (1936), edited by Fink, where a distinction is drawn between writing that is Leib (constituting, giving sense) and writing that is Körper (constituted, factual); and it is the former that the geometer or philosopher writes: an embodiment of living truth (Verleibichung) rather than a material inscription (Verkörpierung). Only logic, mathematics and rigorous philosophy—phenomenology—could be truly pure in the sense of being written in a thoroughly reduced language, Husserl thinks, a language in which materiality would not bother the reader because of the clarity of the author’s intentions as they are embodied in conventional signs, whether
logical, mathematical or linguistic. He is close to Frege here. Writing in a reduced language is straightforward in logic and mathematics, Husserl thinks, because their objects are free idealities and therefore above and beyond time and history. The scholar can, as it were, look straight through language to the objects that interest him or her. What, though, of philosophy? If its object is to analyze truths that are universal and invariant with respect to time, then it will address free idealities; but even the most exacting phenomenology, since it must concern itself also with the mundane, will frequently produce texts that address bound idealities, which belong to the cultural world, and even the most free of free idealities is bound to the extent that it is marked by Erstlichkeit, having been discovered at a time and in a place: we speak of Pythagoras’ Theorem, Newton’s Laws, Euler’s Theorem, Gauss equations, and so on. And then there are of course natural phenomena, which display their content to us by way of the irreality of noemata. As one passes from logic to nature to poetry the idea of a reduced language becomes less and less plausible.

It may be that we should not expect the same degree of rigor in all cases of reduction, much as we do not expect the same degree of Evidenz to be available with all phenomena. If so, phenomenology, as Husserl practices it, has a varying limit. Of more concern, I think, is one’s conviction that phenomenology is valuable precisely because it leads us to a concrete understanding of phenomena, and that it is in art (including poetry) where we find such concreteness in an exemplary way. It is not language that is the problem of reduction here so much as what prompts reduction in the first place and indeed the very direction of reduction. Blanchot evokes this situation in his enigmatic remarks about “infinite reduction,” though for him language is regarded solely by way of its ability to hollow out lived experience and alert us to the approach of the Outside. It seems to me, though, that language need not evacuate phenomenality but rather focus it. Let me consider a fairly complex example, Wallace Stevens’ early lyric “Nomad Exquisite.” Part of the poem’s complexity abides in its rendering its condition of possibility as a theme.

When I read the poem I am led back, through the very luxuriance of the language, to something that is prior to me and that lays a claim on me. Yet that is not quite how we first read the lyric:
As the immense dew of Florida
Brings forth
The big-finned palm
And green vine angering for life,

As the immense dew of Florida
Brings forth hymn and hymn
From the beholder,
Beholding all these green sides
And gold sides of green sides,

And blessed mornings,
Meet for the eye of the young alligator,
And lightning colors
So, in me, come flinging
Forms, flames, and the flakes of flames.53

When we first read this poem we encounter a lyric about the contemplative gaze of a “beholder” who grasps, from one bodily perspective, the essence of life in the Deep South. Yet the lyric gaze does not end in leading transcendence back to a final immanence; and in fact in its final line the poem passes from consciousness to imagination. The imagination reverses the movement from transcendence to immanence; it “flings” a response back into the world. The fecundity of the landscape prompts a reaction in the one beholding it; it elicits a storm of imaginative force, a desire to create (which ends with the spent energy of that desire), which is caught in the very lyric we have been reading. The poet sees the essence of tropical life, at least from one perspective, and supplements that perceptual act with an account of human creativity. It may be that the poem ultimately turns on the ambiguity of “tropical”: a climactic state and a figural situation.

Were Stevens writing in a fully reduced language “Nomad Exquisite” would run more or less as follows: “Climactic conditions in the Deep South of North America produce luxuriant vegetation and support exotic aquatic life, the fecundity of which resembles the human impulse to create art, an impulse that is quickly exhausted and leaves the artist feeling desolate.” Now such a text, if recorded in a work of phenomenology, would indicate little or nothing of the concreteness of life in Florida. Yet when one reads “Nomad Exquisite” one is led back to something independent of one’s existence, something that precedes it, namely the force of
life itself; and one also senses a claim on oneself: to be answerable to that force, to be as creative in one’s response to life as is possible in the ways that are given to one. It is the richness of the language of the poem that prompts reduction: not only particular phrasings, such as the evocation of “immense dew” and the “green vine angering for life” [my emphases], but also the phonic play of the lines, and the repetitions that bespeak the sunlit luxuriance of Florida.

Something similar could be said of how religious texts have the ability to prompt reduction in those who read them. To evoke all too fleetingly an example I consider in detail elsewhere, when I hear one of the parables of Jesus I am led back, through the narrative, to the absolute claim that the Kingdom of God has on me. In neither case, however, is reduction a mental ἄσκησις. Rather, it is I who am reduced, led back, to what radically precedes me—the force of natural life or the Kingdom of God—and can recognize it in a pre-thetic manner, in all its concreteness. That is, the force of life or the Kingdom becomes thinkable by dint of the poem or the parable, regardless of whether it remains difficult, mysterious, enigmatic, or whatever. Not all poems, and not all parables (for there are many outside the Gospels) have the strength to prompt reduction; and we may well take reduction as an index of poetic or religious force. In thinking of the irreducible, as it might be for Husserl, we come partly to understand what he means by “reduction” and partly to grasp why that very notion needs to be reconceived more thoroughly than has been done so far. It is not a matter of modifying reduction, or prematurely halting it, so as to stem a tide of idealism; nor is it a question of colonizing the meontic so as to save reduction from circularity. Instead, it is being led back into concreteness, with all its ambiguities and difficulties, being lead back so that, as Stevens says, we might “be / In the difficulty of what it is to be.”

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NOTES


13. See Husserl’s comment on Fink’s reformulation of the reduction in *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*, 130. It is worth drawing attention to Heidegger’s emphasis that “the human being is a human being.” *Zollikon Seminars*, 178.

14. See Husserl’s comments throughout the *Sixth Cartesian Meditation* and the appendices to the text.

15. Fink, *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*, 40 n. 112.

16. See Fink, *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*, 144.


18. See Paul Ricœur, “On Interpretation,” *Philosophy in France Today*, ed. Alan Montefiore (Cam-


24. David Woodruff Smith is admirably clear about this issue in his *Husserl* (London: Routledge, 2007).


29. See my *Kingdoms of God* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), ch. 2


the irreducible
While the subject of forgiveness, especially in the wake of the work of Hannah Arendt and Jacques Derrida, has received a great deal of philosophical attention, self-forgiveness remains relatively neglected, although the literature has begun to grow in recent years. This neglect may be in part due to Arendt’s famous argument in *The Human Condition* that self-forgiveness is not possible.¹ My paper proposes to revisit Arendt’s arguments to investigate their import and explore how dismissals of self-forgiveness, including those that take Arendt’s arguments seriously, could have been too hasty.

Self-forgiveness raises special puzzles of self-relation. Arendt argues that forgiving, like promising, depends on plurality, others being with us and acting: “For no-one can forgive himself ... forgiving and promising enacted in solitude or isolation remain without reality and can signify no more than a role played before oneself.”² She believes that we need to be forgiven by others in order to escape the consequences of our deeds. Rather dramatically, she suggests that we are like “the sorcerer’s apprentice” without the incantation to break a magic spell, most likely a reference to the 1797 Goethe poem of that name.³ While the master is away, the apprentice casts a spell that makes a broom carry water and nothing he does, including splitting the broom in two, can stop it from filling the house with water. Only the master, on his return, can tell the magic word that will send the broom back into the cupboard. In order to be forgiven, we must await the magic
To be more specific, Arendt believes that we cannot forgive ourselves as we cannot be both the subject and object of experience. Furthermore, she argues that the most profound reason that we cannot forgive ourselves is that “we are dependent on others, to whom we appear in a distinctness that we ourselves are unable to perceive. Closed within ourselves, we would never be able to forgive ourselves any failing or transgression because we would lack the experience of the person for the sake of whom one can forgive.” On this view, we are dependent on others to forgive us, as we do not appear to ourselves as we appear to others.

While Arendt’s discussion is often taken to concern personal forgiveness in general, a great deal of light can be shed on her views by reminding ourselves that the forgiveness she is describing is political, not personal. In her account of forgiveness, Arendt is writing about the public sphere, where relations with others are paramount, and they “determine the extent and modes in which one may be able to forgive himself.”

There are a number of ways that focusing on the political perspective alters our understanding of Arendt’s claims. First, it could be argued that while we cannot forgive ourselves, we can come to some sort of accommodation with ourselves. She refers to a similar idea in her discussion of the two-in-one dialogue in which we need to live with ourselves, where she is focusing on personal morality, as I will discuss below. The other openings left by Arendt are in her hints that forgiveness of self is determined and dependent on the forgiveness of others in its extent and modes. I argue that it may be possible for perpetrators to develop their own moral response to their acts, in some respects, which may include self-forgiveness or at least an attempt to come to terms with their past actions, so I examine the nature of the self in self-forgiveness, its relation to the forgiveness of others, and the phenomenology and psychology of self-forgiveness. Furthermore, I explore the implications of the possibility of self-forgiveness for the ethics of self-forgiveness in terms of the kind and extremity of wrongs we can forgive ourselves, and our reasons for doing so.

1. POLITICAL AND PERSONAL FORGIVENESS

Arendt’s examples of forgiveness are of legal and political notions of sparing the vanquished or commuting a sentence, actions that clearly cannot be applied
to the self. The possibility of self-pardon has been considered by several US Presidents, such as Richard Nixon, George Bush (Senior) and Bill Clinton, but none have done it so far, and the idea is understandably controversial. Rather a judge or state leader makes these kinds of decisions as a parallel to personal forgiveness. Thus her argument looks more like the claim that self-forgiveness is dependent on political or state forgiveness. It is notable in these examples that it is not the victim who forgives and so suggests that the nature of the forgiveness is different from interpersonal forgiveness. This characterisation of forgiveness in the political context is the first clue to how personal self-forgiveness might be possible, even on Arendt’s account. While a person cannot decide their own sentence for a crime, they might be able to consider whether their action was forgivable.

Thus, we need to clarify the difference between forgiving the self and pardoning the self, for pardoning is closer in meaning to political forgiveness. First, how can we distinguish between forgiving and pardoning in general? For Paul M. Hughes, pardoning involves releasing the wrongdoer from the consequences of their actions and so is incompatible with punishment and compatible with condoning the wrong, whereas forgiveness is compatible with punishment and not with condoning. However, this way of distinguishing the two is not quite correct as pardoning may occur after some form of punishment, and be made for other reasons, such as the perpetrator has served enough time, the punishment seemed inappropriate, they are found to be innocent, legal anomalies and so on. An example of formal pardon in Australia when the accused or convicted is found innocent is the case of Lindy Chamberlain. Pardoning, in English (unlike in French), is generally associated with “an official acting on behalf of the society or the state,” although in everyday speech we might use “pardoning” to refer to interpersonal relations. The other aspect of Hughes’ claim is right, in that pardoning could be compatible with condoning, since it might be judged that the person had not really done anything wrong and forgiving could never (correctly) mean that. When we forgive we do so in the knowledge of the original transgression. In any case, this way of looking at the question does not help us to interpret Arendt’s ideas, since her concern is with political forgiveness, a kind of pardon that is compatible with punishment, as I said. She stresses that even pardon is for the person, saying “no pardon pardons murder or theft but only the murderer or the thief.”

So let’s look at self-forgiving and self-pardoning. Given that Arendt’s view of forgiveness in the political realm is a kind of mercy or pardoning, self-forgiveness
here would consist in pardoning oneself for a crime one has committed against others. It is easy to see why she does not believe this is possible, as it is not part of any past or existing system of law or politics and is unlikely to ever be. Judgements about crimes in this sense are made by others. Another possibility, although Arendt does not consider this idea, is that a political leader might forgive themselves, and do so in a public way. To understand how that could happen, we need to shift the ground from the political and public to the private and personal and ask if self-forgiveness is possible then. One of the hurdles Arendt puts up against self-forgiveness is that we do not have the right kind of relation to ourselves. We can concede that we cannot pardon ourselves of crimes as if we were a judge or state power, but is it true that we do not experience ourselves or appear to ourselves in the right way to forgive ourselves? Or in other words, what kind of a self must we be to forgive ourselves?

Let’s think of a recent, fictional example in order to understand the structure of self-forgiveness in general—from *The Wire*. Roland “Prez” Prysbylewski (played by Jim True-Frost) is a police officer who retires and becomes a public schoolteacher after the fatal accidental shooting of a plainclothes colleague who is African-American. (The character and events are based on the real-life experiences of Ed Burns, producer and writer for *The Wire.*) Immediately after the shooting he is desperate and has to be kept in a cell on suicide watch. We see him much later, calm, and dedicating himself to his work as a teacher. He takes special interest in a poor boy, Duquan “Dukie” Weems, even washing his clothes so he will have clean clothes for school. Although his efforts to protect this particular child are ultimately unsuccessful after the boy is put in a group home, we can think of Prez as a person who has truly acknowledged his wrong, has tried to make amends, and as someone who may be able to forgive himself. I raise this example so that we have a sense of a person who has forgiven themselves and how they might go about it before we consider some of the questions concerning self-forgiveness.

2. WHAT KIND OF SELF IS PRESUPPOSED FOR SELF-FORGIVENESS?

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt argues that we cannot appear to ourselves as we appear to others, and it seems that we cannot appear *in the same way*, in that others see us as we appear in the public, political space. But could we appear to ourselves enough to forgive ourselves? We could reflect on our own actions and understand the depth of the harm we have done to others and possibly ourselves.
Are we really a what rather than a who for ourselves? Could we recognise our own individuality? Do we see it reflected back by the view of others? I have thought that at the very least Arendt’s position would allow for some kind of accommodation with the self, yet it seems that there is a distinction between reconciling with the self and forgiving oneself. However, it is not obvious that reconciliation or accommodation with the self is any easier to make sense of than forgiveness of the self, at least in so far as they raise similar issues of self-relationship. So I will see if there are threads in Arendt’s work that enable us to reconsider this question.

In a later lecture, “Thinking and moral considerations,” Arendt discusses the idea that we can have a two-in-one dialogue where we need to learn to live with ourselves in a harmonious state, saying “in a sense I also am for myself though I hardly appear to me.” We should bear in mind that in this discussion Arendt is focusing on thinking rather than acting. In this focus she comes closer to the question of personal forgiveness; at the same time she moves away from the consequences of actions, an issue I will return to when considering what kinds of wrongs we can forgive ourselves. For her, this inner dialogue is what we call consciousness, and she takes the point further, suggesting that “I am not only for others but for myself, and in this latter case, I clearly am not just one. A difference is inserted into my Oneness.” Although Arendt believes we primarily appear to others, for ourselves we are two-in-one in “Being-conscious-of-myself.” This two in one can have an inner dialogue and be both in harmony and out of harmony with itself, a concept that she associates with Socrates’ dictum that we need to be in harmony with ourselves. Thus there seems to be some room in her overall thinking for some kind of self-relationship.

We have to be able to refer to ourselves in self-forgiveness, and create a certain unity of past, present, and future in the self. I would argue that we can distinguish these aspects without being committed to a self of distinct components. In contrast, Kathryn Norlock, considering forgiveness from a feminist perspective, suggests that forgiveness is a commitment to “the set of relationships between one’s past, current, and future selves.” Yet this idea seems to differentiate between parts of the self and suggest that a concept of a split self is required. She contends that we need to conceptualise a fragmented self to make sense of self-forgiveness. For her, the ordinary self is fragmented, yet the traumatised self, often the self in need of forgiveness, is even more so. What Norlock means is that we are structurally and socially fragmented in our identities as well as unstable. However, there are different kinds and degrees of fragmentation, and it is not
incompatible with projects of unity and integrity. Susan Brison, a philosopher who survived a serious assault, sees the traumatised person who has been abused or suffers from eating disorders, for instance, as having conflicting self-concepts, some of which can be seen as separate. Self-deception also plays an important role in distancing connections within the self.

Norlock argues against Arendt’s idea that we only appear to others thus: “In accounts of those who have been both victims and perpetrators of evils, sometimes the gray agent has the most information about the wrongs done and their magnitude.” The “gray” agent is the person who has been forced or pressured to harm others. For example, only Primo Levi knew the choices he made in the concentration camp until he chose to share them. The basis of her argument is that others’ knowledge of us, especially our ethical lives, is incomplete. This approach may miss part of Arendt’s argument, in that Arendt is not so much discussing the amount of knowledge others have of us compared to our own, but discussing the different stance and relation others have to us. Yet I believe that Norlock’s point is relevant to the examples of personal rather than political forgiveness. From her starting perspective, we are all split in multiple ways, both synchronically and diachronically and what we need to do in self-forgiveness is create a narrative unity, but not necessarily a narrative unity that removes or covers over all sense of fragmentation. Her view ties in with Arendt’s, suggesting that in some ways we take an external perspective on ourselves in order to forgive, and also implying that forgiveness of self is related to the forgiveness of others in that we take that perspective. Thinking of self-forgiveness like this to some extent vindicates Arendt’s claim that “the extent and modes of self-forgiveness is dependent on the forgiveness of others.” This claim itself requires further explanation, to understand the similarities and differences between the two kinds of forgiveness, so I will consider that question next.

3. WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-FORGIVENESS AND FORGIVENESS OF OTHERS?

Arendt’s assertion is that the only way that we can understand self-forgiveness is through forgiveness of others, so let’s first see the connections. For the purposes of this discussion I am only considering self-forgiveness for wrongs that affect others. I will turn to the question of harms to ourselves further on.
The two kinds of forgiveness have to be connected in their overall conception of forgiveness, and be distinct from other ideas such as condoning or legal pardon. A psychologist writing on the issue, Robert Enright, appears to address Arendt’s argument against self-forgiveness although he does not refer to her work. Self-forgiveness might be dismissed on the grounds that we cannot be both our own defendant and judge. However, he says, “This argument confuses legal pardon and forgiveness. In the latter, we are not reducing a deserved punishment, as in legal pardon, but instead are welcoming ourselves back into the human community.”

This is an important point, in distinguishing personal self-forgiveness from legal or political punishment, just as interpersonal forgiveness can be distinguished from legal pardon, as I have argued. Nevertheless, we could consider whether we can continue to punish ourselves in an attenuated sense and to forgive ourselves, as is possible in the case of forgiveness of others. This problem can be addressed by taking it that, as in interpersonal forgiveness, we can forgive, but will still have some hard feelings, and we might think that we cannot trust ourselves in certain areas of our lives.

Another connection between forgiveness of others and self-forgiveness is that they both can be ethically generous to others. We forgive others partly so that they can transform their lives, and sometimes we forgive ourselves so that we can contribute to the lives of others. In other words, as we respect ourselves more, we are more likely to extend that respect to others. Instead of being wrapped up in our own self-flagellation, we are able to open to others on a grounding of respect. Also, unforgiving of ourselves, we may be unforgiving of others. Oedipus’ curse on his sons Polynices and Eteocles, that they will kill each other, suggest that he cannot forgive himself, although he protests his banishment. Joseph Conrad’s Lord Jim is an excellent example of the dangers involved in not forgiving oneself. As Robin Dillon notes in her account of self-forgiveness and self-respect, Jim cannot forgive himself for being the sort of person he thinks he is, that is, a coward. When the Patna, the ship on which Jim is chief mate, appears to be about to sink, he jumps into a lifeboat with other crew members, leaving the 800 passengers to their fate. Luckily, the ship does not sink and all the passengers survive, but Jim is tried and stripped of his seamen’s license. His mistake in the past colours all his relationships, his judgement of himself, and his capacity to act, ultimately leading him to give up the love of his life, Jewell, and his own life in refusing to defend himself. He seems to have accepted his father’s claim that “who once gives way to temptation, in the very instant hazards his total depravity and everlasting ruin.” We could ask whether the former captain of the sunken Costa
Concordia, Francesco Schettino, is going through similar tortures, but his recent (August 2014) lecture to a Roman university on emergency procedures would suggest otherwise. This argument that we need to forgive ourselves in order to protect those we love provides self-forgiveness with a crucial ethical implication for others that overcomes Arendt’s sense of our being shut up within ourselves. We need to forgive ourselves precisely in order not to be shut away from others, to open ourselves to them.

Of course, there are important differences between self and other forgiveness as well, but these are surprisingly difficult to pin down. One idea, suggested by Enright, is that “[u]nlike interpersonal forgiveness, which is philosophically distinct from reconciliation, self-forgiveness and reconciliation with self are always linked.” There is a point to this claim in that the processes of self-forgiveness and reconciliation will be connected in that we cannot escape the self in the same way we can avoid the other; nevertheless they are still philosophically distinct processes. The process of self-forgiveness, according to Lin Bauer et.al., involves a growing sense of ease with oneself that includes taking responsibility for one’s mistakes and feeling at home in the world. They conclude that self-forgiveness ultimately means becoming part of the human community again. In this account, reconciliation is the outcome of forgiveness, and suggests that if we are able to reconcile ourselves without forgiving ourselves, a sense of unease should remain, although that may not be so.

We can see that in the case of Judah Rosenthal in Woody Allen’s Crimes and Misdemeanours, who becomes reconciled with himself but does not forgive himself. Rosenthal hires a killer to murder his girlfriend after she threatens to expose their affair. It seems to me that he does not forgive himself because he fails to properly acknowledge his wrong. Rosenthal appears to acknowledge the crime when he is first troubled by what he has done, but ultimately rather than doing so he moves on and forgets it, partly because no-one else finds out about it and he is able to go on living very similarly to how he lived before the murder. He enjoys his relationship with his partner, family, friends, and patients; in short, all of his life. Thus the claim of a tight connection between self-reconciliation and self-forgiveness, in contrast to interpersonal forgiveness, is not borne out.

It is sometimes true that not forgiving the self is even more painful than not forgiving others. Enright sees lacking forgiveness as necessarily negative and painful, but we may not experience this suffering, particularly if we forget what others have
done to us. However, in our own case, we may continue to find it painful because we continue to punish ourselves in some way and hold hard feelings towards ourselves.35 This point implies that there is more of a psychological imperative to forgive oneself than to forgive others.

Another possibility is that there is a proper order between self-forgiveness and forgiveness, with one or the other coming first and enabling the second. Philosopher and psychoanalyst Jon K. Mills suggests that self-forgiveness come first, and enables forgiveness of the other. His argument is that “If we do not initiate the process of self-forgiveness prior to interpersonal forgiveness, then we are placing responsibility on the other and refusing to accept radical responsibility for our ontological obligation.”36 His point here can be challenged, as although we should not avoid responsibility, when we have wronged another we have in some way made ourselves dependent on them. That cannot reasonably be denied. What can be taken from Mills’ argument, nonetheless, is that we do need to begin the process of self-forgiveness for that is a full acknowledgement of the wrong and this acknowledgement is also necessary for the forgiveness of the other.37

Could it be the case then that others have to forgive first from an ethical perspective, before self-forgiveness is possible? While this view may have some prima facie appeal, it encounters problems in being too dependent on victims’ good will, which appears unjust. For example, Margaret R. Holmgren argues that the victim does not have to forgive the offender before they forgive themselves, although the offender must acknowledge their crime, take responsibility, and apologise or otherwise make amends to the victim.38 (This view takes into account that victims may unreasonably withhold their forgiveness, as I will discuss later on.) These conciliatory gestures towards victims facilitate self-forgiveness.39 It makes sense that the steps taken of acknowledgement and conciliation also concern our own possibility of self-forgiveness. So what we can take from this discussion is that while steps should be taken to enable the forgiveness of others, it is not necessarily prior to self-forgiveness.40

However, there are other experiential, phenomenological concerns that mean the forgiveness of others comes first, or a link to others is essential. Without a connection with others, or some level of care, we stay locked in a cycle of self-recrimination. As Dillon observes, self-forgiveness is connected to that of others, which “can be useful, even necessary.”41 This point is one that links with Arendt’s declaration that only others can forgive.42 The weaker version here is that we need
the help of others to forgive the self. If we go back to the example of Prez, the trust of the children, the feeling of doing good for others, of making something valuable in his life through others, is what made him able to forgive himself. These ideas show there is truth in Arendt’s claim that the extent to which we can forgive ourselves is dependent on others. The problem she points to suggests that we cannot forgive ourselves if we are entirely alone and shut up within ourselves, so others have to play some role in our self-forgiveness, even if it is a memory of others’ love in the past or an imagining of their forgiveness. In *Three Colours: Blue* it is the small pleasures of life, and feeling compassion for her neighbour that start to bring Julie back to life and perhaps to self-forgiveness, if she has somehow reproached herself after the death of her husband and daughter. Our relation to others can bring us to self-forgiveness. Arne Johan Vetlesen further notes that self-forgiveness can also serve as an example to others. Citing Hitler’s secretary Traudl Junge’s statement of self-forgiveness in a documentary about her life, Vetlesen suggests that because she has gone through a “critical self-examination” and accepted blame and not excuses for her blindness about Hitler and his actions, her process of self-forgiveness could be worthy of emulation, and is at least the beginning of a process of forgiveness by others.

We need the concern and trust of others to help us with the spell we need to go through that process, and our self-forgiveness can be of relevance to others in similar situations. So how do we forgive ourselves? What is the phenomenology of self-forgiveness?

4. **HOW DO WE FORGIVE OURSELVES?**

The phenomenology and psychology of forgiveness, in contrast to the ethics of forgiveness, is important here to explain the work of self-forgiveness. Derrida contends that we shift or oscillate between self-forgiveness and non-self-forgiveness, writing “There is in me someone who is always ready to forgive and another who is absolutely merciless, and we are constantly fighting. Sometimes I can sleep, sometimes I cannot.” For Derrida, it is the conflict within the self that prevents forgiveness, rather than the lack of being able to see ourselves, as Arendt maintains. Yet we appear to be able to make sense of not forgiving ourselves and if that’s so, then surely we must be able to make sense of forgiving ourselves?

One of the first difficulties with comprehending exactly how we can forgive ourselves is recognising what kind of responses we can have to our own actions. For one, is it intelligible that we resent ourselves or be angry with ourselves or any of the other negative emotions associated with forgiveness that need
to be overcome? Hughes claims that “notwithstanding the fact that people
may be angry with themselves, experience self-directed loathing, and struggle
to overcome such negative emotional attitudes, it is not clear that the idea of
resenting oneself is coherent and, thus, whether forgiveness as overcoming self-
referential resentment is possible.”48 If correct, this impossibility would render
self-forgiveness distinctly different from forgiveness of others on that ground
alone. His argument is that the view that one and the same person can be both
subject and object and victim and wrongdoer “is incompatible with the idea that
resentment is necessarily directed against other people.”49

The problem with Hughes’ argument is that it begs the question against those
who argue that we can resent on behalf of others and resent ourselves. I believe
we can resent ourselves, feeling that we have failed our own standards and the
standards of others and have behaved in a way that could be considered unjust to
both ourselves and others.50 We then look on ourselves as if we were looking at
another. Norlock adds the point that we often closely identify and empathise with
others such that it makes sense to call our feelings resentment, and this can be
the case where we have harmed someone else, and so we can resent ourselves.51 It
seems to me that we can and do resent ourselves, and so self-forgiveness will be
in part a process of overcoming or transforming that resentment.

Hughes notes that self-forgiveness needs to be distinguished from self-condoning.52
This distinction is separate from the distinction I made earlier between personal
forgiveness and self-forgiveness, and legal pardon. A number of authors refer
to pseudo self-forgiveness, premature, or non-genuine self-forgiveness to set
that apart from true self-forgiveness.53 What they have in mind is forgetting or
overlooking the transgression altogether or forgiving oneself without taking
responsibility for what one has done, or trying to make amends.54 However,
proper or genuine self-forgiveness entails an acknowledgement of the wrong one
has done and acceptance of responsibility for it. If that’s so, it indicates that self-
forgiveness requires a recognition of the wrong done in order to qualify as self-
forgiveness from an ethical point of view. Otherwise it would be more like self-
condoning, as in the example of Judah Rosenthal in Crimes and Misdemeanours.

From the experiential perspective, self-deception and rationalisation can enable
the achievement of pseudo self-forgiveness.55 At the very least, we would like to
believe that Judah Rosenthal does not have the sense of wholeness and harmony
that someone remorseful and atoning could have. These considerations clear
the ground, as it were, for thinking about the affective and intellectual changes we might need to go through to forgive ourselves. In her account of political forgiveness, Arendt stresses only the action aspect, the forgoing of revenge, but these other elements are necessary for interpersonal and intrapersonal forgiveness.

Giving up resentment, as I have already stated, but not all hard feelings, is necessary for us to forgive ourselves. We could also forgive ourselves but still remain angry with ourselves, although without those feelings dominating more positive ones, as Dillon notes. Furthermore, self-forgiveness may involve overcoming feelings other than forgiving others, such as “embarrassment, disappointment, shame, or guilt.” We might also feel contempt or even disgust for ourselves. To some extent we can overcome remorse and regret and other ethical responses to our actions, although not entirely. We have to accept that there will be a certain level of remorse and self-blame that does not go away after we have forgiven ourselves, but which may be brought under control, thereby making it possible to live with ourselves.

So far I have been discussing self-forgiveness without looking at a significant question concerning what types of offenses we are able to forgive ourselves. I turn to that question now.

5. WHAT KINDS OF WRONGS CAN WE FORGIVE OURSELVES?

The question of the type of harms we can forgive ourselves, is distinct from the question of what extremity of wrongs can be forgiven, which I will consider in the following section. There are three possibilities: wrongs done to ourselves, wrongs done to others, and wrongs done to ourselves through our wrongs to others, and there is controversy over which of these make sense as objects of self-forgiveness. It may seem inappropriate to forgive ourselves for wrongs done to others—if only the victim of harms can forgive, we would be unethically substituting ourselves for the victim. As Derrida states, only the victim can forgive, “The survivor is not ready to substitute herself, abusively, for the dead.” In other words, we do not have the ethical standing to forgive ourselves for what we have done to others. This stricture would apply to both self-forgiveness and third-party forgiveness by bystanders or others.
However, first and most obviously and literally, if the victim is dead or otherwise not possible to contact, how could self-forgiveness even be possible? Griswold and Hagberg claim that in general if the victim is present, then the other has to forgive us before we forgive ourselves. This point appears problematic, nonetheless; for instance, what if the victim is a heartless and cruel non-forgiver—should we be chained for the rest of our lives to their whims? That possibility has to be taken into account, and then the person has to consider what they have done from an impartial perspective and reflect on the concerns of the victim.

Second, there may be deeper reasons for turning to self-forgiveness. To demonstrate this point, Goldie argues that there are cases where self-forgiveness for wrongs to others is necessary because there are moral reasons preventing the victim forgiving us, for example, if we have disloyal thoughts or have done something disloyal behind a person’s back. Should we go and announce what we have done in order to gain their forgiveness? Norlock makes the even more profound point that as part of the process of becoming a more ethical person, we may need to begin to forgive ourselves even when the victim cannot. She believes it may be imperfect, but that’s what we have. We should not leave ourselves outside the pale, ashamed, perhaps humiliated, and too desperate to improve. There is a certain level of disbelief in the possibility of forgiving ourselves for what we have done to others. As Norlock points out, self-forgiveness has a similar structure to what she calls third-party forgiveness, or forgiveness on behalf of the victim. Nevertheless, there are a range of situations where self-forgiveness even for what we have done to others is ethically demanded.

There are a variety of ways in which we can harm or injure ourselves and may need to at least consider forgiving ourselves. Norlock, for example, defines as moral harms that may require self-forgiveness those practices that “demean us, damage our capacities, or limit the opportunities of our future selves.” For self-forgiveness to be in play, there has to be a weighing of the sense in which people bear some responsibility even when they are suffering from an illness or being oppressed by others. Take the example of an eating disorder, Norlock suggests, where although we might not be culpable for having the disorder, we could be culpable for hiding it from our loved ones.

Dillon adds that we can be hurt by our own feelings, thoughts, and desires, such as racist thoughts and fears or being excited by violence, and these can damage our self-respect. For instance, Karl Ove Knausgaard in A Man in Love cannot forgive
himself for knocking on a woman’s door in the middle of the night, even though she did not let him in and he agrees it was nothing.72 I would like to take this issue further and consider the way we can wrong ourselves in wrongdoing others, say by undermining our own character.73 When we harm or injure others we harm ourselves in a range of ways, by letting ourselves down, or by making ourselves a lesser person. This feature links to Lisa Tessman’s worry about burdened virtues under circumstances of oppression, an aspect of self-forgiveness that Dillon does not consider.74 Oppression could structure our lives in ways that make it more likely that we do things for which we struggle to forgive ourselves. Oppression could also be even worse in the sense that by limiting our options, we may have to continue to do such things without hope of transforming ourselves. For instance, we could corrupt our own character by being so angry about class injustice, by telling lies to oppressors, or by manipulating others, but cannot see or have any other way to live. Some of the examples Norlock gives—such as women suffering abuse—are relevant here. She notes that victims of abuse feel or are implicated in the situation of abuse, and may make some choices and have some sense of responsibility for those choices, such as how they deal with children in that situation.75 These are complicated cases, since as Enright argues, victims of abuse have nothing for which to forgive themselves.76

Yet victims in these cases often feel implicated in the abuse and feel the need for self-forgiveness so the idea of responsibility is tied to the bad moral luck of being a victim.77 Dillon observes that we often find it difficult to forgive ourselves in these cases, and we risk being overly rationalistic if we do not take these feelings seriously.78 In other words, we should not draw too sharp a line between acts that call for self-forgiveness and acts that are not “objectively” wrong; rather we should consider the experience of the person who feels guilt, regret, and remorse as the most crucial factor. The person who cannot forgive themselves feels angry, bitter, cynical, and “beats themselves up” a common expression used to indicate the notion of punishment of the self. Another way to describe the phenomenon is self-destructive behaviour, which can be manifested in thoughts and feelings or even in physical self-abuse. Their own lack of self-forgiveness is something that itself calls for self-forgiveness. Thus we should not forget that situations of oppression may make self-forgiveness difficult and even impossible if the person cannot see a way to change. In general, I argue that we can forgive ourselves for wrongs done to others in some circumstances without the victim forgiving us, for wrongs done to ourselves, and for wrongs done to ourselves through what we do to others. There is still the different question, however, as to whether we can
6. SHOULD WE FORGIVE OURSELVES? FOR WHAT EXTREMITY OF WRONGS?

Arendt may be correct that we cannot see ourselves as others see us. Nevertheless, as I have argued so far, we may be able to see ourselves sufficiently to find the basis for self-forgiveness. The answer to the question of the ethics of self-forgiveness—whether we should forgive ourselves—is going to depend to some extent on the extremity of the wrong and thus there may be wrongs to self and others, and to the self through wrongs to others, that cannot be forgiven. In the context of action, Arendt sees forgiveness as being “released from the consequences of what we have done.” However, there are some crimes and “willed evil” that are unforgiveable on her account. In the context of self-forgiveness, we cannot release ourselves from all the consequences of our actions. We may rely on others to do that in the case of crimes, but even when there has not been a crime as such, our actions could be unforgivable.

Forgiveness of the self can include forgiveness for trivial faults, or “trespassing,” or acting unknowingly, as Arendt calls it. One example here is Elizabeth Bennet in Pride and Prejudice, who could probably fairly easily forgive herself for her prejudices against Darcy. I have argued, following Immanuel Kant, that forgiveness is an imperfect duty, or duty of sympathy. In other words, forgiveness is not generally strictly obligatory. However, as in the case of forgiveness of others, if the wrong is very slight, and we have made it up to ourselves, forgiveness could become a kind of obligation. For example, if we were to do something very trivial, like complain about the coffee somewhere or forget to go to someone’s birthday party, incidents that are probably quickly forgotten by others, then we should forgive ourselves for them. Furthermore, we should aim to be generally forgiving of ourselves as of others, since non-forgivingness of faults, particularly trivial ones, is suggestive of a character flaw or at least of some psychological problem, in being too harsh on ourselves or too proud. So forgiveness for these lesser faults should be something we aim for, along with what Dillon calls preservative self-forgiveness, a future-oriented self-forgivingness and acceptance of ourselves as worthwhile human beings who sometimes make mistakes.

Forgiveness for extreme crimes raise special puzzles, especially when we consider it is often difficult and/ or unethical for victims to forgive extreme wrongdoing.
like rape, murder, torture, or genocide. Raskolnikov's self-forgiveness after being imprisoned for murder in *Crime and Punishment*, if that’s what it is, happens mysteriously through a religious conversion that begins a rebirth, a “gradual regeneration, of his gradual passing from one world to another, of his acquaintance with a new and hitherto unknown reality.”

In extreme cases, one could consider that it is possible to live with oneself, or reconcile, without forgiving oneself, as I suggested earlier. Life could become just tolerable without a person entirely giving up on resentment or anger against oneself. Forgiveness is not always possible even though it could be possible in principle, if the offender were able to take responsibility and atone for what they have done. Self-forgiveness may depend on whether the victim is able to forgive and if they are present to consider forgiving. Many views that consider self-forgiveness always appropriate are focused on acts, where we might look back on them and believe we have changed in fundamental ways since committing them. However, if we consider the problem of a serious fault—such as realising that one has a racist character that we are unable to transform—then it may be appropriate to remain angry with oneself. Also, some acts may be so extreme that they are judged unforgivable, either by others or ourselves. If we are to understand self-forgiveness in any of these cases, we need to examine what reasons we might have for forgiving ourselves or not doing so.

7. WHY SHOULD WE FORGIVE OURSELVES?

In the literature, there are two main approaches to the grounds for forgiveness, one that focuses on respect, and the other that stresses love in certain forms. In the case of self-forgiveness, is self-respect sufficient to ground self-forgiveness or do we need self-love in the form of compassion and empathy for ourselves? Dillon argues that we can forgive ourselves, although we should not always do so, and sometimes we are appropriately left with self-reproaches. She centres on “transformative” self-forgiveness, concerned with our past acts, (as opposed to preservative self-forgiveness) and how it can be compatible with evaluative self-respect (in contrast to recognition and basal self-respect) if we go through the appropriate processes. Although we might still feel self-reproach, it does not have such a powerful hold on us. Herman Melville leaves it unclear whether Captain Vere forgives himself for ensuring the hanging of Billy Budd for accidentally killing the man who brings false charges against him, but since he dies with Billy’s name on his lips, we can be sure that he was disturbed. We cannot necessarily overcome every aspect of what we have done wrong through self-forgiveness. Our
self-respect tells us that we have worth in spite of the wrong we have done as human beings, and many ethical theories will tell us that we all have worth. But does our worth mean that we should be forgiven?

Dillon believes self-respect is enough for self-forgiveness, but do not we need self-love in the form of empathy and compassion as well? While I accept self-respect is necessary, I am inclined to believe that love in some form will foster forgiveness and is also necessary to a healthy sense of self. Arendt notes that love is sufficient for forgiveness in the private sphere. However, we may need both respect and love for forgiveness of self or other. Then we can forgive ourselves, in some way modelled on what Norlock calls third-party forgiveness, by feeling empathy for ourselves, or an aspect of ourselves. What we need to do is have empathy for our own past and present selves, and be able to see ourselves as “both agents and victims.” She argues that self-forgiveness is part of a project of regaining moral integrity, taking responsibility, living up to our moral ideals, and developing hope and trust. We could also distinguish between empathy and compassion here. Do we feel compassion towards the self? The character of Briony in Ian McEwan’s *Atonement* can be seen as someone who has had to exercise a compassionate and imaginative response to her own wrongdoing, especially since the people she has wronged are not alive to do this for her. We have to have some kind of feeling or attitude that looks on our own actions with imaginative understanding and sees that we are not fully defined by them and may be worthy of forgiveness. Then we can enter into the action of self-forgiveness, which will enable us to lead a better kind of life.

Finally, another question: is it hard to forgive ourselves or too easy? Dillon, for example, argues that forgiving ourselves is more difficult than forgiving others. This idea is in contrast to Griswold’s view that people sometimes forgive themselves with “lightning speed.” Here what we see is that the more ethically concerned a person is, the less likely they are to forgive themselves, whereas the less ethically concerned they are, the more likely they are to forgive themselves, thus leading to extremes in both types of cases. It is not clear that we can make either generalisation, just that we will tend to see these extremes as they are self-reinforcing. So we need to take particular care to note which way we might be tending.
CONCLUSION

From my discussion of the phenomenon of self-forgiveness, it appears to be possible, at least in the personal rather than political sense. Furthermore, such forgiveness of the self could be compatible with Arendt’s view of forgiveness, as outlined in *The Human Condition*, if we separate political forgiveness from personal forgiveness, and focus on personal forgiveness of the self. What Arendt rules out is self-forgiveness as self-pardon for crimes, a rare and controversial phenomenon sometimes considered by heads of state since only they appear to have such a power. Nevertheless, what we can take from Arendt’s idea of self-forgiveness being dependent on the forgiveness of others is the reality that others generally play a role in self-forgiveness: we cannot forgive ourselves really ‘shut up within ourselves.” We usually need the support and comfort of others to be able to forgive ourselves. It is very difficult, sometimes more difficult than forgiving others, and there may be times when we should not forgive ourselves. Yet self-forgiveness, just as Arendt says of forgiveness of the other, can allow the possibility of starting something new. It is a kind of magic spell that shares the miraculous quality of forgiveness and promising others.

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NOTES


10. Arendt does see political forgiveness as having a personal aspect, in addressing and concerning the individual, or the “who” in question. (*The Human Condition*, 241).


12. Goldie argues that while self-forgiveness is possible, self-pardon is not. (‘self-forgiveness and the Narrative Sense of Self,” 69). Nevertheless, he means something different again by pardon—that it is taking the person as not fully responsible for an action—something that we cannot (reasonably) do in our own case, although we can for others. (92)


14. See Arendt on the individuality of the person, which we see reflected in everything we do, in *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York: Schocken, 2003), 13.


17. Arendt sees the “who” as expressed in the narrative of a person’s life, for example the narrative we have of Socrates. (*The Human Condition*, 186)

18. Some authors, such as Nancy E. Snow, have thought of self-forgiveness as restoring the self to wholeness. However, this idea does not imply splitting the self into higher and lower parts, just that the self is complex and can judge aspects of itself. Snow, ‘self-Forgiveness,” *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 27.1 (1993): 76.


20. Garry L. Hagberg argues that self-forgiveness is self-constitutive, in that the self is changed by the process of self-forgiveness. “The Self Rewritten: The Case of Self-forgiveness,” in Fricke
ed. *The Ethics of Forgiveness*, 69. For him, the self is not partitioned; instead a bifocal doubling bootstraps an increasing sense of self-worth through forgiveness. (75) Similarly, Goldie contends that in self-forgiveness we see ourselves from an external perspective but nevertheless it is first or second person rather than third-person or impersonally. (‘self-forgiveness and the Narrative Sense of Self,” 89)


25. Enright, “Counselling within the Forgiveness Triad,” 117.

26. For instance, Enright suggests that self-forgiveness may be an indirect gift to others since as we lose our self-resentment; we may be able to respect others more. (“Counselling within the Forgiveness Triad,” 117) Snow sees self-forgiveness as potentially facilitating forgiveness of others as it may make us more empathetic to offenders. (“Self-Forgiveness,” 77)

27. Sophocles, *The Theban Plays*, trans. E. F. Watling (London: Penguin, 1947), 988-991. Goldie develops the idea further, comparing shame to grief, as things we must feel, but that we also must get over for the lives of others. (‘self-forgiveness and the Narrative Sense of Self,” 84) If we feel shame about the sort of person we are, rather than guilt over a particular wrongdoing, that may really undermine our sense of self and poison our relationships with others. Hall and Fincham expect to find a negative relation between shame and self-forgiveness, more than is the case with guilt, as shame focuses on the self and its lack of worth. (“The Stepchild of Forgiveness Research,” 631) In her work with substance abuse users in recovery, psychologist Marjorie Baker found that people had to self-forgive to overcome guilt and shame and that that helped them to avoid relapsing into drug use. Baker, ‘self-forgiveness: An Empowering and Therapeutic Tool for Working with Women in Recovery,” in *Women’s Reflections on the Complexities of Forgiveness*, ed, Wanda Malcolm, et al. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 72.


30. Schettino has been convicted of manslaughter, causing a shipwreck and abandoning ship, and has been sentenced to 16 years in jail, a sentence that he plans to appeal. (Gaia Pianigiani, “Captain of Ship that Capsized off Italy in “12 is Convicted,” *The New York Times*, February 11, 2015, 11).

31. Enright, “Counselling within the Forgiveness Triad,” 116. See also Espen Gamlund, “Ethical Aspects of Self-forgiveness,” *Sats* 15.2 (2014): 242. Norlock agrees with Baker that we have to reconcile with ourselves to forgive ourselves. (Forgiveness from a Feminist Perspective, 151; Baker, ‘self-forgiveness: An Empowering and Therapeutic Tool,” 64) The primary reason given is that we cannot avoid ourselves in the way we can live apart from others.

32. H. J. N. Horsburgh, “Forgiveness,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 4.2 (1974): 278. Hall and Fincham (“The Stepchild of Forgiveness Research,” 64) suggest that, typically, the consequences for the self of lack of forgiveness is more severe than lack of forgiving another, as we can avoid the perpetrator, but we cannot avoid ourselves. Self-alienation and self-destructiveness may be the
result. However, they note that this point has not been shown empirically.
35. Szabłowski takes that further and says that “the inability to forgive oneself or others not uncommonly results in the strongest and most negative psychological conditions that can arise in human experience.” Zenon Szabłowski, ‘self-Forgiveness and Forgiveness,” *The Heythrop Journal* 53.4 (2012): 678.
37. Another philosopher who takes this idea further is Byron Williston, who argues that we are “morally required” to forgive ourselves first to deserve the forgiveness of others: “The Importance of Self-Forgiveness,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 49.1 (2012): 67. His reason for thinking this is necessary is that he identifies the steps towards self-forgiveness with the process necessary for forgiveness by others. (76)
39. Or so psychologists Julie H. Hall and Frank D. Fincham predict (“The Stepchild of Forgiveness Research,” 632), given the evidence on this score is mixed.
40. A third possibility is that we need to forgive others for what they have done to us before we can forgive ourselves. Bauer et. al, stress that forgiveness of self can coincide with forgiving others as one realises that one also had a role to play in the wrongs suffered, for example in the relationship with a parent, and it can occur after a specific incident or arise over time. (“Exploring Self-Forgiveness,” 154)
41. Dillon, ‘self-Forgiveness and Self-Respect,” 81, n68.
42. Also, like Dillon, Bauer et.al. acknowledge the importance of others in aiding self-forgiveness through love and acceptance, “it may not be too strong a statement to say that ‘self” forgiveness always takes place in the context of some variation of loving relationships with others.” (“Exploring Self-Forgiveness,” 155)
43. Norlock also acknowledges this relevance of Arendt’s point—that we need to talk about what has happened to others as they help us to make a narrative of our lives. They can also affirm a sense of our being worthy of self-forgiveness. (*Forgiveness from a Feminist Perspective*, 153)
44. *Three Colours Blue*, directed by Krzysztof Kieślowski (1993; Santa Monica, CA: Miramax, 2003), DVD.
47. Griswold makes the accurate point that we can reproach people for not forgiving themselves, being too hard-hearted with themselves, and too proud to forgive themselves, and that is as equally meaningful as criticising people for forgiving themselves too easily. (*Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*, 122)
49. Hughes, “Forgiveness.” Goldie also accepts we cannot feel resentment towards ourselves, but
we can feel blame, reproach, shame, and hatred (‘self-forgiveness and the Narrative Sense of Self,” 83); likewise Jeffrie G. Murphy, “Jean Hampton on Immorality, Self-Hatred, and Self-Forgiveness,” Philosophical Studies, 89.2-3 (1998): 217. Griswold says that we cannot feel resentment towards ourselves as well; rather we feel self-hatred (Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration, 125) and Gamkund, (“Ethical Aspects of Self-forgiveness,” 240) agrees. Holmgren accepts that we can feel resentment, although in her later book she prefers to use the term ‘self-condemnation” as an analogue for resentment felt toward others, in Forgiveness and Retribution: Responding to Wrongdoing (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 104-133.

50. As Hagberg maintains, when we enter into the plight of the person harmed, we “become able to feel warranted resentment against the person who perpetrated the injury i.e. ourselves.” (“The Self Rewritten,” 73)


52. Hughes, “Forgiveness.”


54. Similarly, Hughes suggests that our own wrongdoings may not cause us psychological distress, (“On Forgiving Oneself,” 558) although what he has in mind are trivialities, like accidentally stepping on someone’s foot on the bus.

55. Holmgren, ‘self-Forgiveness and Responsible Moral Agency,” 77. Hall and Fincham question whether it would have “the same emotional, psychological, and physical benefits as true self-forgiveness.” (“The Stepchild of Forgiveness Research,” 627)

56. Enright notes that forgiveness involves affect in giving up resentment, cognition in giving up condemning beliefs, and behaviour, in giving up revenge. (“Counselling within the Forgiveness Triad,” 108)


59. Hughes, “Forgiveness.”

60. Zenon Szablowinski modifies the point by suggesting that self-forgiveness involves not the elimination of these feelings, but their control and prevention from becoming “excessive, unwarranted, or malicious.” (2012, 688)


62. Griswold mentions this possibility (Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration, 123), as well as the idea of when the victim ought to forgive but will not.

63. Griswold, Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration, 124.


65. Similarly, Snow argues that self-forgiveness is a second-best alternative when the forgiveness of the other is not possible, or when the offender unreasonably refuses to forgive. (“Self-Forgiveness,” 79-80)

69. As Hughes observes, we may need to forgive ourselves for self-directed wrongs such as not fostering our talents or not living according to our commitments or values. (Hughes, “Forgiveness.”) He argues that the only aspect of the wrongs done to others we can forgive ourselves for is the way we wrong ourselves in wrongdoing others. Snow sees that we may need to forgive ourselves for character traits, attitudes, and dispositions. (“Self-Forgiveness,” 78) As specific examples, psychologists Hall and Fincham mention academic and social failures, substance abuse and eating disorders, (“The Stepchild of Forgiveness Research,” 626) a group of problems that Norlock centres on.
70. Norlock, *Forgiveness from a Feminist Perspective*, 149.
73. Hall and Fincham (“The Stepchild of Forgiveness Research,” 626) note that some wrongs may indicate a character flaw and so be harder to forgive.
75. Norlock, *Forgiveness from a Feminist Perspective*, 143.
76. Enright, “Counselling within the Forgiveness Triad,” 120.
77. After the death of others, particularly suicide, we are likely to blame ourselves for not having done something to prevent the death. It is an instance of survivor guilt. Hall and Fincham are aware of this possibility but argue that in these cases there is nothing to forgive. (“The Stepchild of Forgiveness Research,” 628) This way of seeing these circumstances is correct; what is needed is recovery from grief and that will involve giving up self-blame. However, it is unreasonable to expect this change to take place quickly or easily.
84. Hughes (“On Forgiving Oneself,” 558) points out that we can easily forgive our own minor transgressions through an act of forgiveness.
85. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (London: Penguin, 1951), 559. Surprisingly, Snow suggests that self-forgiveness may be particularly important in such extreme cases, when it is not possible to atone for the wrong, as that is the only way one can go on living with oneself. (“Self-Forgiveness,” 80) Yet there may be other ways to respond, through reconciliation, acceptance of the unforgivability of our actions but attempts to make amends, or through various kinds of repression.
86. Linda Radzik suggests that we may reconcile with ourselves without forgiving ourselves, by continuing to resent ourselves and feeling guilty even though we have redressed the wrong and become trustworthy: “Forgiveness, Self-Forgiveness, and Redemption,” *Making Amends: Atonement in Morality, Law, and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 139-40.
There are a range of different views about these extremes situations. Hughes observes that some wrongs are so heinous as to be unforgivable by self or other. (“On Forgiving Oneself,” 559-60) Hall and Fincham consider whether self-forgiveness is appropriate for terrible crimes such as rape and murder, and accept that it might be possible, if the offender goes through a process of true self-forgiveness. (“The Stepchild of Forgiveness Research,” 628)

Holmgren contends that forgiveness in extreme cases is possible and appropriate. She uses the example of serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer to argue that self-forgiveness is a better outcome for everyone than his breakdown due to self-contempt. (Forgiveness and Retribution, 125-6) Dahmer became a born again Christian and was killed by another prisoner in 1994. More broadly, she argues that there is no value in judging our past acts or our self as a whole; rather we should be focussed on improving ourselves. However, another alternative to self-forgiveness is living with what one has done. Moreover, we could improve ourselves without forgiving ourselves.


Dillon, ‘Self-Forgiveness and Self-Respect,” 83.


Enright argues we should forgive ourselves because although we acknowledge the wrong we have done, we still ‘see the self as worthwhile.” (“Counselling within the Forgiveness Triad,” 117) He defines self-forgiveness as “a willingness to abandon self-resentment in the face of one’s own acknowledged objective wrong, while fostering compassion, generosity, and love toward oneself.” (“Counselling within the Forgiveness Triad,” 116) He accepts that these last attitudes are not duties, but like Dillon, finds self-respect necessary for this process.


Norlock, Forgiveness from a Feminist Perspective, 140.

Norlock, Forgiveness from a Feminist Perspective, 150.

Norlock, Forgiveness from a Feminist Perspective, 149.

Enright says we feel compassion towards ourselves as we become more aware of our own suffering. (“Counselling within the Forgiveness Triad,” 118) Holmgren also sees compassion as necessary for self-forgiveness. (‘Self-Forgiveness and Responsible Moral Agency,” 79) Hagberg argues we need compassion, along with insight and understanding to see ourselves differently and so forgive. (“The Self Rewritten,” 76)

Ian McEwan, Atonement (London: Vintage, 2002). See Williston, (“The Importance of Self-Forgiveness” 71-72) for quite an interesting discussion of Briony and self-forgiveness, although he appears to believe that Briony was able to apologise to Cecilia and Robbie, rather than create a fiction where that occurs, as the novel describes.

Dillon, ‘Self-Forgiveness and Self-Respect,” 54. As Aurel Kolnai writes in his article on forgiveness ‘so much is certain that in most of us a tendency to self-exculpation is operative and needs careful watching; the habit of easy self-absolution, even following an act of repentance, is always suspect of being more akin to condonation than to genuine forgiveness,” “Forgiveness,” Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 74 (1973): 106. He does add, however, that we need to have
patience with ourselves, as with others. Enright, who has worked with victims of incest, argues similarly that “our experience is that most people are harder on themselves than on others.” (“Counselling within the Forgiveness Triad,” 119)

101. Griswold, Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration, 122. His example is members of the clergy found to be unfaithful.

102. I would like to thank the audiences at the SPEP and ASCP conferences for valuable questions and comments, and Richard Colledge for inviting me to speak at ASCP and his editorial advice.
Contemporary philosophers do not often explicitly discuss wonder. Yet its philosophical history resonates in discussions of knowledge in relation to imagination and emotion. This is especially true of Jacques Derrida’s writings. One of the many striking features of his work is his skill in integrating insights into the history of philosophy with critique of current issues. His analyses of contemporary culture and politics often emerge from close readings of particular philosophical and literary texts; and those readings often resonate with the philosophical history of wonder. He rarely discusses wonder directly. Yet he had a deep interest in issues arising around the ancient idea of *aporia*—the condition in which the perplexed mind seems to come to a halt with no path to follow. The connections between *aporia* and wonder are of course at the heart of ancient Greek accounts of the beginnings of philosophy. To see just how much Derrida’s thought resonates with the philosophical history of wonder, it is helpful first to return briefly to those ancient beginnings.

Both Plato and Aristotle stress that philosophy begins in wonder. Plato opens his late dialogue, the *Theaetetus*, with a powerful evocation of wonder. There, he has Socrates talk of it as an experience which is characteristic of a philosopher: “This,” he says, “is where philosophy begins and nowhere else.” It is proneness to wonder that makes the boy Theaetetus an ideal student for Socrates. He is eager to be drawn into the kind of bewilderment that brings intellectual activity to
a temporary standstill, when the mind does not know how to go on. Drawn into Socratic questioning, Theaetetus says, “I often wonder like mad what these things can mean; sometimes when I'm looking at them I begin to feel quite giddy.” In describing the boy’s capacity for intellectual inquiry, Plato gives to Theodorus, his mentor in mathematics, a metaphor which evokes a calm serenity of mind in motion—a coming together of passivity and activity; of stasis and movement. The boy, Theodorus says, approaches his studies in a way reminiscent of “the quiet flow of a stream of oil.”

The tensions evoked there between intellectual motion and rest—and the idea of their ultimate co-existence—recur throughout the rest of the dialogue. Socrates does not seek to cure Theaetetus of his initial state of “giddiness.” The boy continues to “wonder like mad”; but he comes to a better understanding of that state—and at the same time to a deeper appreciation of the intellectual character which Socrates attributes to the philosopher. It becomes clear that the art of thinking, as Socrates teaches it, does not lead to definitive conclusions. Theaetetus is initiated into a kind of thinking which originates in perplexity and wonder; and, rather than rejecting that condition, Socrates’ exercise of intellectual “midwifery,” as he describes it, transforms it into a more virtuous form of not-knowing.

“And so, Theaetetus,” says Socrates in concluding the initiation, “if ever in the future you should attempt to conceive or should succeed in conceiving other theories, they will be better ones as the result of this enquiry.” In consequence, his companions will find him “gentler and less tiresome”—more modest, not thinking that he knows what he does not know. “This,” Socrates says, “is all my art can achieve—nothing more.” Towards that end, Socrates works on inducing those states of perplexity which excite and attract the young Theaetetus—states where the mind is brought to an impasse, not knowing where to go.

The *Theaetetus* can be read as an account of the initiation of a young mind into philosophy as a specific kind of intellectual inquiry—a kind of thinking that begins and persists in wonder, construed as acknowledged not-knowing. However, there is also something of broader significance here than the origins of what we now know as philosophy. We are thrown into perplexity—into wonder—when ever our established beliefs and habitual expectations are shaken—when things long taken for granted are exposed to challenge.
Wonder, as well as being the beginnings of philosophy, can be the beginnings of political consciousness. Plato’s Socrates is well aware of this. He sets himself the task of inducing wonder in others as a social good. The dialogue ends with Socrates going off to face the charge of corrupting youth. The outcome of that charge will of course be the sentencing of Socrates to death—the story of which is told in other dialogues. The *Theaetetus* dramatises this “corruption” of the young and foreshadows the outcomes of that allegedly subversive activity. As well as being an exercise in the definition of knowledge, the dialogue is thus a defence of the role of Socratic inquiry as social critique—and of the place of wonder in that critique.

Aristotle reinforced Plato’s idea of philosophy as beginning in wonder, while refining it. In the *Metaphysics*, he says that philosophy is distinguished from other forms of knowledge by the largeness of its subject matter—its concern with “greater matters”—the moon, sun, stars, and the genesis of the universe. But there is also, he thinks, something distinctive about the kind of thinking involved—a certain kind of wavering or vacillation in the mind’s movement. Aristotle spells this out as a sort of hovering between knowing and not-knowing. That, he suggests, gives philosophy—“the love of wisdom”—something in common with myth. For lovers of myth, he says, are also in a sense lovers of wisdom, since myths are composed of things not completely understood—of wonders. 5

For both Plato and Aristotle, the not-knowing involved in wonder is not just an acknowledged absence of knowledge. It is a kind of not-knowing which brings with it an intense desire to understand. In Book I of his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle emphasises the connections of wonder with desire and pleasure. Learning and wondering, he says there, are both as a rule pleasant. Wondering implies “the desire of learning, so that the object of wonder is an object of desire; while in learning one is brought into one’s natural condition.” St Thomas Aquinas was later to take that observation further when, in the *Summa Theologiae* (Second Part, I, Q32, Art. 8), he glossed it by saying that wonder is a certain sort of desire: the wondering mind yearns for what is its own good—the satisfaction of its deep desire to know.

There are tensions in those old accounts of wonder—between activity and passivity; motion and stasis. There are tensions too between the images evoked in describing wonder. On the one hand, it is directionless wandering—fluctuation and vacillation; on the other hand, it is purposeful movement towards knowledge as a determinate and strongly desired end. There is also the sense of something
to be hoped for—a reconciliation of motion and rest. However, the aspect of anc-
cient wonder which resonates most strongly in Derrida’s sustained development
of the old Socratic idea of *aporia* is the idea of the blocked path—the intellectual
impasse, when the mind is brought to a halt. He makes the continuities with an-
cient ideas of *aporia* explicit in the lectures published in 1992 as the volume called
*Aporias*. What he offers there is, he says, a revitalised version of the “old, worn-out
Greek term *aporia*, this tired word of philosophy and of logic.”

At the core of this revitalisation is Derrida’s emphasis on the notion of singularity.
What is fascinating in this experience of *aporia*, he says, is that we are “singularly
exposed in our absolute and absolutely naked uniqueness.” In the experience of
*aporia* we are “disarmed, delivered to the other.” This emphasis on singularity is a
striking—and in some ways perplexing—elaboration of the ancient idea of *aporia*
as the blocked path allowing nowhere to go. How does *aporia* yield our “naked
uniqueness” or the “deliverance to the other”? How did “otherness” get into the
picture?

The trajectory of Derrida’s thinking here becomes clearer in the light of his dis-
cussion of *aporia* in *Memoires of Paul de Man*, originally delivered as lectures in
1984. Talking there of de Man’s frequent appeal to the notion of *aporia* in his last
texts, he has this to say:

I believe that we would misunderstand it if we tried to hold it to its most
literal meaning: an absence of path, a paralysis before roadblocks, the im-
mobilisation of thinking, the impossibility of advancing, a barrier blocking
the future. On the contrary, it seems to me that the experience of the aporia,
such as de Man deciphers it, gives or promises the thinking of the path, pro-
vokes the thinking of the very possibility of what still remains unthinkable
or unthought, indeed, impossible. The figures of rationality are profiled and
outlined in the madness of the aporetic.\(^8\)

*Aporia* for Derrida, following de Man on this point, is not just the absence of a path
forward for thought. There is an important shift of emphasis here, though it’s not
inconsistent with the ancient Greek idea. The intellectual hiatus—the mind’s loss
of movement—is to be taken, not as an incipient state of paralysis, but rather as
a constructive pause in its ongoing activity. Derrida’s version of *aporia* involves a
style of thinking—a reflective response, which transforms the experience of the
path lost. It becomes a pause for reflection; yet Derrida’s account of it also resists
any bland idea of moving forward: “When someone suggests to you a solution for escaping an impasse, you can be almost sure that he is ceasing to understand, assuming that he had understood anything up to that point.” We have here an elaboration, and enrichment, of ancient *aporia*. It is a significant development which can, I suggest, be made clearer by looking back to an intervening moment in the philosophical history of wonder: Spinoza’s repudiation of Descartes’s treatment of wonder and of its place in the life of the mind.

In his account of wonder in *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes had argued that, although useful in beginning inquiry, it also poses real threats to the gaining of knowledge. Wonder, as a “sudden surprise of the soul,” brings a heightening of attention under the impact of the unexpected. However, that surprise all too readily turns to the excessive state of “astonishment,” which can render the whole body “as immobile as a statue.” Those who are not at all prone to wonder are, he says, usually very ignorant. Yet often we wonder too much, rather than too little; for we can become transfixed with astonishment at things that don’t really merit much consideration.¹⁰

According to Descartes, becoming like statues by wondering too much is a greater risk than that posed by mere ignorance resulting from wondering too little. The “uncorrected habit” of wonder can leave us afflicted with “blind curiosity”—“seeking out rarities simply in order to wonder at them, and not in order to know them.” Fortunately, though—as with other excessive states of passion—a virtuous exercise of will can come to the rescue. The discerning mind can set aside the risky passion of wonder, making good its absence through the will, which can always impose on our understanding a “special state of attention and reflection” when we judge the matter before us to be worth serious consideration.¹¹

About all that, Spinoza was scathing in his discussion of emotions in Part III of the *Ethics*. He rejected the whole idea of minds acting on bodies through the causal intervention of supposedly free will. Like Descartes, he saw wonder as involving an intermission in mental activity—a coming-to-a-stop, in the face of something unfamiliar. The upshot of his analysis is, however, radically different—with ramifications for what we can now make of Derrida’s revitalisation of ancient ideas of *aporia*.

For Spinoza wonder is, strictly, not a passion—or indeed any kind of affect or emotion at all. For him emotions are necessarily transitions in activity. They involve
mental movement. So a state in which there is no mental movement—where thought comes to a halt—is not an emotion. Yet the presence of wonder is crucial to the formation and transformations of a wide range of emotions. Wonder, for Spinoza, is crucial to the life of the mind.

Spinoza’s critique of Descartes’s treatment of wonder is a conjunction of subtlety and sarcasm—at once playful and devastating. It is a sustained reflection on the experience of hiatus in mental activity—on the state which, he agrees with Descartes, is the core of wonder. Putting together his rejection of the Cartesian view of mind and body as causally interacting, and his rejection of the idea of free will—both of which are essential to the Cartesian account—what emerges is that wonder is located in a non-causal relation of mind to body. Mind is related to body as an idea to its object. Wonder belongs in that relationship between the mind as “idea” and the body which is its “object.” It arises in the mind’s initial response to something unfamiliar—something not understood—happening in the body of which it is the idea. We have here another twist to the old idea that philosophy begins in wonder. The mind responds to its own body as to something it does not understand, and which nonetheless it must understand in order to be what it is. All that suggests that, according to Spinoza, wonder is necessary for the mind’s continued existence.

It is of course a strange and intriguing notion—this suggestion that minds respond to their own bodies in wonder; and that this wondering response is necessary to their very being. Spinoza elaborates it through a clever and playful diversion, in which he expresses the wonder which he claims he himself experiences when he confronts Descartes’s preposterous alternative theory—that wonder is a passion of the soul, arising somehow from its causal interactions with body. Surprise was at the core of Descartes’s account of wonder. Spinoza agrees with that. However, in response to Descartes’s account of wonder as a passion produced in the soul by body, Spinoza presents himself as very surprised indeed.

In Part III of the Ethics, he observes that “no one knows how, or by what means, the Mind moves the body.” So “when men say that this or that action of the body arises from the Mind, which has dominion over the Body, they do not know what they are saying, and they do nothing but confess, in fine sounding words, that they are ignorant of the true cause of that action, and that they do not wonder at it.” Spinoza’s point there was to insist that the body itself, “simply from the laws of its own nature, can do many things which its Mind wonders at.” Descartes would not
have disagreed with that. He held that there are many movements of which bodies
are capable without causal intervention of minds. However, in the Preface to Part
V, Spinoza returns to the theme in a way that is explicitly directed against the Car-
tesian treatment of minds as separately existing individual substances, capable of
causally interacting with bodies. Here, he presents Descartes’s lack of wonder at
his own outrageous theory as itself an appropriate object of wonder. Faced with
Descartes’s account of the passions of the soul in terms of causal interactions
between mind and body, he says, “I cannot wonder enough that a Philosopher of
his calibre ... one who had so often censured the Scholastics for wishing to explain
obscure things by occult qualities ... should assume a Hypothesis more occult
than any occult quality.”13

Taking the passages together, we can read Spinoza as mocking Descartes’s version
of the surprise at the heart of wonder. The minds of his opponents, he seems to
imply, are so habituated to the acceptance of the mysterious that their acknowl-
edged not-knowing does not even trigger wonder. Their minds are closed. In his
own treatment of wonder, surprise remains; but it is differently construed. The
emphasis shifts from the psychological state to a more formal consideration of
singularity among objects of attention.

The role of imagination is crucial here. In the Definitions of the Affects, at the
end of Part III, wonder is “an imagination of a thing in which the Mind remains
fixed because this singular imagination has no connection with the others.”14 In
other words, the mind is brought to a standstill when confronted by singularity.
What Spinoza here calls singularity is a richer notion than Descartes’s version of
surprise. It involves an intellectual challenge, rather than a potentially paralysing
psychological state. It is here that we see the affinities between Spinoza’s treat-
ment of wonder and Derrida’s version of the notion of aporia.

In Spinoza’s more general account of knowledge, imagination has the role of
bringing things together for comparison; and this is where singularity comes in.
When the imagination encounters something singular, it cannot bring it together
with other things. “This affection of the Mind, or this imagination of a singular
thing, insofar as it is alone in the Mind is called Wonder.”15

If wonder brings the exercise of imagination to a halt, the mind’s search for com-
monalities is also blocked. By treating wonder as involving a fixation of the imagi-
nation, Spinoza gives more content than Descartes could to what actually happens
in the mental hiatus which both see as characteristic of wonder. Wonder, Spinoza says, is a “distraction of the Mind,” that arises from the fact that there is no cause “determining the Mind to pass from regarding one thing to thinking of others.”

Spinoza thus acknowledges the power of wonder to impede mental activity. Yet his treatment of wonder reflects a much more positive evaluation of its role in the life of the mind than Descartes’s cautionary approach. For Spinoza wonder is not a threat, needing to be controlled by an extraneous virtuous will. That is fortunate, because for him there is no such thing as the will—whether virtuous or wicked. However, the mental hiatus associated with wonder brings its own restorative activity. Encountering singularity, imagination initially finds no room to move. Yet, having been stopped in its tracks, it must then resort to less obvious resemblances, finding a way forward to grasp commonalities. The mind steps back, as it were, in order to leap forward. Its urge to continue thinking—its striving to understand—is what Spinoza calls its *conatus*: a thing’s effort to persist in being what it is. Each blocked pathway for the imagination thus becomes an impetus to find a way forward. The inherent effort to understand—which is just as characteristic of wonder as the initial hiatus it induces—brings of itself the relief from paralysis, which Descartes had sought in a spurious exercise of will over passion.

So we have here another version of the ancient dictum that intellectual inquiry begins in wonder. Wonder arises from the imagination’s encounter with unexpected singularity, which drives a need—indeed a necessity—for better understanding. Wonder is no longer construed as a passion in need of external control. It now becomes inherent in the mind’s on-going striving to understand body—and hence to understand itself, as the idea which has body as its object.

Spinoza’s opponents—on his scathing account of them—acquiesce in mystery. They do not even wonder at the strangeness of the supposed interactions between mind and body to which they appeal in explaining the nature of human emotion—including wonder itself. They lack the self-reflection to realise that their inquiries have come to a premature dead-end. Insofar as the Cartesians believed that those mental affections which were “passions of the soul”—and their “remedies”—involved a causal interaction between minds and bodies, they were included among the targets of Spinoza’s attack. Descartes expressed concern about excessive wonder. Spinoza turns the tables on the Cartesians, suggesting that their incoherent version of mind-body relations indicates that they do not wonder enough.
On Spinoza’s account, then, wonder—rather than being at odds with the pursuit of knowledge—co-exists with, and strengthens, it. Although it brings the mind to a temporary halt in its efforts to understand itself and the world, wonder is also readily—indeed necessarily—redirected at the remarkable capacities of human bodies in interaction with one another and with other things. Properly understood, the mind’s encounters with apparent “mysteries” thus become an impetus to its efforts to understand the world and its own place in it. Let me now bring all this back to Derrida.

I suggested earlier that his notion of *aporia* is rich with the philosophical history of wonder. He does not, to my knowledge, ever deal directly with Spinoza’s response to Descartes’s way of dealing with the intellectual hiatus involved in wonder. Yet the connections are there to be made. The continuities—and the differences—become especially clear in his later seminars, where he reflects on the idea of singularity in relation to hospitality, to sovereignty, to the death penalty, and to death itself. “Singularity” remains a shifting and often perplexing notion which comes up in in much contemporary philosophical debate. It is not always easy to keep a grip on it. The affinities—and the differences—between Derrida’s use of it and the ways Spinoza talked of it can help anchor this elusive concept.

For Spinoza, singularity was a feature of the object before us. Struck by its apparent uniqueness, there is initially nowhere for thought to go. The blockage is in the activity of thought; but the singularity resides in the object apprehended. For Derrida in contrast “singularity” seems to be readily applied, not only to the object, but also to the mind’s experience in confronting it, and to the mind itself. Yet there is a trajectory of thought which can take us from Spinoza on wonder to Derrida on *aporia*. If what is before us is such that our thinking cannot get any purchase on it at all, then that is to say that this thing confronting us is utterly “other.” In that way, the experience of *aporia* can be said to deliver us to otherness. With nowhere for thought to go, we are thrown back on ourselves. So there is here a reciprocal “otherness”; the thinking self is utterly other to what is before it. There is a lack of common ground—not only between the things we are trying to think about, but also between us and those objects of thought. *Aporia* can thus be seen as a state of incipient alienation. We can hear something like that sequence of thoughts in the resonances of “singularity” in Derrida’s late seminars.

In the seminars published as *The Beast and the Sovereign*, singularity is associated with the theme of exceptionalism—with the paradoxical “exceptional” right to
Singularity is here the source of instability in the conceptual triad: beast, human, divine. It is what can make the sovereign “look like the most brutal beast, who respects nothing, scorns the law, immediately situates himself above the law, at a distance from the law.” 17 Singularity is the basis of the troubling resemblance—the “obscure and fascinating complicity,” as Derrida puts it, between sovereignty, animality, and criminality. The seminars explore that “complicity” from a starting point in the ironic mantra which runs through La Fontaine’s fable “The Lamb and the Wolf”: that the reason of the stronger is always the best. There is of course a deliberate ambiguity here; what is called “the reason of the stronger” might be taken either as the reason that in fact prevails or as the reason that ought to prevail—by right and according to justice.

Derrida’s main concern here is with shifts of thought around the theme of singularity in relation to “sovereign” “beast” and “God.” Yet these passages are also pervaded by the sense of wonder. They are evocatively described in terms reminiscent of Plato’s Theaetetus. Derrida talks of a vertigo of the mind—a sense “of the bottomless, the abyss,” of “what can make your head spin.”18 Although he does not talk explicitly of wonder in this context, he does later offer an extended treatment of the closely related—though at first sight antithetical—notion: stupidity. In its French version —betise—this form of stupidity evokes animality. Hence it’s relevance in Sovereignty and the Beast. It is an anomalous figure of speech. Drawing on Deleuze’s discussion in Difference and Repetition, Derrida reflects on the fact that “bêtise” in this sense does not apply to animals. If this be a form of animality, it is one that properly applies only to humans. Betise, Derrida wryly observes—evoking a famous remark of Descartes’s—is “that which is proper to man, like good sense, the most equally distributed thing in the world among humans.”19

Derrida is talking of stupidity. However, it becomes clearer that we are here in the territory of wonder when he moves beyond Deleuze’s discussion of bêtise by “following the track of Flaubert.”20 The reference is to Bouvard and Pecuchet, Flaubert’s dark comedy about two copy clerks engaged in a passionate and increasingly frantic search for encyclopedic knowledge. The story takes a particularly poignant turn when the clerks develop what the narrator describes as the “piteous faculty” of “seeing bêtise and no longer being able to tolerate it.” Discussing this pitiful state, again drawing on Deleuze, Derrida develops the startling hypothesis that bêtise is integral to the “structures of thought as such.” With some relish, he elaborates the point in relation to the kind of thinking typically involved in philosophy—its concern with definitive understanding of the natures of things.
Against the background of the philosophical history of wonder, we might say that the upshot of his analysis is that bêtise is the other side of wonder. Where there is wonder—the beginnings of philosophy—there too is inherent susceptibility to a certain kind of stupidity.

Clearly, Derrida is being impish in associating philosophy and stupidity. Yet there is a serious point at stake. It becomes clearer in the light of Flaubert’s own definition of stupidity in letters which Derrida quotes. While working on *Bouvard and Pecuchet*, he wrote to Louise Colet that stupidity is “wanting to come to a conclusion.” From Flaubert’s perspective, stupidity resides in wanting the completion of thought—the resolution of the desire to know. The philosophical history of wonder shows us that the desire for that state of completed knowledge is inherent in wonder. Against that background, if Flaubert’s provocative description of stupidity is accepted, philosophy can be seen as caught up not only in wonder but also in stupidity.

Flaubert’s dark remarks about stupidity are, however, more nuanced than his railings against “wanting to come to a conclusion” suggest. His version of bêtise can be associated, not only with the philosopher’s desire to come to a definitive conclusion, but also with the refusal to enter into the mental agitation of wonder at all. Derrida also reflects on another letter, written by Flaubert when travelling in Egypt, in which he famously expressed his disgust at finding on the wall of a pyramid, the scrawl of a name: “THOMPSON.” “The cretan,” he wrote, “has incorporated himself into the monument and perpetuated himself with it.” That vandalism is for Flaubert not just a specific act of stupidity. It becomes stupidity’s symbolic enactment. The immobilising of thought is inscribed into the immobility of the monument. There are echoes here of Descartes’s fear of wonder’s immobilising power, which can make wonder and stupor converge. However, the unfortunate Thompson is immortalised for his failure to engage at all with the spirit of wonder—as the place demands. For Flaubert the foolish Thompson becomes an emblem of acquiescence in an intellectual stasis that is more than a transient state—monumental stupidity, etched in stone.

Flaubert returned to his idea of stupidity as “wanting to come to a conclusion” in the satirical “Dictionary of Received Opinions,” which was meant to accompany *Bouvard and Pecuchet*—a list of the mindless cliches elicited in the circulation of common expressions—lifeless platitudes, which acquire the status of benchmarks of collective stupidity. On Derrida’s analysis, philosophy—in its desire to
reach conclusions—is itself prone to this descent of thought into the stupidity of “received opinions.” In trying to reach conclusions—to bring to a stop the vacillation of wonder—philosophers themselves can fall into stupidity. Philosophy may begin in the asking of questions. Yet there can, Derrida observes, be a strange and troubling affinity between bêtise and a certain obstinacy in asking, or asking oneself, questions. “There is without doubt,” he says, “a bêtise of the question, as there is of affirmation, as there is of negation.” His point is that not all questioning manifests sustained intellectual activity. The rigidity of thought which is the mark of this kind of stupidity can be enacted in stubborn persistence in asking questions, as well as in dogmatic opinion.

Some of this can pass as teasing play at the expense of the pretentions of philosophers. Yet there is also a serious point at stake. The posture of the philosopher’s effort to understand—to come to a conclusion—can enact proneness to stupidity. We have here, says Derrida, a “mimeticism”—something akin to a “contagion” of bêtise. In trying to understand it, he says, “we engender bêtise in the very gaze, in the sustained attention, study, or reflection, claiming to know its essence and its meaning.” Thus, to assume that there is an essence of bêtise is already a sign of bêtise. Again, we can hear echoes there of Descartes’s warning that the mental halt induced by wonder can readily turn into a more prolonged immobility. However, Derrida makes also a more unusual point which he has appropriated from Flaubert’s interest in constructing a “dictionary” of “received Opinions”: this kind of stupidity is a communal, intersubjective matter. It is not something that happens “all on one’s own and by oneself.” It is a collective phenomenon. The stupidity of each is intensified by seeing it enacted by others. The resulting circulation of stale cliches deadens both the individual and the collective life of the mind.

It is in his treatment of death that we see most clearly the richness of Derrida’s version of singularity. Here, again, there are strong resonances of the philosophical history of wonder. The connections between aporia and the thought of death were of course already there in Plato’s Socratic dialogues. Confronted with what cannot be readily understood—with the unknown—the mind comes to a halt. It is not surprising then that Socratic aporia was already connected with the realisation that it is impossible to really know what, if anything, lies beyond death.

In the Apology, Plato has Socrates appeal to that unknowability in his self-defence. To cease his activities of allegedly corrupting the young out of fear of being put to death would be to perversely presume that he knows that death is an evil. For all
that we can know, Socrates reasons, death may in fact be the greatest good; yet we fear it as if we know quite well that it is the greatest of evils. “And what is this,” he asks, “but that shameful ignorance of thinking that we know what we do not know?” Socrates is attracted to thinking of death as a good. He insists, however, that he really knows neither that it is a good nor that it is an evil. What most matters is not to claim knowledge which he does not in fact have; and that of course is what he has been teaching the young—allegedly to their corruption.

For Derrida too there are close connections between the experience of aporia and the thought of death. We have seen that he gives content to his version of singularity by playing with that old motif of aporia—having nowhere to move. What emerges from his own enriched version of aporia is a singularity that applies both to the mind and to the object it apprehends. Aporia is here the idea, not so much of intellectual paralysis, like Descartes’s statue, as of disorientation. Apprehending singularity leaves us lacking any clear sense of where to go. It is a state which can be manifested in restless to-and-fro-ing—in vacillation, as well as in transfixed immobility. This aspect of Derrida’s version of singularity comes out especially in his discussion of Heidegger on “world” and “solitude” in the second volume of The Beast and the Sovereign. It culminates in the Second Session, in the powerful passages on death in relation to Robinson Crusoe’s encounter with the single footprint in the sand.

Here again there are strong resonances of the philosophical history of wonder. Crusoe is initially paralysed by the footprint—as though he had been struck by lightning or thunder. He is astonished by the apparent evidence of another human presence on “his” island. However, that consternation gives way to an even more disturbing thought. The print becomes more uncanny for being possibly his own, on a path already trodden. A new temporal disorientation now joins the lack of bearings which disturbed him in his early days on the island. It is “as though he were living everything in the past of his own past as a terrifying future.” The future now comes to be thought as the revenance of something already past. The temporal disorientation passes over into a fear of death:

He believes he is shortly going to die, that he is running after his death or that death is running after him, that life will have been so short, and thus, as though he were already dead, because of this race with his revenance, everything that happens to him happens not as new, fresh or to come, but as ... already past, already seen, to come as yesterday and not as tomor-
As in other reflections of Derrida’s on time and mortality—on grief and on futurity—he plays here with dislocating the ordinary laws of tense logic in ways that can bring on its own wonder-induced vertigo. “As I run to death always after yesterday, yesterday will always be to come: not tomorrow, in the future, but to come, ahead, there in front, the day before yesterday.” If this be play, it has nonetheless a profound seriousness. It seeks to unravel the deeper logic of emotions caught up in grief, in mourning—whether for others or for one’s self. “I am no longer present, I am already yesterday, I enjoy from yesterday because only yesterday will have given me, only my death or the feeling of my death, a death that will have taken me by speed, only my death lets me enjoy and take pleasure—in this very moment.”

Blanchot in *Writing the Disaster*, which Derrida quotes in these passages on time and death, engages in similar mind-bending verbal play. He speaks of dying as “the imminence of what has always already come to pass.” Commenting on that remark, in relation to Blanchot’s *The Instant of My Death*, Derrida talks of this “imminence” as “an unbelievable tense,” which “seems to deport what has always, from all time, already taken place toward the coming of the to-come.” Blanchot also talks also of “the disaster of a time without present which we endure by waiting, by awaiting a misfortune which is not still to come, but which has always already come upon us and which cannot be present.” “In this sense,” he continues, “the future and the past come to the same since both are without present.”

It can all sound like mesmerising linguistic gymnastics. However, having in mind the philosophical history of wonder can give us insight into the emotional depth of these strange but luminous reflections. It is the unthinkability of what is singular that interconnects wonder and stupidity; and that unthinkability is at its starkest in relation to death. Able to take place only once, death represents, in these passages, ultimate singularity—and hence ultimate unthinkability. In the lack of anything in common with other things we have experienced, death cannot be thought. Yet this dying, is something which “though unsharable, I have in common with all.” These are complex—even tortuous—passages. There is something deeply paradoxical in the idea of the singular which emerges in them. Yet they resonate with familiar paradoxes of presence and absence, which are part of the universal, and singular, human experience of death.
To engage with the thought here, it can again be helpful to go back to Spinoza. On his approach to wonder, what is singular thereby resists being seen in relation to other things—resists being generalised, and hence being thought. In these passages from Blanchot and Derrida on death, there is a similar sense of nothing to be done—nothing to be said. It is a mark of this paradoxical singularity of death, in the midst of its being common to all, that it is inevitably something at which we are inexperienced. There are resonances here, not only of Spinoza’s treatment of wonder, but also of his tantalising observation in the *Ethics*—often quoted but little understood—that the wise think of death least of all things and that their wisdom is a meditation, not on death, but on life. Reading Derrida and Spinoza together, perhaps we can say that the reason Spinoza’s wise don’t think of death is that they are wise enough to recognise its unthinkability. So much for death. Let me now return in conclusion to wonder in relation to social critique.

Plato had Socrates link his skills in inducing *aporia* to the broader social significance of the kind of thinking that begins in wonder. Perhaps there is a comparable role for Derrida’s version of singularity. The encounter with the unexpected—the as-yet-unassimilated—can stop thought in its tracks in ways that lead on to passionate theoretical inquiry into the natures of things—into what Aristotle called “the greater matters.” Yet the shock of the new—of what seems unbelievable—can be no less powerful when our moral and political expectations of norms and normality are thwarted. Wonder can be the beginning of political consciousness, as well as of more narrowly focused forms of philosophical thinking. When a familiar social, cultural or political world recedes from us, singularity takes on an added starkness.

Wonder—whether it takes the form of awe or of shock—can bring minds to a jarring halt. That disorientation can be the impetus to fresh thinking, breaking the hiatus of wonder to take us in new directions. Yet, given the connections between wonder and stupidity, the unease generated by confrontation with the singular can also cause us to seek relief in familiar narratives—in the recitation of “received opinions.” The disorientation arising from confrontation with the singular can harden into new forms of intellectual paralysis—into what Derrida, following Flaubert, saw as collective *bêtise*.

Collective stupidity, thus understood, is at play in much of the prevailing political discourse of our times—no less than it was in Flaubert’s. Yet railing at stupidity can itself take the form of reiterated trite “received opinion.” Stupidity—in the
form in which we are dealing with it here—is not an episodic lapse of logic or failure of reasoning. It arises from something inherent in human thought—no less than does the capacity for wonder. As Derrida cunningly remarked in his wry twisting of Descartes’s remarks about common sense in the Discourse on Method, which I mentioned earlier, stupidity is something equally spread throughout all groups of human thinkers—among all those who engage in argument.

What then can be said, against the background of the philosophical history of wonder, that might help us better understand the phenomenon of collective stupidity as we encounter it—and are caught up in it—in our own times? It may, as Derrida suggests, be self-defeating to try to offer a philosophical definition of stupidity; but, as he also remarked, that does not mean that it is difficult to find examples of it. Identifying and exploring contemporary examples of collective stupidity can be an exercise of philosophically and politically informed intelligence.

What Flaubert and Derrida call betise suffuses—not least—current debate on two of the most pressing political challenges of our times—understanding and responding to climate change; and to current mass movements of people in search of safety or relief from poverty. Whatever side we may find ourselves on in those multi-layered and frequently baffling debates, it is not only inadequate but also self-defeating to fall back on exchanging accusations of stupidity. On such topics, it can be counter-productive to proceed as if all that were needed is to have the scales lift from our opponents’ eyes. Stupidity, in this form, arises from a deep need to seek alleviation of the unrest and disorientation which are inherent in our efforts to think.

Derrida has demonstrated how rich a resource informed readings of literary and philosophical texts from the past can be for understanding our present. Talking on a related topic—translation—he says, in concluding the first Beast and Sovereign Seminar, that “an interpretive translation brings with it the whole of culture.” Such an exercise is “not separable from historical movements in which all the forces of the world and the age are engaged.” The “whole force of history” is at work in producing it.32 What Derrida calls in this context “interpretive translation” is in important ways similar to his own strategies in offering close readings of literary and philosophical texts; and they are of course often inter-dependent exercises.
Interpretive readings of the kind in which Derrida engages demand extensive scholarship. That they are interpretive does not mean that they abandon ideals of objectivity. It does, though, suggest that offering readings across time of literary and philosophical texts can often be a more creative—and more political—activity than it is commonly regarded. The central point here was already—at any rate on my reading—made by Spinoza in his discussion in the *Tractatus-Theologico-Politicus* of the spurious certainties of biblical narratives.

Faced with dogmatic theologians who maintained their power over the multitude by posing as the authoritative interpreters of objective truth, Spinoza insisted that the narratives contained in Scripture were properly understood as constructs of imagination. As fictions, they were useful for the formation and sustaining of social bonds which allow human life to flourish. Yet those fictions—if they are misconstrued as definitive truths—could also threaten the very flourishing they made possible. Spurious certainties—for Spinoza as later for Flaubert, and for Derrida, can debilitate the life of the mind.

The familiar narratives that bind a human collectivity together can also come to restrict the mind’s freedom to move. They can become a source of intellectual paralysis. When we acquiesce in that hardening of thought—when we cease to “wonder enough”—we put ourselves at the mercy of received opinions, mouthing prevailing platitudes that come to be regarded as obvious truths. What begins as wonder can end in stupidity. Yet, when we find ourselves wondering at our collective stupidity, that can itself in turn be the beginnings of new-found wisdom.

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NOTES

2. *Theaetetus*, 155C; ibid.
11. Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, II, Sec. 76; 355.
Many years hence, when the reaction of the past shall have left only the grand outline in view, this perhaps is how a philosopher will speak of it. He will say that the idea, peculiar to the nineteenth century, of employing science in the satisfaction of our material wants had given a wholly unforeseen extension to the mechanical arts and had equipped man in less than fifty years with more tools than he had made during the thousands of years he had lived on the earth. Each new machine being for man a new organ—an artificial organ which merely prolongs the natural organs—his body became suddenly and prodigiously increased in size, without his soul being able at the same time to dilate to the dimensions of his new body.

—Henri Bergson, *The Meaning of the War*
On August 25, 1914, almost two months from the outset of the First World War, the German army occupied the Belgian university city of Leuven, intentionally burning its University's great library with its hundreds of thousands of manuscripts and books. It may be argued that the violation of this sanctuary of learning was the event that triggered a different aspect of the war, one fought between intellectuals, by the pen rather than by the sword. This is what we will refer to from now on, in the words of the Neo-Kantian philosopher Alois Riehl, as “the Cultural War [Kulturkrieg].”

Having said for a long time that he was used up, finished, more old-fashioned in his pretended audacities than the most pompous nonentities, she now comprised that condemnation in a general indictment by saying that he was “pre-war.” According to the little clan, the war had placed between him and the present, a gulf which relegated him to a past that was completely dead. Moreover—and that concerned rather the political world which was less well-informed—Mme. Verdurin represented him as done for, as complete a social as an intellectual outsider.

—Marcel Proust, *Time Regained*

Ah, demons of the whirlwind, have a care, What, trumpeting your triumphs, ye undo! —George Santayanna, “The Undergraduate Killed in Battle: Oxford, 1915”
The destruction of the library immediately made world news headlines. A number of French and Belgian intellectuals wrote in protest against Germany’s brutality towards learning and culture. British writers and intellectuals gathered around Wellington House, also known as the War Propaganda Bureau, commissioning an onslaught of propaganda, some of which was pure fiction, against Germany’s barbarism in the so-called “Rape of Belgium.” Under the August 1914 Defence of the Realm Act, Britain not only prohibited the teaching of German at schools, but also banned all books written in the German language. The German response came in the form of the notorious Manifesto of the Ninety-Three professors defending “Germany’s honour” against accusations of barbarism, proclaiming that Germany’s acts in Belgium were part of a war that was not caused by Germany, which was now obliged to fight in order to protect “the legacy of a Goethe, a Beethoven, and a Kant.” Numerous speeches and publications by German intellectuals, including almost all of the most prominent academic philosophers at the time, followed the line of the manifesto. The response by intellectuals around the world included those of prominent philosophers such as Bergson in France, and Dewey in the United States. This international turn against the German professors’ philosophical heroes seems to have, obviously very problematically, taken it for a fact that the legacy of 19th-century figures such as Kant, Fichte, Hegel, or even Nietzsche, were in some sense rightly invoked by their self-proclaimed inheritors as justifiers of German militarism.

This paper will begin by exploring that part of what I referred to as the “cultural war” that has to do with philosophy. More specifically, as we shall see, the way philosophers in Britain and Germany dealt with the war is intimately related to this idea of the legacy of Kant and post-Kantian philosophy. More ambitiously, I will try to trace connections between the First World War and subsequent developments of factors that would gradually lead to the formation of the idea of a divide between analytic and continental philosophy. The study focuses on the rhetorical and outright propagandistic uses in which philosophy, or rather appeals to philosophy, were employed during the war (to the detriment of careful study of the arguments, which would require much longer study). The reason why focus on such surface impressions is useful here is because, as I shall show, it was such proclamations, rather than detailed philosophical argument, which shaped the subsequent history of philosophy, by giving philosophers excuses not to read some of their peers’ work.
1. IT WAS ALL NIETZSCHE’S FAULT

The philosophy of F. W. Nietzsche was, perhaps above that of any other Germanophone thinker, the subject of most abuse during the war. As Nicholas Martin has shown, most of the wartime commentary on Nietzsche was based on gross exaggerations of doctrines that are either based on very selective readings of his work, or simply on ignorance of that work. The breakout of war, it seems, could be blamed on Nietzsche, due to the fact that Gavrilo Princip, who had assassinated Archduke Ferdinand, had been a follower of Nietzsche. And though the “Black Hands,” the Nietzsche-inspired secret society of which Princip was a member, had been militant against Austria’s annexation of Bosnia, this did not prevent British propagandists in the autumn of 1914 from identifying Nietzsche with the policies of the Kaiser. Nietzsche’s aphoristic texts, though explicitly anti-nationalistic and even anti-German, often develop romanticised images of war. This allowed for the projection of all sorts of meanings onto selected fragments. Nietzsche’s German publishers might have seen an opportunity for sales here. The war anthologies of Nietzsche’s work were best sellers among the German soldiers. According to the Nietzsche scholar Karl Jöel, this was evidence that “this people went to war with their souls.” This was the basis of the British propagandists’ myth that Thus Spake Zarathustra was somehow formally included in the Prussian infantry’s field packs, in place of the bible. The idea of Nietzsche as an obverse alternative to the bible disturbed Nietzsche’s British critics, as is reflected in the following lines of a poem by Edmond Holmes:

Christ or Nietzsche? Right or might?
Truth of Heaven or lies from Hell?
Healing balm or bursting shell?
Freedom’s day or serfdom’s night?

Yet despite the potential ease with which Nietzsche could be abused by the popular press for the purposes of propaganda, once the professional philosophers stepped in the arena the project was abandoned. Nietzsche was neither on the minds nor on the reading lists of many academic philosophers at the time. In fact, Nietzsche’s depiction as the mastermind behind the Kaiser’s policies was the first acquaintance with his thought for many in the Anglophone world. Furthermore, in Germany the mainstream of academic philosophy was dominated by Neo-Kantianism, whose mainly epistemological conception of philosophy had little to do with Nietzsche. Some German academics, for example Wilhelm Dilthey...
and Rudolf Eucken, did already draw inspiration from Nietzsche's work prior to the war. Another exceptional case was Bergson, who was himself not in the mainstream of French academic philosophy but rather, like Nietzsche, had at the time a more broad impact on an intellectual elite beyond the circles of academia. These would be the sources from which, at the end of the war, the predominantly Germanophone tradition of Lebensphilosophie would be put together to challenge the Neo-Kantian establishment.

What was on the minds of mainstream academics, nonetheless, was a Germanophone tradition of philosophy that had begun with Kant. As a reviewer of Dewey's wartime polemic for the New York Times put it,

> Not Nietzsche, but Immanuel Kant is responsible for the spirit of twentieth century Germany. Not belief in the superman but belief in the categorical imperative and the thing-in-itself has sent Germany to war with the world. Not *Thus Spake Zarathustra* but the *Critique of Pure Reason* explains the amazing utterances of Bernhardi, of Treitschke, of Wilhelm himself.

The claim that Kant, a staunch defender of cosmopolitanism and “perpetual peace,” was in any way responsible for the war appears even more controversial than the idea that the anti-Prussian Nietzsche was posthumously guiding the Kaiser’s hand. Had we not already come across the Manifesto of the 93, we might have been severely puzzled as to where someone like Dewey could have gotten the impression that Kant was somehow responsible for the war. It is, therefore, to the Germanophone claims to the legacy of Kant that we must now turn.

### 2. WAR AND THE GERMAN LEGACY OF KANT

As Beiser has maintained, the period from the middle of the 19th century up to the outbreak of the First World War can, without exaggeration, be described as “one of the most creative and revolutionary periods of modern philosophy,” even if it has been “little studied in German [and] even less in English.” The metaphilosophical debates taking place during this period, revolving around a certain crisis regarding philosophy’s self-conception, were crucial in shaping philosophy’s reaction to the successes of the positive sciences in the 19th century. From the 1890s to 1914, Germanophone academic philosophy was mainly concerned with the methodological issue of criticising “psychologism,” in parallel to related methodological projects of critique directed against various
other vague “isms” such as positivism, historicism, materialism, and relativism.\(^{25}\)

The emergence of experimental psychology laboratories raised the question of whether psychologists should hold positions in philosophy departments, an issue that is inseparable from philosophical critiques of psychologism.

One of the first overt attacks against psychologism is to be found in the work of Frege, whose hostile review of Husserl’s brand of psychologism seems to have disrupted the correspondence between these two “grandfathers” (as Michael Dummett calls them) of, respectively, analytic philosophy and continental phenomenology.\(^{26}\) Whatever one thinks of the heated debate during the past few decades over the relationship between Frege’s and Husserl’s anti-psychologism, Husserl’s claim to refute psychologism in the first volume of his *Logische Untersuchungen* (1900) is clearly the origin of the controversy known as the *Psychologismusstreit* that remained at the forefront of Germanophone philosophy for the next fourteen years, and which (alongside almost all other philosophical activity in the Germanophone world), came to a halt with the start of the war. Philosophy’s identity crisis,\(^{27}\) of which the turn-of-the-century anti-psychologism had been a result, seemed to have found a temporary solution in philosophers’ assuming the role of defenders of Germany’s cause.\(^{28}\)

It is perhaps telling that, one hundred years later, German philosophers’ wartime writings mostly remain untranslated in English. By contrast to the unrefined accusations against Nietzsche, these were attempts to justify the war by men who had devoted their lives to rational thought. It is thus even more troubling that such men could allow themselves to join the supposed general enthusiasm for the war. Neo-Kantian philosophers, who had seen themselves as inheritors of the legacy of Enlightenment humanism, would come to write tracts celebrating Germany’s cause. Perhaps the most unexpected aspect of Neo-Kantian support for German militarism was that offered by Herman Cohen, the head of the Marburg school of Neo-Kantianism, who also happened to be Jewish. In a 1914 address to the Kant Society of Berlin, Cohen repeats a refrain that would be found in the “Manifesto of the 93” when he attacks the distinction between culture and its defence through war, conjoining Germany as a nation of poets with Germany as a nation of soldiers.\(^{29}\) According to Cohen,

> Germany is and remains in continuity with the eighteenth century and its cosmopolitan humanity ... [In] us there struggles the originality of a nation with which no other can compare.\(^{30}\)
For Cohen, there appears to be no clash between the cosmopolitan Enlightenment values to which he aspired and Germany's participation in the war. Or, as the “Manifesto of the 93” puts it:

Without German militarism, German civilization would have vanished long ago from the face of the earth ... [The] German army and German people are one.31

This idea of the oneness of the German people and the army seems to go some way to explaining why at the start of the war philosophers ceased their disputes over psychologism and adjusted to their new role as the army’s propagandists.32

One of the most prolific of the philosopher-propagandists during the war was another Neo-Kantian, Paul Natorp. Our puzzlement regarding the possible alignment of Kantian Enlightenment values, socialist politics, and Prussian militarism was not shared by Natorp, who based one of his arguments in favour of the war on this seemingly incoherent alignment. In his 1915 book *Der Tag des Deutschen*,33 Natorp claims that, by contrast to the Western countries that had dedicated their efforts to imperial conquests, Germany had developed its philosophy. Somehow, the superiority of German academic-philosophical learning made it a good candidate for winning the war. Furthermore, Germany had applied its philosophical advances to the idea of a society based on reason. Socialism and militarism could come together in a society where “the autonomy of rational will”34 would be the basic organising principle. This Kantian form of socialism, according to Natorp, justified Germany’s war.35

Neo-Kantian philosophical defences of the Kaiser’s position in the war such as Natorp’s, were typical of the German professoriate’s defence of German militarism. We can view Natorp’s defence as a development of the quasi-Kantian ideal of a non-individualistic, non-egalitarian socialism that went hand-in-hand with a critique of Western European capitalistic societies, especially Britain. One aspect of this criticism was developed by the economist and sociologist Werner Sombart, who in a 1915 pamphlet famously interpreted the war in the Western front as one between “traders” [*Händler*] and “heroes” [*Helden*].36 Obviously Sombart’s heroes were German, while the traders were English. According to Sombart, the English capitalists are traders in that they view the world in terms of transactions, positioning themselves as the ones who receive. By contrast, the German hero “approaches life with the question: what can I give you?.”37 The former is not
only characteristic of English society, but also of the philosophy developed by that society. Sombart traces a trajectory of the “trader’s spirit,” starting from Bacon and leading up to utilitarian ethics, which he sees as characterised by individualism. The ideal life lived according to the Benthamite principle of “the greatest happiness of the greatest number” is interpreted by Sombart as resulting in “comfort with respectability: apple pie and Sunday service, peaceableness and football, money-making and leisure for some hobby.”

When applied to political theory, the “trader’s spirit” leads to a kind of fear of the state, advocating non-interventionist policies which would allow traders to comfortably go on with their transactions.

Sombart’s division between traders and heroes can be seen as relying on an older distinction developed in Germanophone academia prior to the war, between culture and civilisation. The German “mandarin” academics, as Fritz Ringer calls them, had sought to justify their existence by appeal to the notion that the civilisations which developed through technological progress in the Western world were lacking the inner cultivation that constitutes a culture. Therefore the German state required a learned intellectual elite which would uphold its traditions, keeping the flame of this culture alive in German Universities. It is notable that, like Natorp’s idea of a community of “autonomous rational wills,” the division between civilisation and culture can be traced to Kant, who discusses it as follows:

We are cultivated to a great extent by the arts and the sciences. And we are civilized to a troublesome degree in all forms of social courteousness and decency. But to consider ourselves to be already fully moralized is quite premature. For the idea of morality is part of culture. But the use of this idea, which leads only to that which resembles morality in the love of honor and outward decency, comprises only mere civilization.

While clearly a distortion of Kant’s views, the Neo-Kantian philosopher Alois Riehl would come to see the division between civilisation and culture as that over which the war was fought. According to Riehl, Germany’s enemies had been characterised by civilisations directly determined by the advances of technology and capitalism. Riehl seems to be in line with Sombart’s critique of utilitarianism when he claims that calculative, instrumental uses of reason belong still to the realm of technological civilisation. According to Riehl, in a line that anticipates subsequent continental critiques of the relation between rationality and techno-
capitalism, “Even intellectualism, i.e. the training of our understanding, is no more than civilisation, it is merely something external.” It is against this mere civilisation, and in defence of culture, that Germany must go to war. Echoing Cohen’s idea of cosmopolitanism, Riehl claims that “[w]e fight this war in order to preserve and improve our culture, and we know that thereby we fight for the future of mankind.”

3. NEGOTIATING THE LEGACY OF GERMAN IDEALISM

It is not surprising, given the claims about Kant involved in German philosophical propaganda, that Anglophone philosophers would raise issues regarding the association of the German Idealist tradition with German militarism. As already mentioned, the debate begins with Dewey’s indictment of the idealists in his 1915 *German Philosophy and Politics*, which of course is more scholarly than its *New York Times* review cited above. Dewey’s book issues a serious challenge to the idealistic establishment in the Anglophone philosophical world, from which his own thought had emerged prior to the war. The controversy that ensues dominates British philosophical debate during the war, and revolves around issues to do with political philosophy and international relations. One of the most well known takes on this debate comes from the dedication of Hobhouse’s 1918 *The Metaphysical Theory of the State*, a letter to his son who is fighting in the trenches. It begins by juxtaposing the image of their reading Kant together in their home garden before the war began, to that of his reading Hegel while Hobhouse hears German planes over London:

Was this a time for theorizing or destroying theories, when the world was tumbling about our ears? My second thoughts ran otherwise. To each man the tools and weapons that he can best use. In the bombing of London I had just witnessed the visible and tangible outcome of a false and wicked doctrine, the foundations of which lay, as I believe, in the book before me. To combat this doctrine effectively is to take such part in the fight as the physical disabilities of middle age allow. Hegel himself carried the proof-sheets of his first work to the printer through streets crowded with fugitives from the field of Jena. With that work began the most penetrating and subtle of all the intellectual influences which have sapped the rational humanitarianism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and in the Hegelian theory of the god-state all that I had witnessed lay implicit. You may meet his Gotha in mid air, and may the full power of a just cause be
with you. I must be content with more pedestrian methods. But “to make
the world a safe place for democracy,” the weapons of the spirit are as
necessary as those of the flesh.\footnote{42}

Though for Hobhouse the attack on Hegelian political philosophy had seemed
an obvious contribution to the war effort, it was not at all clear that this was
a conception of patriotic duty shared by all British philosophers. The influence
of German high culture, including German Idealism, had been a force that had
shaped British philosophy prior to the war.\footnote{43} This is why most British attacks
against Kant and Hegel were directed against their British advocates, not the
German professors.

In response to allegations of responsibility for the war made against German
philosophical theories of the state, the German-British pragmatist philosopher
at Oxford, F. C. S. Scott Schiller, would argue in his review of Dewey’s *German
Philosophy and Politics* that

> The large and influential section of our rulers which was educated at
Balliol by T. H. Green and his followers has been for years indoctrinating
us with this same theory [that of German philosophy] without any terrible
effects. So may not the verdict of history be that philosophic ideas had as
little to do with it as with other wars?\footnote{44}

Schiller’s approach characterises the British Idealists’ response to their opponents,
whose attacks were epitomised in the charge directed against Bosanquet of being
a “Prusso-phil [sic] philosopher.”\footnote{45} To such charges, the general response seems
to have been an acceptance of a certain degree of philosophical Prussophilia, to
be distinguished from other forms of Prussophilia. In other words, Anglophone
philosophers influenced by Germanophone thought would insist, as Schiller does,
that Germanophone philosophy has little to do with German militarism. For this
they would need to uphold the distinction between German culture and Prussian
militarism which the German professors had vehemently attacked.

One may object to the idea of the pervasiveness of Germanophone influence on
British academic philosophy by claiming that British Idealism had, by the time of
the war, been overthrown by an even more purely British philosophical movement,
analytic philosophy. This is a distorted picture on two levels. On the one hand, it
would be wrong to imagine British Idealism to have simply vanished due to Russell
and Moore’s criticisms, which did not result in the immediate resignation of all British Idealists from their academic positions. British philosophy departments would include members working in the BritishIdealist tradition until long after the First World War. In fact, it had been Russell, and not the British Idealists whom he criticised, who would lose his academic position during the war, due to his pacifist stance. On the other hand, it would be wrong to believe the subsequent depiction of the birth of analytic philosophy as a somehow particularly British philosophical revolution. As David Bell has argued, rather than seeing the analytic “coup” as a revolutionary act of creation ex nihilo, as it was commonly portrayed after the war, it would be more correct to view it as based on Russell and Moore’s acquaintance with developments which had taken place in Germanophone philosophical debates of the latter half of the 19th century. One can trace a line of influence on pre-war British philosophy by a series of Germanophone thinkers opposed to German Idealism, including Herbart, Bolzano, and Brentano.

Because Hegel and Kant, not the lesser known Bolzano or Brentano, were at the epicentre of the cultural wars, the British Idealists could be seen Prussophile, while Russell and Moore could add the epiphenomenal label of ‘Britishness’ to what would later be called “analytic philosophy.” Though this label made little difference to the way in which the content of analytic philosophy developed, we can see it as a precursor for subsequent troubled relations with non-analytic philosophical trends. We could say that it is the condition of possibility for carelessly bundling all non-analytic approaches to Western philosophy as “continental.”

4. AFTER THE WAR

Let us now move on to how things turned out after the war. The international academic scene immediately after the war was shaped by the boycotting of German and Austrian academics from international scholarly associations, conferences, or other events. By contrast to the prominence that German Universities enjoyed in international academic networks prior to the war, they now found themselves isolated. Furthermore, due to the post-war economy, a large number of Germanophone University graduates would find themselves unable to secure academic positions.

It is possible here to generalise regarding the divergent ways in which the legacy of the cultural wars was worked through during the decade following the end of hostilities. For Germanophone philosophy, this would be played out in the
gradual dissociation of a younger generation of philosophers from the Neo-Kantian establishment that had participated in the cultural wars. By contrast, one might argue that British philosophy simply incorporated the polemic against Anglo-German Idealism developed during the war into its self-image. The British Idealist tradition was portrayed as having died out after the war, while the analytic tradition which would come to replace British Idealism as the mainstream in academic philosophy, despite having avoided participation in the cultural wars, would eventually grow willing to adopt its designation as somehow more British than its idealist predecessor.

In what follows I will illustrate these developments by focusing on two events that shaped interwar philosophy. The first is Husserl’s 1922 lecture series at UCL, while the second is the 1929 Davos Hochschule. Both events were conceived as efforts towards overcoming the war’s effects. As I will show, both are also crucial in understanding the development of the idea of the analytic/continental divide.

4a. Husserl’s UCL lectures

When Russell was imprisoned for his activities in favour of pacifism in 1918, he took with him a copy of Husserl’s *Logische Untersuchungen*. Despite the ban on German books during the war, Russell had planned on reviewing the book for *Mind*. His philosophical views had already been seen, prior to the war, by the modernist poet and self-professed dilettante philosopher T. E. Hulme as somehow close to those proposed by Husserl. Unfortunately Hulme would go on to die in the same war which he had bitterly defended against Russell’s pacifism, and so his idea of the proximity of Russell and Husserl’s philosophy was never seriously fleshed out. Russell never finished his projected review of Husserl, though he did write a letter to Husserl about it. He seems to have thought highly of the book, which he would later praise as being “a monumental work” which he sees as part of “a revolt against German idealism ... from a severely technical standpoint” and which he places alongside the work of Frege, Moore, and himself.

It might seem puzzling, then, that analytic philosophers seemingly did not pay much attention to one of their founding fathers’ praise of phenomenology. It should be noted however that, whether or not due to Russell’s sympathy, a number of analytic philosophers had indeed been interested in phenomenology at around this time, among whom we might mention Carnap who studied under Husserl, Wittgenstein who at some point during the twenties would see his own work as
phenomenology, and Ryle who mentions in his autobiography that he taught a course titled “Logical Objectivism: Bolzano, Brentano, Husserl and Meinong” at Oxford in the 1920s.\(^{55}\)

Ryle nonetheless mentions that the course was unwanted. This may have to do with the fact that Husserl had been the first Germanophone philosopher to lecture in Britain after the war. Husserl’s lecture series at UCL has been seen as a fiasco that failed to win over any converts to phenomenology (with the possible exception of Ryle), or to have convinced any British philosophers that willingness to read Germanophone philosophers might be rewarding.\(^{56}\) This has less to do with the ideas that Husserl presented to his British audience than the way in which he presented them. Husserl’s lectures, presented in German, seem to have presumed some familiarity with Husserl’s earlier work and jargon. It did not help that Husserl had decided that it would be appropriate to name his philosophy “transcendental idealism,” which would not win him any friends in 1922. Russell’s clarification that Husserl’s work was in fact part of a revolution against German Idealism came too late, and was not substantial enough to reverse the bad impression Husserl had left. And whereas he would tell his French audience, in much better French, that he was an unorthodox Cartesian – thereby paving the way for his canonization in France (a point further reinforced by the Franco-German philosophical rapprochement that would take place at Davos, to which we now turn) – Husserl’s English translation had implied to his British audience that he was in the line of influence of Kant and Hegel.

4b. Davos: The demise of Neo-Kantianism

German interwar philosophy was marked by the demise of the old Neo-Kantian philosophical schools, and this decline is arguably crucial to the development of the idea of an analytic/continental divide. As Michael Friedman has shown,\(^{57}\) understanding one of the crucial moments in the history of the divide, namely Carnap’s polemic against Heidegger, requires a background understanding of the decline of Neo-Kantianism. In fact, as I have argued elsewhere, the Carnap-Heidegger affair is best understood in the context of a certain polarisation within Germanophone philosophy, a consequence of the decline of the old establishment, rather than as part of an analytic/continental divide characterised by a lack of engagement between camps.\(^ {58}\) There were, of course, more than two candidates for the philosophical throne of the Neo-Kantians, and one could see the end of the war as being cause for a general reassessment of Kant’s legacy by various
philosophical schools including *Lebensphilosophie*, Marxism, Phenomenology, Frankfurt School Critical Theory, Heideggerian Existentialism, and Logical Positivism. Nevertheless, explaining the decline of Neo-Kantianism is crucial for understanding the move from interwar philosophy to the development of the analytic/continental divide. One could attempt to explain it by the mere fact that almost all the Neo-Kantians, with the exception of Ernst Cassirer, had either died or retired soon after the war. Yet, as Beiser puts it, this supposed explanation “begs the question why no one came to replace them.”

There seem to remain two main options for explaining Neo-Kantianism’s interwar decline. The standard account portrays the rationalistic Neo-Kantians in struggle with the irrationalism of *Lebensphilosophie* and Heideggerianism. The tale to be told in favour of this view is tightly interwoven with the legacy of the First World War, as well as the development of the idea of the opposition of a continental (primarily Franco-German) philosophy to Anglophone analytic philosophy. The symbolic death of Neo-Kantian philosophy has commonly been seen as taking place in the 1929 Davos *Hochschule*. This had been part of a series of annual meetings at Davos conceived of as a “Locarno for intellectuals,” a post-war rapprochement between French and German academics. The high point of the proceedings was a formal dispute between Cassirer and Heidegger over the legacy of Kant. This would be attended by numerous French and German philosophers, including Emmanuel Levinas, Maurice de Gandillac, Jean Cavaillès, Léon Brunschvicg, Eugen Fink, Joachim Ritter, Otto Friedrich Bollnow, and Rudolf Carnap. For various reasons, which I have discussed elsewhere, the meeting was popularly depicted in terms of a victory on Heidegger’s behalf. Thus the effort at Franco-German re-acquaintance would result in a generation of young French philosophers taking the news of Heidegger’s victory back to France, leading to the eventual popular triumph of existentialism after the Second World War. On the Austro-German side, however, this would result in an analytic critique of Heidegger, as well as a subsequent critique of both Heidegger and his analytic critics by the Frankfurt School. Carnap’s polemical challenge was issued at first in the context of a lecture to the students of the Dessau Bauhaus in September 1929, where Carnap would encourage artists and designers to fill in the gap which is left once metaphysical nonsense (exemplified by Heidegger’s pronouncement that “Das Nichts selbst nichtet”) is overcome. Carnap’s attack was, however, accompanied in that same year by sympathetic remarks on Heidegger by both Wittgenstein (who claimed that he “can readily think what Heidegger means by Being and Dread”) and Ryle. Ryle’s self-proclaimed sympathy towards Heidegger...
does not seem to preclude him from prophesying that phenomenology is “at present heading for bankruptcy and disaster and will end either in self-ruinous Subjectivism or in a windy mysticism.”

To go back, however, to our question regarding Neo-Kantianism’s decline, we may here turn to one of the most common depictions of Cassirer and Heidegger at Davos, as offered by Hendrik Pos. Pos contrasts the “Apollonian” figure of Ernst Cassirer, “the heir of Kant ... tall, powerful, serene,” with Heidegger, who he sees as harbouring “feelings of loneliness, of oppression, and of frustration, such as one has in anxious dreams.” Such feelings, Pos goes on to argue, were shared by the academic youth of Germany, which turned to Heidegger due to sharing such feelings with him rather than due to the philosophical content of his work. Notice that Cassirer could be portrayed, 15 years after the war, as a rationalistic proponent of the Weimar Republic continuing the Neo-Kantians’ legacy. After the war, the remaining Neo-Kantians had followed a portion of German academia in defending the Weimar Republic against its numerous critics, epitomised by Cassirer’s lecture on the occasion of its tenth anniversary in 1928. Thus, to summarise this way of explaining the decline of Neo-Kantianism, we could say that it fell, together with the Republic, by the hand of its irrationalist enemies.

There is, however, another possible explanation, which would at least partly locate Neo-Kantianism’s decline in the stance it defended during the First World War. Though one may argue that beyond the surface appearance of jingoism there had been a rational force at work in Neo-Kantianism’s war-time arguments, they had been rendered irrelevant by the Central Powers’ defeat. Furthermore, one might argue that the war had arbitrarily put the significant philosophical debates in which the Neo-Kantians had been engaged before 1914 to an end. Not only had these establishment figures arguably given up serious philosophy in order to become propagandists, but furthermore their pre-war philosophical views seemed to have little relevance to what was interesting and new in the post-war philosophical scene. The fundamental distrust towards modernity characteristic of the academic establishment prior to the war was sidelined by the new varieties of modernism in philosophy as much as in other aspects of culture, including a kind of “reactionary modernism.”
CONCLUSION: THE RELATION BETWEEN THE WAR AND THE DIVIDE

Having presented this overview of the situation that developed between 1914 and 1929, we can go on to ask how it was that the war and its legacy contributed to the subsequent emergence of the idea that philosophy is divided into two camps, analytic and continental. To clarify, I talk about its subsequent emergence since, prior to the Second World War, no philosopher had thought in such terms, and thus to imagine that the idea of the divide existed in the interwar period would be anachronistic. [Indeed the first explicit mention of a divide between English and Franco-German philosophy that I have been able to trace was uttered by Georges Bataille in 1951, after a night of drinking with A. J. Ayer and Merleau-Ponty. Furthermore, though the term “analytic philosophy” had been used by Collingwood in the 1930s to describe a certain tendency of thought to which he was opposed. The term would only play a significant role in the self-perception of analytic philosophers with the end of the Second World War.]

Scholars have connected the war to the divide in different ways. Peter Simons, for example, notes that the death of Adolf Reinach (Husserl’s former star-student) in the trenches, would allow phenomenology to take the Heideggerian path that it did. Had Reinach lived, it might have been possible to see Carnap’s polemic against Heidegger as siding with a phenomenological opposition to Heidegger rather than an opposition to phenomenology tout court. However, while Simons correctly notes that the effects of the war on the divide are uncertain, and so goes on to discuss the crucial issue of the demise of Neo-Kantianism and the rise of Heideggerianism without any other reference to the war, as I have shown above, the war is clearly of central importance to it.

A way of linking the war to the divide through the sociology of knowledge has recently been offered by Steve Fuller. Fuller seeks to explain the German academics’ pronouncements in favour of militarism by appeal to the idea that the perceived superiority of Germany over the Western powers was due to the superiority of its academic learning. Fuller then sees the subsequent developments in philosophy which lead to the analytic/continental divide as responses to the perceived failure of the German University system, associated with losing the war. Though this perception of failure may be partly correct in connection to our question regarding the demise of Neo-Kantianism, Fuller’s account unfortunately contains a problematic degree of over-generalisation. For example, he associates German learning with “German Idealism,” paying little attention to the important
developments in Germanophone philosophy after Hegel and up to the war (which one might want to refrain from placing under the banner of German Idealism). It might, however, be significant to look at Fuller’s proposal as one of the multiple aspects of the phenomenon of the demise of Neo-Kantianism and its effects on interwar Germanophone academic philosophy.

A more precise take on the relationship between the war and the divide was recently presented by Jack Reynolds, who has argued that the war led to a split over the relation between philosophy and politics or history. Analytic philosophy becomes, according to Reynolds, a kind of philosophy that dissociates itself from politics, while the various strands of continental philosophy are characterised by an embeddedness of political thinking in their theorising. Even if analytic philosophy is to be thought of as associated with this meta-philosophical demarcation from politics (conceived in non-essentialist terms as a family resemblance), there is nonetheless a particular element in post-war analytic philosophy that Reynolds’ view does not seem able to account for. The extrusion of politics from interwar philosophy (and vice versa, i.e. the prohibition against the uses, which are necessarily abuses, of philosophy in political life), is not only to be found in philosophers’ silence about politics. It is also exemplified not only by Russell’s revival of the critique against German Idealism, with its references to “the German treatment of Belgium,” but also by Neurath’s Anti-Spengler, in many ways a prequel to Carnap’s criticisms of Heidegger. In the case of Neurath, who was writing while imprisoned for his participation in the Bavarian Soviet Republic in 1919, the banishment of philosophy (or, as Neurath puts it, “pseudo-rationalism”) from the sphere of political action is clearly a political project: “Anti-metaphysicians strengthen the force of the proletariat.” Neurath was perhaps exceptional in explicitly linking the anti-metaphysical work of logical positivism to Marxist political action. There was, however, an implicit remnant of Neurath’s spirit in the overall project of segregating analytic philosophy and politics. Though most early analytic philosophers did conceive of philosophy as politically neutral, this was, in many cases, itself a political position. It might further be noted that analytic philosophy’s political neutrality was formed in opposition to views of the embeddedness of political thinking in philosophy that were perceived as connected with the war (e.g. contra Hegel, Spengler, or Heidegger).

As already mentioned, some of the developments surrounding the Great War and its aftermath can be seen as constituting conditions of possibility for the emergence of the idea of the divide. It would be mistaken to think of philosophy
during the interwar period as divided into two and only two warring camps, since it involves a plurality of factions. That is not to say that there are no interesting philosophical disagreements, or clashing metaphilosophical conceptions, during the period we are discussing. It is rather to say that a schema based on bilateral opposition is inadequate for capturing interwar philosophical debates. One could suggest an alternative schema: that of a branching out from an older order centred around types of Kantian or post-Kantian idealist philosophy, towards various “revolts” against the old establishment. The old establishment was one in which idealist philosophers could meaningfully debate amongst themselves and with rival non-idealist philosophers. The various “revolts” against idealism take place in such a way as to allow a limited degree of dialogue with rival idealists, but somehow muddle dialogue with rival “revolutionaries.”

Of course there are various limitations to this schema. First of all, in being schematic, it might fail to account for all significant details. This is, nonetheless, the kind of trouble that is faced by such attempts at generalisation, and is perhaps tolerable only by contrast to the kind of over-generalisation included in the idea of an analytic/continental divide. A particular problem, however, which arises from the general schema is its portrayal of a quasi-unity of pre-war idealist philosophy, which is presupposed in the notion that pre-war philosophers were somehow more able to engage in a supra-national exchange of views. Again, though this is limiting with regard to the schema at hand, if one contrasts it with the schema of an analytic/continental divide it becomes clear that it is a more likely candidate for a verifiable claim: the numbers of philosophers involved in idealistic schools between the 19th century and the Great War are far fewer than those involved in the analytic/continental divide.

Prior to the war, Anglophone, Francophone, and Germanophone philosophers may be seen as having, to a large extent, been able to converse about their shared concerns over the legacy of thinkers such as Kant or Hegel. Germanophone academia had established international prestige through scholarly networks which ensured that being versed in some form of Germanophone learning was an integral part of academic training throughout the world. The war caused the collapse of these networks, and the effects of this collapse included a cultural war between philosophers in Germany, Britain, France, and the United States. In the aftermath of the war, German scholars were excluded from international academic activity. And whereas Franco-German philosophical relations would be rekindled after the war at affairs like Davos, British hostilities toward German philosophy would not
come to be revised after the war. This, I claim, is the cultural-political framework in which the development of the idea of the analytic/continental divide became possible.84

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NOTES

4. The library, built in 1345, was arguably a masterpiece of high medieval architecture. Its collections of around 230,000 volumes included over a thousand 12th century manuscripts, nearly a thousand 15th and 16th century incunabula and postincunabula, portraits of scholars and philosophers such as Erasmus and Justus Lipsius, all of which were deliberately destroyed along with the building. See Jeff Lipkes, *Rehearsals: The German Army in Belgium, August 1914* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2007).
10. Such an extensive scholarly study, with regard to Anglo-German philosophical exchange during the war is found in Peter Hoeres, *Der Krieg der Philosophen: Die Deutsche und Britische Philosophie im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004).
13. As Martin, “Nietzsche as Hate-Figure in Britain’s Great War” (esp. 148-150) shows, British commentators had portrayed the triumvirate of Nietzsche - Treitsch - Bernhardi as responsible for the “ideas of 1914,” though the connection between the thought of these three was quite arbitrary.
14. A similar phenomenon is discussed by Boutroux, who mentions German tear-off calendars with “quotations from German thinkers, intended to explain and justify the conduct of their country in this war” [Émile Boutroux, *Philosophy and War*. Trans. Fred Rothwell. (London: Constable, 1916), vi].
15. Martin, “Nietzsche as Hate-Figure in Britain’s Great War,” 155.
17. Cited in Martin “Nietzsche as Hate-Figure in Britain’s Great War,” 154.
21. Here Bergson’s account can be contrasted to Dewey’s. Bergson’s overall view of the war was as
a clash between spirit and machine, in which philosophy had little part to play, being “doomed to translate into ideas what was, in its essence, insatiable ambition and will perverted by pride” (The Meaning of the War, 29). As Bergson puts it, “Germany, having finally become a predatory nation, invokes Hegel as witness; just as a Germany enamoured of moral beauty would have declared herself faithful to Kant” (The Meaning of the War, 30). Furthermore Bergson sees Germany’s war as an abandonment of the Kantian principles of “the inviolability of right, the eminent dignity of the person, the duty of mutual respect among nations” (The Meaning of the War, 45), which German philosophers had “received for the most part from the France of the eighteenth century and of the Revolution” (The Meaning of the War, 45). In France, it was Boutroux who defended the Deweyan identification of Kant with German militarism, going as far as to claim that “their generals state that the German officer is nothing else than the visible representative, the incarnation, of the categorical imperative” (Boutroux, Philosophy and War, v).

22. Anonymous, “German spirit due to Kant, not Nietzsche: Professor Dewey traces German Militarism back to the famous Philosopher of the Eighteenth Century and his Categorical Imperative.” The New York Times, July 18 1915.


24. See Kusch, Psychologism.

25. See Ringer, The Decline of the German Mandarins, 295-299, where he refers to the emergence of a critique of these vague positions as a response to a “crisis of learning,” Kusch’s Psychologism, 95-122, also connects all these other -isms to psychologism (see esp. 118-120). By contrast with Ringer’s claim that “roughly from 1850 to 1880, German scholars were comparatively unconcerned with philosophical or methodological questions” (The Decline of the German Mandarins, 298), paying more attention to “empirical work in various disciplines” (ibid), Beiser’s After Hegel might allow us to see that controversies over materialism (53-96) and historicism (133-157) during this time might have paved the path for subsequent rejection of such “isms” during the “crisis of learning.”


27. See Beiser, After Hegel, 15-19.

28. In this, philosophers would join a multitude of German academics, though as Kusch’s Psychologism, 219-224, points out, not most psychologists, who had found more practical ways of getting involved in the war effort.


30. Quoted in Habermas, “The German Idealism of the Jewish Philosophers,” 41. Habermas goes on to comment that “This kind of loyalty to the state later delivered over those who in deluded pride called themselves National German Jews to the tragic irony of an identification with their attackers” (41).

31. Quoted in Kusch, Psychologism, 213.

32. See Kusch, Psychologism, 213-219.


34. Quoted in Kusch, Psychologism, 214.

35. Of course, this “true” socialism which Natorp envisaged was one “in which neither egalitarianism nor the race for unearned income would play a role” (Ringer, The Decline of the German Mandarins, 189).


43. If we take J.S. Mill at his word when he writes in 1840 that philosophy in Britain is divided between the scientistic empiricist brand of philosophy advocated by Bentham, and the “continental” Kantianism of Coleridge [John Stuart Mill, “Coleridge.” *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill: Essays on Ethics, Religion and Society* (Vol. 10). Ed. J. M. Robson. (London: Routledge, 1985), 117-164], it would seem that it is a development of the latter which wins out, dominating academic philosophy until the turn of the century.


46. As Akehurst, for example, points out, the Cambridge philosophy department, where analytic philosophy “made quiet progress” [Thomas L. Akehurst, *The Cultural Politics of Analytic Philosophy: Britishness and the Spectre of Europe* (London: Continuum, 2010), 22] was quite small, while “in the much larger philosophy department at Oxford, the ideas of the Cambridge (analytic) school of philosophy were barely discussed” (22) up to the 1930s.


48. See O. W. Nasim, *Bertrand Russell and the Edwardian Philosophers: Constructing the World* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). As Nasim points out, the British New Realists’ debates were shaped by concepts developed by the Austrian Realists, especially through G. F. Stout’s British version of Brentanianism.


50. See Akehurst, *The Cultural Politics of Analytic Philosophy*, 28-29. Though Akehurst may be right in claiming that Russell did not “indulge in bloodthirsty militarism, or German-bashing, in 1914-1918” (29), it should be noted that Russell did participate in a symposium held by the Aristotelian Society in 1915 which was at least partly directed against (British) Hegelian views of the state (and where, for example, on page 313, we find the accusation of Prussophilia directed against Bosanquet); see Burns, Russell, & Cole, “Symposium: The Nature of the State in view of its External Relations.” (As Akehurst clarifies, this is a critique of “the Hegelian view of the state, albeit without mentioning the names of any philosophers alive or dead” (29).)

51. See e.g. Ryle’s (misleading) claims to the Britishness of “the massive developments of our logical theory... partly responsible for the wide gulf that has existed for three-quarters of a century be-
between Anglo-Saxon and Continental philosophy. For, on the Continent during this century, logical studies have, unfortunately, been left unfathered by most philosophy departments and cared for, if at all, only in a few departments of mathematics.” Gilbert Ryle, “Phenomenology vs. The Concept of Mind.” Collected Papers: Critical Essays Vol. 1 (London: Hutchinson, 1971), 182.


57. Michael Friedman, A Parting of the Ways: Carnap, Cassirer, and Heidegger (Chigago: Open Court, 2000).


60. See Kusch, Psychologism, 243.


63. See Vrahimis, Encounters between Analytic and Continental Philosophy, pp. 31-46.


68. Pos, “Recollections of Ernst Cassirer,” 68.

69. According to Ringer (The Decline of the German Mandarins, 202-213), for that minority of German academics that supported Republicanism, this tended to be seen as a case of acceptance of the inevitable; the supporters of the Weimar Republic faced fierce opposition from their conservative peers who stood for an anti-Republican “orthodoxy” (pp. 213-227).

70. See Ernst Cassirer, Die Idee der republikanischen Verfassung (Hamburg: Friedrichsen, 1929).

71. In considering this, Beiser’s “Weimar Philosophy and the Fate of Neo-Kantianism” claims to play “advocatus diiavoli” (p. 116). Though Beiser mentions this option (“Although the neo-Kantians were, to be sure, not the only advocates of the war, some of their most prominent spokesmen—Windelband, Cohen and Natorp—had been especially vocal, indeed fanatical, on its behalf.” (p. 116)), he fails to explain exactly how Neo-Kantianism’s defense of German militarism led to its
Beiser instead locates Neo-Kantianism's decline in its failure to offer an adequate philosophical response to historicism, nihilism, and pessimism. Though these can be portrayed as irrationalistic by contrast to Neo-Kantian rationalism, the “devil’s advocate” can claim that they may have been the rational stance to take after the war, especially given the absence of philosophical refutation.

72. See e.g. Hoeres, Der Krieg der Philosophen.
75. Peter Simons, “Whose Fault?”.
77. But see e.g. Beiser, After Hegel.
84. I am grateful to the Australasian Society for Continental Philosophy, and particularly to Dr Richard Colledge, for the invitation to present at the Society’s 2015 conference, and for providing me with the opportunity to talk about this topic on the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the Great War.
René Descartes’ *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) is a work steeped in temporality. The text is divided into six ‘meditations’ that are purported to occur over six ‘days’. While Descartes’ theory of temporality was not a major aspect of his thought, it appears in various works, most significantly in the *Meditations*, as well as in the * Replies to the Objections* (CSM, II: 66-397), and the *Principles of Philosophy* (CSM, I: 177-291). This article will explore the notions of temporality found within these texts, particularly the *Meditations*. I suggest that a reflection on Descartes’ concept of temporality is of particular interest when considered in the light of the manner in which the text itself is temporal. The temporality of the *Meditations* is a fictional temporality; the ‘days’ of the *Meditations* do not, I would suggest, represent the real historical days in which Descartes was writing this text. These fictive and stylistic elements can influence the way the text is read. Consequently, I will be drawing on theories of narrative to frame the discussion, particularly concepts of experientiality and narrativity proposed by Monika Fludernik.

Two brief preliminaries are in order before beginning this discussion of the *Meditations*. First, the reading given in this article emphasizes the importance of the fact that the narrator of the *Meditations* (‘I’) is not Descartes himself (i.e., the historical figure, who was born in 1596 and died in 1650), but is instead a fictional character. In order to keep this distinction clearly in view, the narrator will be referred to throughout as ‘the Cartesian Meditator’ rather than as ‘Descartes’.
The fictionality of the Cartesian Meditator is uncontentious, but its importance for understanding Descartes’ philosophical project in the *Meditations* has not received the attention it deserves.5

Secondly, the *Meditations* as a whole has the hallmark of a fictional narrative, as it is represented as a series of thoughts occurring over a number of days. The Cartesian Meditator begins the first day as “the man who is only just beginning to philosophize” (CSMK, 332), and ends the final day in a state of properly philosophical knowledge. The arguments of Descartes’ text are thus embedded within a fictional temporal framework. That is, each argument is represented as occurring at a particular temporal point in the epistemological journey of the Cartesian Meditator, and each argument’s position in this fictional temporal sequence is crucial to understanding its role in the overall project of the *Meditations*. These two considerations thus suggest—as will be argued in more detail below—that the *Meditations* is a text that demands a reading which takes seriously not just its discursive arguments but also the fact that those arguments are embedded in a narrative form.6

In order to better lead into this discussion I will provide a brief refresher of the text itself. The plot of the *Meditations* sees the Cartesian Meditator carefully examining his beliefs in turn, and if he can find any cause to doubt them, he will throw them out. He is hoping to cleanse himself of his former errors in order to gain a firm base of knowledge: a stable foundation of beliefs that are unquestionable. These beliefs will act as the framework for a whole belief system through which the Cartesian Meditator can understand himself and the world around him. The activity is presented as occurring over six days. On the first day, The Cartesian Meditator throws all his beliefs into question, including his very existence. On the second, he postulates that he does in fact exist, and that he is a thinking thing. On the third day he casts around to see if he can discover anything beyond himself, which leads him to the idea of God. On the fourth day, Descartes considers the concept of clear and distinct ideas, and how they can keep him from falling into error henceforth. The fifth day includes further consideration of God (and a second proof of God’s existence). Finally, the sixth day of meditation is devoted to further consideration of the distinction between the body and the mind. The passage that forms the basis of Descartes’ concept of temporality is found in the third day of meditation, and will be considered in some detail below.
DESCARTES’ NON-ENDURANCE DOCTRINE

The central passage that will be explored in this article can be found within the third day of the Cartesian Meditator’s reflections. The passage in question, which Jonathan Bennett calls Descartes’ *non-endurance doctrine,* appears towards the end of the Third Meditation:

A lifespan [*omne tempus vitae*] can be divided into countless parts, each completely independent of the others, so that it does not follow from the fact that I existed a little while ago that I must exist now, unless there is some cause which as it were creates me afresh at this moment - that is, which preserves me. *(CSM, II: 33)*

There is an unusual conflation here between creation and preservation, one that many of Descartes’ commentators have discussed. While it goes beyond the scope of this article to explore the distinction between creation and preservation, minor reference will appear throughout. The significant element I will draw on is “lifespan” [*omne tempus vitae*]. Elizabeth Anscombe and Peter Geach translate this as “the whole duration of life.” The passage demands consideration of the entire span, from birth until death, and yet immediately following this passage we are told that life is divided into numerous parts that are completely independent of each other. The text gives a strange impression here. The contrast between the whole span of a unified life, and the discontinuous atoms of events that may add up to a unified existence will be explored below. Also of particular interest will be how Descartes’ notion of time emerges from within these themes.

While in the above quoted passage Descartes is discussing a ‘lifespan’, he alters his language in other works to make it more explicitly about time. *In the First Set of Replies,* Descartes says:

For I regard the *divisions of time* as being separable from each other, so that the fact that I now exist does not imply that I shall continue to exist in a little while unless there is a cause which, as it were, creates me afresh at each moment of time. *(CSM, II: 78-79, emphasis added)*

In this passage Descartes is speaking of the “divisions of time,” rather than of a “lifespan.” An implication of this is that Descartes sees no differentiation between the span of a life and the span of time itself. As Geoffrey Gorham has stated, “it
seems to be one thing for the parts of time itself to be mutually independent, and another for the temporal stages of things that exist in time to be independent.”

Gassendi questioned Descartes on this in the Fifth Set of Objections (CSM, II: 209). Descartes’ somewhat peeved reply to Gassendi suggests that he sees no real distinction worth discussing (CSM, II: 255). It is, I hope, enough for our purposes at this stage to simply be aware that Descartes views the nature of time and the lifespan within it as one and the same. Below I will return to this concept, as it has significant implications once we begin to consider the text as a narrative.

TIME AND THE COGITO

Genevieve Lloyd states that the Meditations is “suffused with a sense of the tenuousness of the self’s capacity either to integrate itself into the world or to maintain a secure relationship with its past.”

In the First Meditation, the Cartesian Meditator outlines that he seeks to begin again from the foundations [a primis fundamentis] (CSM, II: 17), in order to remove the shackles of the past that are binding him to a particular way of thinking. Once the foundations have been removed through his three stages of skeptical enquiry, he no longer has a firm footing, either in the temporal or physical spheres (given he has at this point found no evidence that he actually exists). By the start of the Second Meditation, then, the Cartesian Meditator is untethered and anxious: his skeptical program has been so successful that he has been left in complete turmoil. He says “I feel as if I have fallen unexpectedly into a deep whirlpool which tumbles me around so that I can neither stand on the bottom nor swim up to the top” (CSM, II: 16).

The primary purpose of the Second Meditation, then, is to discover “one firm and immoveable point” (CSM, II: 16) which will be the new foundation on which he can base his new philosophy. The point that he reaches is that “if I convinced myself of something, then I certainly existed” (CSM, II: 17). From here he is able to “finally conclude that this proposition, I am, I exist, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind” (CSM, II: 17, emphasis in text). The Cogito provides a foundational truth. Despite this, though, it will be a long road to greater certainty.

While the Cogito helps to assure the Cartesian Meditator that he himself exists, it provides no assurance about anything beyond him. Quoting Lloyd again, “Time poses a challenge even to the narrator’s capacity to extract from the indubitable Cogito anything more than a momentary existence.” The performance of the Cogito—reciting, “I am, I exist”—assures the Cartesian Meditator that he exists;
however, it does not provide him any further certainty, since it is the performance itself that provides the assurance. Additionally, the Cartesian Meditator knows that he did not bring about his own existence. He makes this clear in the Third Meditation. The Cartesian Meditator here argues that he could not have derived his existence from himself. If he had the power to bring himself into existence, then he would certainly not have created himself with any flaws or imperfections. Since, though, he is an imperfect being, able to identify that he is limited in knowledge and ability, he must lack the power to have created himself (CSM, II: 33). He then takes this argument further. If he has no power to bring himself into existence, then he certainly does not contain the power to preserve himself from one moment to the next. There must, therefore be some other cause other than himself by which he is preserved. John Carriero refers to this cause as a “metaphysical sustainer,” a device by which to explain one’s continued existence from one moment to the next when one is “metaphysically dependent.” So the Cartesian Meditator relies on a cause outside of himself, namely God. God is the means through which the Cartesian Meditator can be assured of his existence from the past into the present, and from the present into the future.

DEVELOPING A STYLISTIC FRAMEWORK

The Cartesian Meditator’s temporal instability and his causal reliance on a higher power are central themes of the Meditations. As well as this, they are dramatised within the structure of the text itself. The fictional days of the Meditations provide distinct temporal breaks. At the end of the First Meditation, Descartes does not have any assurance that he exists. The next day, then, takes on a tentative, critical, importance. The days form narrative edges upon which we can delineate the sections of time in the lifespan of the Cartesian Meditator. In order to consider the text as a narrative, though, it is crucial to develop a working definition through which we can read the ‘narrativity’ of the text. At the beginning of this article I proposed that the Cartesian Meditator, and the ‘days’ of the text, are fictional elements within a narrative. I will now return to this notion, and spend the remainder of the article exploring some avenues (provided by narrative theory) through which to come to terms with this fictional temporality. Since the historical context into which the Meditations was written will inevitably inform discussions of style, I will first provide a brief historical overview.
An investigation into the style of the *Meditations* is certainly not without precedent. In 1983 Amélie Oksenberg Rorty considered the genre of the text, placing it within a form of religious meditation. She began to explore the implications she believed followed on from this genre placement. Rorty also considered the importance of form and style to the philosopher’s ability to intrigue and convince. “Conviction is often carried by a charismatic, authoritative style: its clarity and condensation, the rhythms of its sentences, and its explosive imagery [...] often the form of the work assures its legitimation.” Style will inevitably influence how the text should be read. But more significantly for Rorty, the personality and power of the author are crucial to the overall success of a philosophical work.

Bradley Rubidge considers this observation by Rorty to be helpful, however he suggest that Rorty needed to more clearly define her understanding of ‘genre’. He reads Rorty as tending to “speak of genre in an ahistorical way, as if a genre were constituted by a group of texts that resemble each other.” For Rubidge, while this conception will help to “reveal certain characteristics” shared in common between texts, it will ultimately reveal nothing about an author’s intentions: something that Rubidge believes Rorty has set out to do. In attempting to mitigate these issues in his article, “Descartes’s *Meditations* and Devotional Meditations,” Rubidge presents a more significant analysis of the kind of ‘devotional manual’ that Descartes is perhaps drawing on. This more detailed reading allows him to more precisely test comparisons between Descartes’ text and the wider genre. It thus presents a more historicised reading, that allows for a more accurate consideration of the place of Descartes’ text within the broad genre of devotional literature.

Rubidge argues that Descartes is drawing generally on a type of devotional manual that flourished in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. By calling his text ‘Meditations’ Descartes was harnessing a genre that his readers would have immediately recognised and been very familiar with. Rubidge points out that seventeenth century works of philosophy were not commonly associated with the term ‘meditations’ and so “the title of Descartes’s book would predictably have made readers associate it with the tradition of devotional exercises.” Thanks to the popularity of a number of texts such as St Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises* and St Francis of Sales’ *Introduction to the Devout Life*, the genre of devotional meditations flourished during this period. Descartes is in some
Rubidge provides a helpful analysis of the key features of the genre of devotional meditations, which I will briefly summarise here. According to Rubidge, reflection was the basic component of this kind of devotional meditation. The subject of reflection was usually very specific, frequently drawn from passages of the bible. The primary purpose of the meditations was to “encourage pious beliefs and sentiments that conform to Church Doctrine.” Reflection was intended to be ‘active’ and these meditations were often called ‘exercises’. As a means of training one’s soul, the meditator seeks definite outcomes in terms of their movement towards the divine. As per Saint Francis of Sales in *A Treatise of the Love of God* (1630): “meditation is an attentive thought iterated, or voluntarily entertained in the mind, to excite the will to holy affections and resolutions.” According to Louis Martz, meditation:

> cultivates the basic, lower levels of the spiritual life; it is not, properly speaking, a mystical activity, but a part of the duties of every man in daily life. It is not performed under the operations of special grace, but is available to every man through the workings of ordinary grace.

This demonstrates in part why the genre was popular: it was a spiritual method available to all.

Rubidge highlights a number of points in the *Meditations* that link it to the tradition of devotional meditations. Some of these include the need for solitude to undertake the meditations (CSM, II: 12), contemplation of God (CSM, II: 36), and purging of past ‘sins’ (CSM, II: 12). Rubidge concludes that these features, among others, are not enough to allow us to call the text a work of meditation itself. It utilises features of the genre without itself becoming a work within that genre. He also believes that these links to the meditational genre “should not alter our reading of the text, for the *Meditations* allude to the tradition without adopting its conventions in a way that makes the text distinctly meditational.” Rubidge argues that Descartes himself provides no indication that he is drawing specifically on this genre of devotional exercises, however the title itself intends to subtly alert readers to consider it in that light. While many commentators have attempted to draw connections to particular devotional texts, such as the *Spiritual Exercises*, Rubidge contends that Descartes is rather drawing generally on the genre of devotional meditation. He sees a strategic motivation in Descartes’ use of the genre.
“By linking his text to such a tradition, Descartes signals his adherence to orthodox positions and advertises his desire to conform to, even to support, some of the Church’s fundamental doctrines.”

I take no issue with Rubidge on this conclusion, and in any case the degree to which the Meditations could conceivably be called ‘meditational’ is not the subject of this article. What emerges from Rubidge and Rorty’s discussions of the genre of the text, though, is that Descartes has appropriated stylistic and thematic components of devotional meditations into his text, though to what extent and how successfully he achieved it may be debated. In opposition to Rubidge I contend that the stylistic ‘choice’ on the part of Descartes will inevitably alter our reading of the text. I do not intend to develop an argument about the extent to which Descartes himself was considering other aspects of style. Arguing for authorial intention moves too far into murky hypothetical ground. Descartes’ initial stylistic choice is simply providing the launching point to discover what the application of contemporary narrative theories may glean from the text, when considered from a stylistic perspective. ‘Choice’, then, as applied to Descartes’ method of writing, is used here broadly. The degree to which this choice may alter our reading of the text will be tested.

Defining Narrative

Descartes has chosen to present the Meditations as a series of events, rather than simply as a series of arguments. This crucial choice provides an ideal point of entry into our reading of the text. Porter Abbott defines narrative as “The representation of an event or a series of events.” This broad definition allows considerable scope to view Descartes’ text as a narrative. As with Abbott, Mieke Bal understands narrative to be a succession of events, however she qualifies that “it is only in a series that events become meaningful.” There must be a causal relationship between events if any significant value can be found in the interpretation of a narrative. In the case of the Meditations, each new day follows on from the day before, and it is this that allows the Meditations to be viewed as a narrative, if we are to takeBal’s distinctions into account. The particularly ‘narrative’ passages, such as that quoted above of the Cartesian Meditator feeling as though he has fallen into a whirlpool, make no real sense in isolation. The events of the text build from each other in a chain of succession. This chain of succession provides a satisfactory starting point; however, as Fludernik reveals, thinking beyond simple causality allows for more vast points of discussion.
In her book An Introduction to Narratology (2009) Monika Fludernik speaks of the way we use story-telling to reconstruct our lives. “We like to emphasise how particular occurrences have brought about and influenced subsequent events. Life is described as a goal-directed chain of events which, despite numerous obstacles and thanks to certain opportunities, has led to the present state of affairs.” We base narratives, then, on the cause and effect connections provided by a series of events. However, “the primary concern in narratives is not actually chains of events but the fictional worlds in which the characters in the story live, act, think and feel.” It is not the actions, but the actors within a fictional world themselves with which narrative is ultimately concerned. For Fludernik, it is the experience of the actors within a story-world (experientiality) that produces ‘narrativity’. Thus, the presence of a character is sufficient to produce narrativity: the storyteller figure and plot are not essential. By dispensing with plot and causality, the definitions provided above by Bal and (in notes) Forster are limited. “Experientiality,” Fludernik says, “is at its lowest in the presentation of merely a succession of events and their causal independence” (TNN, 328). Fludernik considers Forster’s example of a plot, “The king died and then the queen died of grief,” as classifiable as plot not because of the chain of events, but rather the inclusion, ‘of grief’, which contains an indication of experientiality (TNN, 328). Fludernik’s definition of narrative runs thus:

A narrative is a representation of a possible world in a linguistic and /or visual medium, at whose centre there are one or several protagonists of an anthropomorphic nature, who are existentially anchored in a temporal and spatial sense and who (mostly) perform goal-directed actions (action and plot structure). It is the experience of these protagonists that narratives focus on, allowing readers to immerse themselves in a different world and in the life of the protagonists.

In light of Descartes’ notion of time, particularly, Fludernik’s conception of narrative provides an appropriate framework with which to consider the narrativity of the Meditations. As highlighted above, the Cartesian Meditator is intimately bound within Descartes’ notion of time. To return to the discussion above, commentators have questioned Descartes’ conflation of a lifespan and the nature of time. Interestingly, it is within the text of the Meditations that Descartes refers to a lifetime, and it is elsewhere that Descartes refers more generally to the divisions of time. The stylistic elements of the Meditations require a different reading; one that, I contend, is amplified in the light of Fludernik’s experiential...
model. The experience of the Cartesian Meditator (whom we are considering to be the central character of the *Meditations*) is so embedded as to be essential to the expression of the philosophical ideas within the text. Fludernik’s character-centric theory will allow for wider consideration than a theory of narrative based solely on ‘causal’ links. One cannot remove the ‘character’ of the text from the thoughts presented.

**EXPERIENTIALITY, NARRATIVISATION**

The experiential model that Fludernik develops in her book *Towards a ‘Natural’ Narratology* contains four levels. As discussed above, experientiality is central to Fludernik’s method. The first level of Fludernik’s method is therefore concerned with “agency, goals, intellation, emotions, motivation, and so on” (TNN, 43). In other words, the “parameters of real life experience” (TNN, 43). In Level II Fludernik considers “four basic viewpoints which are available as explanatory schemas of access to the story” (TNN, 43). These are Telling; Viewing (“the real-world schema of perception”); Experiencing (“access to one’s own narrativisable experience”); and Action or Acting (TNN, 43-44). Level III “comprises well-known naturally recurring story-telling situations,” (TNN, 44) taking into account generic and cultural considerations. In Level IV, “readers utilize conceptual categories from levels I to III in order to grasp, and usually transform, textual irregularities and oddities” (TNN, 45). This process, termed by Fludernik as narrativisation, draws on her reading of Jonathan Culler’s concept of naturalisation:

“Readers, faced with initially inconsistent or incomprehensible texts, attempt to find a frame that can naturalise the inconsistencies or oddities in a meaningful way” (TNN, 45). Fludernik’s narrativisation differs from Culler’s naturalisation by concerning itself exclusively with narrative parameters. “It circumscribes readers’ attempts at making sense of texts,” enabling readers to “re-cognize as narrative those kinds of texts that appear to be non-narrative according to either the natural parameters of levels I and II or the cultural parameters of level III” (TNN, 46). Space delimits any significant application of these four levels of analysis to the *Meditations*. I will concentrate then, on an informal application of only the first level: parameters of experience. Due to the nature of the *Meditations* (and recalling the historical context outlined above) this discussion will inevitably also dip into level III, bringing in considerations of genre. In many ways, this entire project ties into Fludernik’s concept of narrativisation: level IV of her model. The following will provide a semi-structured reading of some key areas of interest that arise once one begins to consider the *Meditations* in the light of Fludernik’s
In the *Meditations*' Preface to the Reader, Descartes says: “I would not urge anyone to read this book except those who are able and willing to meditate seriously with me, and to withdraw their minds from the sense and from all preconceived opinions” (CSM, II: 8). Descartes did not merely want people to read his text; he wanted them to become actively involved in it. Despite Rubidge’s claims to the contrary, outlined above, there are a number of particular precedents for the *Meditations* that are worth consideration. Two in particular, Augustine’s *Confessions*, and Saint Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*, will be considered here briefly in the light of Descartes’ Preface to the Reader. The relevance of Fludernik’s model will emerge in this discussion, as will the centrality of time to this reading of Descartes’ text. I will then conclude this article by considering the central character of the *Meditations*.

According to Stephen Gaukroger, “The *Meditationes* read like an account of a spiritual journey in which the truth is only to be discovered by a purging, followed by a kind of rebirth.” Descartes’ text can be read as inviting the reader to follow him through this same process. Saint Augustine’s *Confessions*, a first person narrative that details Augustine’s conversion to Christianity, contains similar ideas of rebirth and transformation. Patrick Riley regards the *Confessions* as “one of the first narratives of the self through time.” According to V. Bailey Gillespie, “From the Christian perspective religious conversion is an alternation, a turning around.” The concept of a conversion, a *turning away*, connects Descartes’ and Augustine’s texts. Conversion in Augustine’s *Confessions* acts as a pivot of temporality. At one point in the text, Augustine says, (speaking to God) “I am scattered in times whose order I do not understand. The storms of incoherent events tear to pieces my thoughts, the inmost entrails of my soul, until that day when, purified and molten by the fire of your love, I flow together and merge into you.” For Augustine, resting in God enables him to go beyond time, to escape from the disarray and incoherence of temporality by melting into the eternal a-temporality of the divine. Conversion produces a change in the temporal construct. The divided parts that make up ‘Augustine’ pre-conversion are scattered and disparate. Upon conversion, these disparate parts are able to transcend time to be with the creator who is beyond time. Salvation is, in this sense, being rescued from time. Beyond simply an interesting read, Augustine provides his text to bring about conversion in his readers.
The Cogito of the *Meditations* can be seen as a *turning away* from uncertainty towards certainty; and in a sense is a moment of intellectual conversion. The Cartesian Meditator’s temporal instability up until the moment of the Cogito has been discussed above. Edwin Starbuck presents an exploration of conversion that identifies with what is occurring in the *Meditations*. According to Starbuck, conversion is “a process of struggling away from sin rather than of striving toward righteousness.”

51 The Cartesian Meditator at first acknowledges that he is in error (CSM, II: 12). He then grapples with his errors and his doubts until finally, in the Cogito, he reaches a moment of certainty that will form the basis of his life from that point onwards. In this sense, the *Meditations* certainly aligns with Starbuck’s conception. It is Descartes’ attempt to overcome his errors that leads him towards conversion, and a true discovery—and concretisation—of ‘self’. Harry Frankfurt considers that: “Descartes’s aim is to guide the reader to intellectual salvation by recounting his own discovery of reason and his escape thereby from the benighted reliance on his senses, which had formerly entrapped him in uncertainty and error.”

52 Descartes, like Augustine before him, provides his own journey as an exemplar with which the reader can identify.

This identification is much more immediate in the case of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*. As discussed above, there is a distance between the Cartesian Meditator (the ‘I’ of the text) and the historical Descartes. The ‘I’ of Saint Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*, similarly, is removed from the author. In many passages, it is intended that the reader will inhabit the ‘I’. For example: “Again, reflecting on myself, to ask what have I done for Christ, what I am doing for Christ, what ought I to do for Christ; and then seeing Him in such a condition, and thus hanging upon the Cross, to make the reflections which may present themselves.”

53 The text acts in a sense as a script for the reader to follow; the ‘I’ here is in fact the reader performing these exercises, rather than Ignatius, the author of the work. The *Spiritual Exercises* are designed for the reader to go through the process of reflection and meditation over about four weeks. The text is temporally divided, much like the ‘days of meditation’ found in the *Meditations*. Central to the *Spiritual Exercises* is the process of calling to mind particular events on which one will meditate. In the case of the extract above, for example, the meditator is being asked to reflect on Christ dying on the cross. The text asks readers to interpose themselves into the place of the ‘I’. The *Spiritual Exercises* are written as a guide—a form of spiritual direction. The *Meditations* can be read in the same way. As Bernard Williams says: “The ‘I’ of the writer is not so much the historical
Descartes as it is any reflective person working their way through this series of arguments. Martial Gueroult says of Descartes’s Meditations that it is “not, in effect, mere dry geometry, but the initiation of one soul by another soul acting as its guide.” The ‘I’ of both these texts act as both initiator and guide. Consider the following, from the Meditations:

I propose to concentrate on what came into my thoughts spontaneously and quite naturally whenever I used to consider what I was. Well, the first thought to come to mind was that I had a face, hands, arms and the whole mechanical structure of limbs which can be seen in a corpse, and which I called the body. The next thought was that I was nourished, that I moved about, and that I engaged in sense-perception and thinking; and these actions I attributed to the soul. (CSM, II: 17)

The reader does not merely observe the Cartesian Meditator’s process, but (as per Descartes’ instruction in his preface) will participate in this journey themselves. The readers will thus experience the meditations, becoming fully immersed in the action of the text. Descartes’ stylistic motivation (as discussed above) is difficult to fully apprehend. However, he outlines his reading intention quite explicitly.

The engagement on the part of the reader is highlighted through Descartes’ discussion of his method in the Objections and Replies. Asked why he did not demonstrate his arguments in a geometric fashion, starting with definitions and axioms, Descartes responds by discussing two forms of demonstration, Synthesis and Analysis. Synthesis, Descartes says, “employs a long series of definitions, postulates, axioms, theorems and problems, so that if anyone denies one of the conclusions it can be shown at once that it is contained in what has gone before” (CSM, II: 110). The advantage of this method is that even the most argumentative reader must agree with the conclusion, so long as the series of steps that come before are sound. He does not consider this to be a very satisfying method, though, as it fails to “engage the minds of those who are eager to learn, since it does not show how the thing in question was discovered” (CSM, II: 110). Analysis, on the other hand is “the best and truest method of instruction” (CSM, II: 111). Descartes describes analysis as showing the truth “by means of which the thing in question was discovered methodically and as it were a priori, so that if the reader is willing to follow it and give sufficient attention at all points, he will make the thing his own and understand it just as perfectly as if he had discovered it for himself” (CSM, II: 110, emphasis added). However, he qualifies that an argumentative or inattentive
reader will find no cause to follow such an argument.

Descartes’ discussion of analysis demonstrates how significantly Fludernik’s theory of experientiality ties into the *Meditations*. The communication method employed by Descartes for this text is wholly about the conveying of a personal experience, with which the reader can identify (to such an extent that they will subsume themselves into the text). The advantages of employing a method such as Fludernik’s in reading the *Meditations* are numerous. Descartes’ *Meditations* can certainly be considered a narrative text, then; it goes beyond the actantial and causal to draw the reader in to the experience of the Cartesian Meditator. As we are dealing with a narrative centered on personal experience, it is appropriate to close with a brief discussion of the Cartesian Meditator, the central character of the *Meditations*.

**THE CARTESIAN MEDITATOR AS CHARACTER**

As stated above, Descartes’ notions of time were not a major aspect of his thought, nor have they been granted significant attention in secondary literature. The concept of time and its relationship to the *Meditations* overall takes on a much greater importance, though, once we begin to explore these notions of narrativity, fictionality, and character. I suggest that closer attention to these elements may provide a useful way of understanding the themes of the text, particularly Genevieve Lloyd’s notion of the Cartesian Meditator’s tenuous relationship with his past. Indeed, viewed as the protagonist and the narrator, the Cartesian Meditator takes on an even greater sense of the tenuous relationship with the past. This can be highlighted through Teresa Bridgeman’s understanding of the relationship between fictional characters and time. Bridgeman says:

According to the standard protocols of realist narrative, for example, a narrator looking back on her past life cannot step back in time to intervene in events, any more than a protagonist can know what the author does outside the pages of the text. In each case, access from one ‘world’ to another is blocked by their separation in time and space.58

Descartes has effectively dramatised the temporal fragility of the Cartesian Meditator through the simple act of making the narrator of the text a fictional character, rather than himself. As mentioned above, in the *Meditations* Descartes is presenting a man at the *beginning* of a philosophical journey, who *over a number*
of days of meditation, emerges with a stronger understanding of himself and his beliefs. The narrator of the *Meditations* is thus a character on a dramatised journey of discovery: a conduit for Descartes ideas, but necessarily different from Descartes himself.

The ‘lifespan’ of the Cartesian Meditator is divided into discontinuous ‘parts’. Some of these parts (i.e. the six days of meditation) are discernible to the reader. However, the Cartesian Meditator only ‘exists’ within these meditations. Uri Margolin discusses that characters are “usually temporally limited […] and discontinuous, in that not every minute or even year of their lives is presented in the text.” In the same way, the Cartesian Meditator’s existence is discontinuous. While we can only see the meditator through the glimpses we are given, we are left with the impression of a character that exists beyond the boundaries of each meditation. For example, at the beginning of the Second Meditation, the narrator tells us: “So serious were the doubts into which I have been thrown as a result of yesterday’s meditation that I can neither put them out of my mind nor see any way of resolving them” (CSM, II: 16). While the reader is not privy to the events between the First and Second Meditation, the turmoil that the narrator has been suffering in between these two events is implied. The implication fleshes out the character beyond the glimpses that are provided, giving the reader a sense of a unified life that is greater than the discontinuous parts that are shown.

CONCLUSION

The lifespan of a fictitious character, as with the Cartesian lifespan, is divided into parts. These parts are indicated by textual breaks into chapter, scene, page, and so on. We are only given glimpses of the character through particular revealed events. The reader fills the gaps to flesh out the whole. Recalling Mieke Bal, it is the causal link between events that give a sense of a narrative, and in consequence, the form of the character within it. The experience of character, which for Fludernik forms the basis of narrativity, can be far more deeply mined. The Cartesian Meditator has no preserving influence over his existence. It is the higher power, the same power that created him, which preserves him. The relationship between the Cartesian Meditator and God is thus analogous to the relationship between character and author. Furthermore, it is also analogous to the relationship between character and reader. Over the six days of meditation, the author Descartes creates anew the Cartesian Meditator, which echoes perhaps the six days of creation in Genesis. Descartes is here effectively dramatising his idea of
continuous creation by using a narrative form. I submit that, beyond simply a drama-
matisation of ideas, the narrative form is central to Descartes’ philosophy in the
Meditations. Narrative provides a medium in which readers will enter more deeply
into the text, recreating themselves in the same way that Descartes recreates his
own ‘other self,’ the Cartesian Meditator.

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NOTES


3. See Harry Frankfurt: “In reading the First Meditation it is essential to understand that while Descartes speaks in the first person, the identity he adopts as he addresses the reader is not quite his own.” Harry Frankfurt, Demons, Dreamers, and Madmen. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1970, 4.


6. It goes beyond the scope of this article to fully explore the interplay between argument and narrative in the Meditations. Some of the ways these two areas interact will inevitably emerge through the discussion, but there is certainly scope for further research in this area. An early, provocative discussion of the “double reading” that the Meditations demands can be found in Michel Foucault, “My Body, This Paper, This Fire” History of Madness. Trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa. London: Routledge, 2006, 550-574. This essay was originally published in 1972 as an appendix to the new edition of Histoire de la Folie.


14. The three stages of skepticism are the argument from the senses (CSM, II: 12), the dreaming doubt (CSM, II: 13), and the evil demon (CSM, II: 14).

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23. See also Elizabeth Belfiore, who makes an argument for literary theorists’ tendency to make broad claims about texts, failing to place them appropriately within their historical context: “Literary theorists of our age, even while paying lip-service to [the historically conditioned biases of the critic] are often too ready to assume the universality of their own biases.” See Elizabeth Belfiore, “Narratological Plots and Aristotle’s Mythos” *Arethusa* 33:1 (2000, 37).
24. Rubidge, “Devotional Meditations”, 44. See also Harry Frankfurt: “Moral and religious meditations were published before the seventeenth century, but Descartes was the first to use the form in an exclusively metaphysical work.” Frankfurt, *Demons, Dreamers, and Madmen*, 3.
26. The proceeding draws heavily on Rubidge, “Devotional Meditations”, 28-33. Rubidge provides a far more detailed depiction of the genre of devotional meditations, which goes beyond the scope of this article.
38. See note 34, above.
40. See note 9, above.
41. Compare: “A lifespan can be divided into countless parts, each completely independent of the others” (*Meditations*, CSM, II: 33, emphasis added); “For I regard the divisions of time as being separable from each other” (*First Set of Replies*, CSM, II: 78, emphasis added); “For the nature of time is such that its parts are not mutually dependent” (*Principles*, CSM, I: 200, emphasis added).
42. It also allows for more legitimate discussion of a text not traditionally considered through a narrative framework. As Fludernik says, “The proposed reconstitution of narrativity on the lines of experiential rather than actantial parameters allows nothing less than the reintegration of some 80 to 90 percent of hitherto marginalized literature from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century”. See Fludernik, ‘Natural’ Narratology, 329.
48. Descartes’ *Correspondence* provides further links between the two authors. Reference to Augustinian and Jesuit connections in *Meditations*.
tine can be found in letters to Colvius on 14 November 1640 (CSMK, 159), Mersenne in December 1640 (CSMK, 160-161) and Mersenne on 21 January 1641 (CSMK, 168) around the time Descartes was drafting the Meditations and receiving initial objections.

50. Augustine, The Confessions, 244.
52. Frankfurt, Demons, Dreamers, and Madmen, 4.
56. See Second Set of Objections (CSM, II: 92).
There are competing accounts of the precise way in which the virtual and the actual are related in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. As his philosophy gains a more widespread readership, especially in a diverse range of disciplines, it is important to review differing interpretations put forward as to the precise meanings of Deleuze’s key concepts. Much interdisciplinary work that incorporates Deleuze’s philosophy does so by using the concept of the virtual, usually by offering different accounts of this very important concept. To confound this many readers of Deleuze present differing ‘standard’ definitions, as we will see. As such there is a lack of clarity within the wider academic community and within Deleuze scholarship that stems from a divergence of opinion at best, or an unfortunate misreading at worst. In light of the current landscape this paper will both investigate this lack of consensus, and more importantly, provide a more precise reading of the relationship between the virtual and the actual as presented by Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition* (1994). Through a close reading of the fourth and fifth chapters we will be able to account for the movement of virtual Ideas to their actualised form, as well as to describe the precise relationship between actualisation and the process of individuation. Ultimately we will find that intensity holds the key to uncovering the precise relationship between the virtual and the actual as the domain though which objects are both actualised and individuated.
Commentators tend to take one of two interpretive directions concerning the relation between the virtual and the actual. These are termed here the views of ‘virtual priority’ and ‘reciprocity,’ and we shall explore them both below. Before we engage with these complex concepts, however, we must first come to an understanding of two crucial ‘couplets’: the virtual and the actual, and the intensive and the extensive. This will be the focus of Section I. In the first part of Section II, below, we will outline the reciprocal view. This is the view that the virtual and the actual cohere in a relationship of mutual influence over the production of reality. Following this we will explore the ‘virtual priority’ view, which is the view that there is in Deleuze’s philosophy an implicit priority of the virtual with respect to the actual. As will be seen, however, there is an additional divergence of views concerning the placement of intensity within the relationship between the virtual and the actual. Highlighting the divergence of views found within the secondary literature concerning these concepts will bring into stark display the lack of consensus that is so detrimental to Deleuze scholarship. In Section III, we will turn to the pages of *Difference and Repetition* in order to provide a fresh engagement with the virtual and the actual through an explanation of virtual ‘Ideas,’ the complex notion of ‘differentiation,’ and ‘actualisation.’ We will then focus on the concept of intensity through some key passages from the fifth chapter of *Difference and Repetition*. Ultimately we will find that a more nuanced reading of the relationship between the processes of actualisation and individuation illuminates the non-hierarchical, reciprocal, relationship between the virtual and the actual. However, we will also show that the crucial relationship that often escapes notice is that between the processes of individuation and actualisation. The demarcation of these two processes shows in clear distinction the bounds of the virtual, actual, and intensive.

**SECTION 1: TWO KEY COUPLETS—VIRTUAL/ACTUAL, INTENSIVE/EXTENSIVE**

1.1 Virtual/actual

Before we approach the subject of the paper proper we must first come to terms with the couplet of the virtual and the actual at a broad level. For Deleuze what is ‘actual’ is that which appears to us in spatio-temporal reality. A knotted rope is one such example of an actual object. The virtual, on the other hand, explains the development of the actual object. In this case, a knot exists as the solution to a problem, perhaps, ‘how do we fasten one object to another?’ This problem exists
independently of the various actualised forms of objects that provide a solution to it. Of course there are many ways to secure two objects, one such way is to use rope and to perform a knot. However, as we are well aware, there are many different materials we could use, and many different styles of knot. In this way the virtual problem may become actualised in differing ways using a variety of techniques and materials. We will have much more to say on the detail of this relationship in subsequent sections.

1.2 Intensive/extensive

Similarly we must gain a general understanding of the couplet of the intensive and extensive before moving forwards. Using the same example of the knot, we can also differentiate between the sensible form of the material and the properties of which the material is composed. At a certain level of generality that will be developed in more detail below, the material we use to tie our knot (lets say rope) is obviously extended in spatiality. It has qualitative extension (we can sense it has a quality, we can touch it, smell it etc.). However, we must also recognize that the rope is composed completely of elements of energetic difference (as informed by particle physics) that are only distinguished by said difference. These elements of difference form the underlying quantitative fabric of extended quality and quantity (a certain quantity of particles form the basic fabric of all objects extended in space and time). Thus in a broad sense we can state at this initial stage that to discover the intensive quantity of an object is to explore the conditions that give rise to the extension of the object in time and space. This is what Deleuze refers to as the ‘difference of intensity.’

SECTION 2: THE COUPLETS IN DIFFERENCE AND REPETITION AND TWO INTERPRETIVE APPROACHES

2.1 The relationship between the virtual and the actual

Having come to a broad understanding of the two ‘couplets’ of importance for this paper, the virtual and the actual, and the intensive and the extensive, we can move onto a deeper discussion of the way in which these concepts are presented in secondary work on Deleuze. This will be done by approaching the seemingly problematic stance Deleuze takes in combining the account of the virtual and the actual with his univocal ontology. Following this we can move fully into the two general groups of secondary thinkers, the ‘reciprocal view’ and the ‘virtual
2.1.1 Univocity.

There is an initial tension when we consider Deleuze’s account of the relationship between the virtual and the actual in light of his ontological commitment to univocity. Deleuze’s thesis can be appreciated in contrast to substance dualism where, in the latter, Being is composed of two distinct substances, for example, the Cartesian mind/body distinction. For Deleuze, however, Being is to be conceived as a single sense. This is not to state that everything is the same, rather, every modality shares Being in common. As Deleuze states “the essential in univocity is not that Being is said in a single and same sense, but that it is said, in a single and same sense, of all its individuating differences or intrinsic modalities.” However the relationship between the virtual and the actual can seem problematic as a result of this univocal statement, as the virtual and the actual seem at first to be two distinct ontological domains. The key to Deleuze’s account lies in the reality of the virtual. We can accommodate the thesis of univocity as long as we consider the virtual and the actual as two fully real halves of the object. In this way the virtual and the actual form the two halves of the object, and they are both inherently composed of difference.

2.1.2 Virtual and Actual: Two halves of the object.

We are faced with an apparent problem: describing an object as both composed of the virtual and the actual while also maintaining ontological univocity. However, as we have witnessed in brief above, we can resolve this seemingly paradoxical interpretation by understanding the virtual and the actual as both composed of difference in the Deleuzean sense: Being as a single modality including all of these differences and individualities. Furthermore, we must understand the relationship between these two modalities as one of movement, that is, they are in a process of actualisation. Deleuze often uses the language of ‘problems’ and ‘solutions’ to speak of the virtual and the actual, and we can use this to our advantage here in relation to our previous example of the knot. We might restate our example thus: we are faced with a problem, namely, how to tie our shoe. The problem (or virtual) provides the impetus for the actual, and the solution to our problem, a knot, becomes actualised as our hands do their work. If we take a snapshot of the process at work, the knot exists as at once both virtual and actual, but fully real. We must understand, however, that Deleuze is describing a process, and it is
the movement from the virtual to the actual that we will find to be of the utmost importance moving forward.

2.1.3. Two interpretations: ‘reciprocity’ and ‘virtual priority’.

Now that we have a rudimentary understanding of the basis for the relationship between the virtual and the actual, we can move to highlight one of the central problematic spheres of Deleuzean scholarship. This is how the relationship between the virtual and the actual is interpreted. We can highlight here two broadly defined approaches to this relationship: one based on ‘reciprocity,’ the other, ‘virtual priority.’ Much of the confusion over Deleuze’s concepts, especially concerning the virtual, can be traced back to a misreading of the fundamental ideas presented most fully in *Difference and Repetition*. It is with this in mind that we will first approach the views regarding reciprocity.

The most crucial interpretive decision that divides these views is the level of ontological and metaphysical influence ascribed to the virtual. For thinkers of reciprocity the virtual cannot be abstracted from the actual states of affairs to which it is connected. According to Williams, we cannot consider the complete reality of the object if the virtual “is considered in abstraction from the processes it is connected to.”

Williams views Deleuze’s philosophy from the point of view of a holistic process. That is, one aspect of the process cannot be judged out of the context within which it functions. The core issue here though is the reading of the relationship between the virtual and the actual as one of reciprocity.

This is expressed in another fashion by Hughes, who makes clear that, in his reading, “[t]he object is not at all constituted by the one-directional creativity of the virtual.” In other words, the virtual and the actual are related in a more reciprocal way wherein the object is both virtual and actual without any hierarchy of influence. Another key reader, Somers-Hall, attests “[i]n Deleuze’s system, everything in fact takes place ‘in the middle’.” This is really to move our discussion from a static picture of the object to a dynamic actualisation. This is to describe the object in the language of a movement from the virtual to the actual, and in turn, a movement in the actual that opens the object up to a new virtuality.

The importance of this ‘double movement’ is clearly exhibited in an example from Smith:
at every moment, my existence [is] constituted by virtual elements and divergent series ... [however] when I actualize a virtuality ... that does not mean that the problematic structure has disappeared. The next moment ... still has a problematic structure, but one that is now modified by the actualisation that has just taken place. In other words, the actualisation of the virtual also produces the virtual.\(^8\)

This is a crucial statement that highlights the role of the actual in the process of actualisation. The solution to a problematising virtual is not once and for all. It is in the realm of the actual that dynamic movement engenders the opening of a new range of virtual problems. Importantly, this is a feature of the reciprocal view. In other words, it is only when we conceive of the relationship between the virtual and the actual in reciprocal terms that we can understand the role of both the virtual and the actual within the univocal object.

Contrary to this reciprocal reading is the ‘virtual priority’ view. Thinkers so aligned understand a problematic counter-move in Deleuze’s philosophy. This group of thinkers is labeled with the term ‘priority,’ as they read an implicit prioritisation, or reification, of the virtual in the work of Deleuze. As stated briefly above, many of the implications of this view stem from the determination that Deleuze imbues the virtual with sole creative potential, whether he realises it or not. Although we may choose to view this as a positive element of Deleuze’s thought, in many cases it is seen as detrimental to his philosophical project as it reduces the actual being to a state of subservience, dominated by the creative power of the virtual.

We have already summarily encountered the first particular area of critique. This rests in the uneasy distinction of Being as One (univocal) but composed of the Two of the virtual and the actual. Even with Deleuze’s insistence that the virtual and the actual form the two halves of the object perhaps this is not always the case. For example, on Badiou’s analysis, the virtual “is without any doubt the principle name of Being in Deleuze’s work.”\(^9\) The logical conclusion of this interpretation is that the virtual, as ‘Being,’ has a hierarchical relationship to the actual ‘being.’ In other words, according to Badiou, Deleuze’s philosophy does nothing but affirm actual beings as grounded and animated by the virtual.\(^10\) Univocity is then lost, as the virtual exists in another order entirely to that which it creates. Badiou’s critique has been challenged elsewhere.\(^11\) However we can appreciate here the way in which the relationship between the virtual and the actual is problematised by the suggestion of a priority of the virtual.

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This implicit priority of the virtual also plays out in Hallward’s reading of Deleuze. Crucially for Hallward, Deleuze’s philosophy abstracts the power of creation to the realm of the virtual, leaving actual beings able to truly interact. According to Hallward, this is due to the fact that, “relations between the actuals as such, one actual to another, are deprived of any productive or creative force … [therefore] the only effective relation between actuals … is determined by the differentiation of the virtual or virtuals that they actualise.”

Therefore, for Hallward, Deleuze’s philosophical project is forever hamstrung by the inability of the actual, extended being to ever form a creative connection with another being and together determine their own destinies. Again, this is due to Hallward’s conclusion that “an individual only provides a vessel for the power that works through it.” The consequence of this framing of Deleuzean ontology is clear. Extended actuality becomes defined by its passivity compared to the active force of the virtual.

Deleuze’s position may be that of a “secret dualism.” This is perhaps of no particular importance in itself. The real problem lies in defining the virtual and the actual by a hierarchy of influence. To put this simply, it may be the case that the virtual is prioritized for Deleuze. Conversely, we may also conclude that neither the virtual nor the actual are of particular importance in themselves. This suggests that what is important is the role that each plays within a system that is ‘always-already’ involved in the reciprocal process of creation. We have seen the lack of consensus shown to exist in the interpretive differences outlined above. We will also find below that with the concept of intensity, we come to another lack of consensus regarding a fundamental Deleuzean concept.

2.2 Placing intensity

2.2.1 Intensity and the virtual/actual.

Intensity is a crucial concept in the understanding of the philosophy of *Difference and Repetition*, especially with regard to the way in which the virtual and the actual are related. This is because it is with intensity that Deleuze is able to conceive of the move from pure difference to extended quality and quantity. However, just as with the virtual, the exact role and definition of intensity, or intensive properties, is contested. Again we are faced with differing interpretations that are...
presented as ‘standard’ definitions. As will be explored below, Williams conceives of intensity as a property of the virtual, Roffe counters this with intensity as part of the modality of the actual, and DeLanda understands in intensity a separate ontological register altogether. It is clear then that in order to provide an appropriately exhaustive account of the relationship between the virtual and the actual, we must also explore the role and position of intensity within, or even outside of, the two modalities of the virtual and the actual. We will delve into this issue by surveying the lack of consensus in three secondary sources concerning intensity and the relationship between the virtual and the actual. It is worth pointing out here that these views, while they differ, all derive from Deleuze’s philosophy in *Difference and Repetition*, and as such we must acknowledge that we can indeed find support for these views in the aforementioned text. While this is certainly possible, we will argue towards the close of this paper that the role intensity plays within the modality of the actual is the most significant and desirable reading. However this is to get ahead of ourselves, for now we must explore the details of this secondary divide within Deleuze scholarship.

2.2.2 The placement of intensity within the relationship between the virtual and the actual?

2.2.2.a. Williams. James Williams provides us with the first view on the location of intensity within the relationship between the virtual and the actual. For Williams intensity is to be conceived as *purely virtual*, where the interplay between intensity and spatial extension “describes reality as a dynamic relation between the virtual and the actual.” Therefore the movement of becoming that characterises the relationship between the virtual and the actual in the reciprocal view also finds expression here through the dual concepts of intensity and extensity. Williams outlines his view on this matter, stating that: “Many of the most important arguments of *Difference and Repetition* are developed either to show the reality and necessity of intensities as a condition for significant events or to show that there are such things as virtual intensities that cannot be accounted for in terms of actual identities.”

We can see here that Williams aligns the intensive with the virtual. Furthermore, for Williams, the characteristics of intensity “imply a necessary relation to the actual and condition for the actual but also a resistance to being fully thought in terms of the actual.” This is a crucial point. For Williams, we can only comprehend intensity in its *relation to the actual*, as an individuating process on the side of the
virtual. The consequence of this account runs almost parallel to Hallward’s argument, in that the creative potential of intensity is sided with the virtual over the actual.

2.2.2.b Roffe. With Williams we have seen a distinction made between virtual intensities and actual extension. However with the work of Jon Roffe, intensity holds a different position. For Roffe, it is in the final chapter of Difference and Repetition that Deleuze provides the conclusion to his metaphysics with the concept of intensity. In other words, it is intensity, and the intensive individual, that provide the site at which the virtual and the actual display the dynamism at the heart of their creative process. Counter to the view of Williams, for Roffe, “intensity is the actual: it is actual being.”22 According to Roffe, rather than a virtual intensity cancelling itself in the explication of an actual form, intensity is to be thought fully in the terms of the actual.

Importantly for Roffe “the entire process of actualisation (or differenciation) necessarily lies on the side of the actual itself.”23 This is to suggest that the movement from the differentiated virtual Idea to the actualised form takes place wholly in the actual. In order to support this position, Roffe states that intensity must be grasped “as the determinative context and content of actualisation.”24 In other words intensity serves a dual role for Roffe, both providing the initial actual differential element of the object and linking the virtual Idea to its actualisation (in the form of an ‘intensive individual’). In proposing that intensive individuation is a process of the actual, Roffe argues that the actual possesses a fluid creativity that is denied in accounts in which the virtual provides creative movement. Clearly not only does Roffe give more weight to the actual, by extension his account limits the role of the virtual within Deleuze’s metaphysics.

2.2.2.c DeLanda. Manuel DeLanda provides us with our third and final account of intensity, where the concept is placed as an intermediary ontological domain between the virtual and the actual. For DeLanda the novelty of Deleuze’s philosophy lies in the recognition of the philosophical importance of the “two kinds of space relevant to our human identity […] extensive spaces […] and] zones of intensity.”25 The important point of difference between these two concepts is that, while the extensive is, “intensive differences are productive.”26 As DeLanda states:

wherever one finds an extensive frontier (for example, the skin which defines the extensive boundary of our bodies) there is always a process
driven by intensive differences which produced such a boundary (for example, the embryological process which creates our bodies, driven by differences in chemical concentration, among other things).\textsuperscript{27}

For DeLanda this difference in kind between intensive and extensive spatiality illuminates the relationship between the virtual and the actual.

Key to DeLanda’s formulation of the relationship between the intensive and the extensive is the concept of ‘multiplicity.’ This concept refers to the multiple real, virtual potentialities that can become actualised in any particular moment. Thus for DeLanda’s understanding of the virtual and the actual, the virtual multiplicity acts a structure that guides the movement of intensity. DeLanda’s conclusion is that the virtual, “the intensive and the actual would constitute the three spheres of reality, with virtual multiplicities constraining and guiding intensive processes which in turn would yield specific actual entities.”\textsuperscript{28} The virtual has the specific role of determining—in DeLanda’s terms ‘constraining and guiding’—which potentiality becomes actualised through the intensive process, into an actuality. Thus for DeLanda, intensity becomes a separate intermediary domain between virtual multiplicities and extended actuality.\textsuperscript{29}

2.2.3. Conclusions on intensity

Through exploring three differing views on the specific role and placement of intensity within the relationship between the virtual and the actual, we have come to understand the existence of a lack of consensus concerning the concept of intensity. With Williams, intensity is a process of the virtual, opposed to actual extensive form. Countering this is Roffe, who approaches intensity as wholly on the side of the actual being. Finally, DeLanda produces an account in which intensity holds an intermediary position between the virtual and the actual. We must concern ourselves with this divergence of views in order to fully approach the relationship between the virtual and the actual as presented in \textit{Difference and Repetition}. Although the precise placement, or relation, of intensity in regard to the virtual and the actual may be contested, what is unchallenged is the notion that intensity is a crucial component of the metaphysics of \textit{Difference and Repetition}. As such intensity has an unequivocally important role in the relationship between the virtual and the actual that must be explored in greater detail.
SECTION 3: THE COUPLETS DRAMATISED—ACTUALISATION AND INDIVIDUATION IN DIFFERENCE AND REPETITION

We have come to see a clear lack of consensus among select, but representative, secondary commentaries on both the relationship between the virtual and the actual, and the ontological status of intensity. As such, we must now turn to the text of *Difference and Repetition* in order to explore an understanding of Deleuze’s intended relationship between the virtual and the actual, and the role and placement of intensity in that relationship.

3.1 Ideas & the virtual

3.1.1 Deleuze’s ‘Idea’.

To understand the relationship between the virtual and the actual we must first concern ourselves with Deleuze’s use of the term ‘Idea.’ If all philosophy has been but a footnote to Plato, Deleuze would most certainly be one of the most interesting. It is with his ‘inversion’ of Platonism that we come across the particular aspect of the Idea that Deleuze ‘inverts’ from its Platonic form. While for Plato the Idea is external, transcendent, and based on resemblance (this bookshelf can be said to be such due to the resemblance to a perfect Idea of a bookshelf), Deleuze’s Idea is *immanent* and concerned with *difference*. It is in this sense that, for Deleuze, Ideas are problematising. That is, Ideas are problems to which actual objects are the solution (a bookshelf is so because it is the answer to the problem “How can I best store my books?”). Importantly, problems do not disappear in their solution, but rather, maintain a *virtual* existence, in that they can be solved (or actualised) in other ways (there are many different designs of bookshelf that all solve the same problem).

3.1.2 Ideas and the virtual

Furthermore the virtual describes the state of problematising Ideas that exists as a structure. Crucially, according to Deleuze, “the virtual is opposed not to the real but to the actual. *The virtual is fully real in so far as it is virtual.*” In other words, while we may commonly consider something that is not yet actual to be *unreal*, Deleuze is stating that the virtual is fully real, it is just yet to be actualised. The virtual, in this sense, denotes a realm of *potentiality* as opposed to mere *possibility*. For example, in knitting a scarf, one does not realise some possible next stitch in
the pattern. Rather, the problematising Idea (how best to entwine and fasten this wool) becomes actualised. Again, the Idea does not cease to exist with the solution (in this case the next stitch) but is maintained as part of the virtual structure to be actualised in varying degrees as the scarf continues to be constructed. It is in this way that Deleuze is able to affirm both the difference and immanence of Ideas, in that Ideas are contained within their solution (the problem of fastening wool is encapsulated in the stitch, just as the problem of a cold neck exists in the scarf), and they are judged not by identity (“this stitch is not perfect in relation to my Idea of a stitch”) but by difference (each stitch is affirmed in its difference to both the Idea and the other divergent actualisations in the row). In reality, however, the relationship between virtual Ideas and actual objects is more detailed and contains a movement that is not easily encapsulated in this discussion of ‘problems’ and ‘solutions.’

3.2 Differentiation and differenciation: the virtual and actual in motion

3.2.1 The complex notion of ‘different/ciation’

To state that objects are at once both virtual and actual is a simplistic representation of a more complex process Deleuze terms ‘different/ciation.’ This is to describe a movement from the undifferenciated state of Ideas to the actualised object. According to Deleuze: “We call the determination of the virtual content of an Idea differentiation; we call the actualisation of that virtuality into species and distinguished parts differenciation.”

Rather than be satisfied with describing the object as both ‘virtual’ and ‘actual,’ we must delve into the detail of this notion in order to highlight the way in which the virtual and actual relate in the process of actualisation.

3.2.2 Differentiation of the Idea

In order to comprehend fully the way in which Ideas are differentiated, we must first highlight (in brief) the way in which Deleuze makes use of differential calculus. We will not delve into the complex mathematics here; it is enough to say that from the traditional interpretation of the measure of the infinitesimal in the calculus Deleuze forms a theory of relations. Put simply, a ‘differential’ represents an infinitesimal measurement, a measure of a number so small it is but a tendency towards being zero. Differentials only exist in reality in relation to another differential (in the calculus this is expressed as ‘dx/dy’). What is important for us
here is that calculus shows that relations have a reality. It is with this knowledge that Deleuze is able to formulate a process of determination in regard to Ideas, based on differential elements and the relations between them.

Deleuzean Ideas then, as based on the differential, consist of three aspects: differential elements, relations, and singularities. In turn, these correspond to three elements of determination: determinability, reciprocal determination and complete determination. The process as a whole is termed ‘progressive determination.’ Ideas exist as a structure populated by differential elements that have the propensity to become determined. As with the differential in the calculus, the relations that exist between them determine these differential elements; this is what Deleuze calls ‘reciprocal determination.’ In turn, singularities, or ‘singular points,’ are established between these relations. This is for the Idea to be expressed in a more stable form. Importantly, we must remember that although we may say the Idea is completely determined, it is still entirely virtual, or potential. What remains is for the Idea to be actualised according to both the relations and singular points that inhabit it.

3.2.3 Differenciation (or actualisation)

The virtual Idea forms only one half of the object. It is with the process of differenciation that we will come to the way in which the Idea is actualised into extended spatiality. Indeed, for Deleuze the terms ‘differenciation’ and ‘actualisation’ signify the same process: the movement of the virtual to the actual. As we uncovered above, the virtual Idea consists of differential elements and the relations between them. In the process of actualisation these aspects of the Idea correspond to the two features of extended actuality: quality and extension. Furthermore we can never have one without the other because there is no quality without extension and vice-versa. For example, we can never experience the colour ‘red’ without an object corresponding that corresponds to this description and the reflection of light. As Deleuze states “a difference in quality is always subtended by a spatial difference.” These are the double aspects of differenciation that constitute the relationship between the virtual Idea and the actual object.

We may well ask how it is that these two aspects of the Idea are first actualised into quality and extensity. The answer lies in ‘spatio-temporal dynamisms.’ As Deleuze states, “beneath the actual qualities and extensities, species and parts, there are spatio-temporal dynamisms. These are the actualising, differenciating
agencies.” It seems we have a potential answer to our question; it is the spatio-temporal dynamism that provides the agent of actualisation. That is, according to Deleuze, “they are precisely dramas, they dramatise the Idea.” This to introduce a third and crucial element into the process of actualisation: time. A dynamism is a process that takes time; the actualisation of the Idea has a temporality. We now have three elements to the actualised Idea: quality, extension, and time.

3.3 Intensity and the process of individuation

3.3.1 Uncovering the intensive

This is where we will turn fully to the fifth chapter of *Difference and Repetition* and the concept of intensity, clarified by Deleuze: “Everything which happens and everything which appears is correlated with orders of differences: differences of level, temperature, pressure, tension, potential, difference of intensity.” Intensity, then, exists as the lowest level of difference. It is in this sense that Deleuze takes the idea of intensive and extensive zones from thermodynamics, namely, that the flow of energy exists in an intensive frame, covered over by extensive quality. As Deleuze states: “intensity (difference of intensity)—is the sufficient reason of all phenomena, the condition of that which appears.” Intensity performs a very unique function in the Deleuzean metaphysics: that of a transcendental illusion. If we remember that Deleuze uses the term ‘transcendental’ to mean what explains the genesis of real experience (opposed to the possible experience of Kant), we can see more clearly the role intensity plays in Deleuze’s philosophy.

Intensity has the illusory characteristic of being cancelled in the production of extended form. Simply, we do not come into contact with intensive properties; we only ever experience the extensive. This is what Deleuze calls the ‘transcendental illusion.’ He writes: “it is the case that intensity is cancelled or tends to be cancelled in this system, but it creates this system by explicating itself.” Intensity thus fulfils the role of the transcendental for Deleuze as the reason behind that which appears. In other words, behind every object are the remains of an intensive process that was cancelled in producing the extensive form, the ‘illusion’ being that we only come into contact with fully extensive forms. Once we overcome this illusion, we can understand the intensive as the structural determinant of actualised objects.
3.3.2 Intensity as individuating

Deleuze never ceases to remind us that intensity is individuating. Indeed, he writes: “The essential process of intensive quantities is individuation. Intensity is individuating, and intensive quantities are individuating factors.” For Simondon, we must recognize the distinction between the pre-individual field and specific cases of individuation. In other words, there exists a field of pre-individual relations that does not become exhausted in the production of the individual, but in a sense ‘overflows’ the individual, continuing to influence its development. This is the sense in which we said earlier that problematising Ideas remain so even after they are actualised (or ‘solved’) in a specific case. We can easily see then that intensity plays a crucial role in the metaphysics of Deleuze, and in turn, the relationship between the virtual and the actual. However, we will have to delve into the process of individuation in more detail to truly uncover how this is so.

3.3.3 The process of individuation

The fact that intensity provides the impetus for individuation to occur is clearly stated by Deleuze: “we believe that individuation is essentially intensive, and that the pre-individual field is a virtual-ideal field, made up of differential relations.” In other words, from the virtual field Ideas are actualised and then individuated. Individuation is a process by which intensity, as the level of ‘pure difference,’ becomes explicated in spatial quality and quantity through the act of cancellation outlined above. The individual that is the result of the process of individuation is the extended object. As Deleuze succinctly states: “Individuation is what responds to the question ‘Who?’ ... ‘Who?’ is always an intensity.” Furthermore, and this is to highlight the broader question that provided the impetus for this paper, key to the relationship between the virtual, the actual, and the intensive, is the method of dramatisation engendered with the spatio-temporal dynamism. Deleuze explores these factors of actualisation in the latter stages of the fifth chapter of Difference and Repetition: “We think that difference of intensity ... expresses first the differential relations or virtual matter to be organised. This intensive field of individuation determines the relations that it expresses to be incarnated in spatio-temporal dynamisms (dramatisation)”

Deleuze here firstly explains the relationship between the virtual and intensity. As the domain of pure difference, intensity incarnates the first expression of
the differentiated Idea. In other words, the Idea finds expression through the
*intensive individual*. Importantly, it is contended here that the term ‘expression’ is
synonymous with the double process of actualisation outlined above (just as with
the terms ‘differentiation’ and ‘actualisation’). This is to say that to ‘express the
virtual’ is to *actualise the virtual Idea*, and then, as a result, to open up a new ‘face’
of the virtual. In this way we can clearly see that *intensity has a relationship with the
virtual and is not a part of the virtual*.

Crucially, it is also with intensity that the Idea becomes *dramatised* in the form
of the spatio-temporal dynamism.48 This is where we come to the second line of
the above quote. Key for us here is to realise that this is what Deleuze refers to
when he states “intensity is the determinant in the process of actualisation.”49 It
is intensity that traverses the metaphorical space between the actualised virtual
Idea and the extended object. This is due to the specific process of intensity.
To speak of intensity without recognising its individuated form is to provide an
incomplete explanation. It is the ontological *actual* domain of intensity that, as the
pure form of difference, becomes explicated into the form of the extended object.
In order to truly justify this stance towards the placement of intensity within the
broader relationship between the virtual and the actual we will have to uncover
the relationship between the processes of individuation and actualisation.

### 3.3.4 The difference between actualisation and individuation

We have explored two separate processes that combine in the production of the
individuated object, and it is now our goal to define the way in which they are
related. This will also further our aim of highlighting the way in which the virtual,
the actual, and intensity are linked. Importantly for us here, Deleuze expands
his metaphysical notion of ‘differentiation’ into the complete version: indi-
differentiation.50 The implication is clear: individuation, as a process, is *different
in kind* to actualisation. Crucially, this is borne out in the metaphysical priority
of intensive individuation over the process of actualisation. Deleuze explains this
matter in a key passage: “It is not sufficient, however, to mark a difference in
kind between individuation and differentiation in general. This difference in kind
remains unintelligible so long as we do not accept the necessary consequence:
that *individuation precedes differentiation in principle, that every differenciation
presupposes a prior intense field of individuation*.”51
Deleuze clearly states here that the movement of intensity is primary to the actualisation of the Idea in the process of differenciation. Echoing a distinction made by Hughes, we can view intensity as the ‘environmental present’ of actualisation. Perhaps more simply: the actualisation of Ideas is dependent upon an already-existent field of intensity in which objects can be extended. This distinction has important ramifications for the formation of Deleuze’s metaphysics, but also the way in which we can interpret the placement and role of intensity within the relationship between the virtual and the actual.

SECTION 4: RETURNING TO OUR TWO INTERPRETIVE APPROACHES AND THE PLACEMENT OF INTENSITY

4.1 Reciprocity and virtual priority: two approaches to the relationship between the virtual and the actual

Prior to exploring the influence the placement of intensity has on the relationship between the virtual and the actual, we must briefly return to the two interpretive approaches outlined earlier concerning this relationship. The first, and more common, interpretation we have labeled the ‘reciprocal’ view. This is to understand the virtual and the actual as engaged in a relationship of reciprocity, that is, having a mutual influence on the production of reality. This is to say that within an ontology of univocity we can still locate the virtual and the actual as the two halves of being. The virtual, transcendental half and the actual, extended half.

Contrary to the ‘reciprocal’ view stated above is the ‘virtual priority’ view. As was outlined above, philosophers aligned with the ‘virtual priority’ view understand a counter-move implicit within the relationship between the virtual and the actual in Deleuze’s philosophy. To reiterate, this group is labeled with the term ‘priority’ as they read an implicit prioritisation of the virtual. Two key thinkers exemplify this view: Badiou and Hallward. The critique of Deleuze’s philosophy is developed in different ways by these thinkers, but always retains the core of a reading of the priority of the virtual. With Badiou the virtual becomes “the ground of the actual.” Further, Hallward will claim that through the hierarchical and determinate character of the virtual, “Deleuze’s philosophy is oriented by lines of flight that lead out of the [actual] world.” Through our analysis of *Difference and Repetition*, however, we have been able to come to appreciate that the relationship between the virtual and the actual is much more complex than these two thinkers suggest, especially with regard to intensity.
4.2 Intensity and the relationship between actualisation and individuation

4.2.1 The importance of the relationship between individuation and actualisation

We initially sought to uncover the relationship between the virtual and actual in the pages of *Difference and Repetition*. In posing the relationship in the more detailed terms of ‘differen*tiation*’ and ‘differen*ciation*’ we were able to make sense of the relationship as a *process*, rather than a more static picture of the virtual and actual forming ‘two halves of the object.’ However, we encountered a problem, that is, what is the *agent* of actualisation? *What is it that actually provides the material conditions for the production of objects?* In more Deleuzean terms: what is it that *dramatises*? Of course, we now know it is intensity that fills this role. Indeed, it is intensity that provides the environmental conditions for the actualisation of the virtual idea to occur. In this way we have seen that, for Deleuze, any discussion of the relationship between the virtual and the actual *presupposes a prior field of intensity*. The key for us, in light of the above discussion concerning Williams, Roffe, and DeLanda’s views on the topic, is to determine where intensity fits within the relationship between the virtual and the actual. This will allow us to finally come to a concrete understanding of the way in which the virtual and the actual are related in the work of Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*.

4.3 The role and placement of intensity and the relationship between the virtual and the actual

4.3.1 Intensity as actual

While we have an appreciation and understanding of the role of intensity, we can now confront the specifics of the placement of intensity within the relationship between the virtual and the actual. We outlined three positions concerning this above. Williams defines intensity as a process of the virtual. Contrasting this view, Roffe places intensity firmly on the side of the actual. Finally, DeLanda conceives of intensity as an intermediary ontological domain between the virtual and the actual.

It is at this point that we must take up and expand on the position that Roffe puts forward. Roffe states that “intensity *is the actual*: it is actual being ... it is intensity that characterises the being of the actual, both as implicated intensive quantity and as explicated quality and extensity.” There are some key aspects to Roffe’s
account and in particular Roffe quotes Deleuze when he states that: “any reduction of individuation to a limit or complication of differentiacion, compromises the whole philosophy of difference. This would be an error, this time in the actual, analogous to that made in confusing the virtual with the possible.”

This passage cuts to the heart of the matter, both for the placement of intensity, and for the wider significance of intensity in the relationship between the process of actualisation (differentiacion) and individuation. Deleuze could not be any clearer: \textit{individuation must not be thought of as part of actualisation}. Crucially, as was shown above, it is intensity that expresses Ideas in the form of spatio-temporal dynamisms. It is through intensive individuation that the context of the actualised Idea is explicated. Following Roffe then, it must be concluded that it is crucial that \textit{the intensive and the extensive form the two poles of the actual}.

4.3.2 Actual intensity and the relationship between the virtual and the actual

Our final task is to come to terms with how the placement of intensity as part of the realm of the actual impacts the relationship between the virtual and the actual. In other words, to provide a complete and compelling account of the relationship between the virtual and the actual, we must first recognize that intensity provides the ‘context and content of actualisation.’ Much of the concern for those who are of the virtual priority view is that the virtual holds some implicit power over the actual. This contention, laid explicitly bare in Hallward’s critique, rests on assigning the virtual with intensity. However, as we have shown, this is to mistake the role of intensity, and to confuse the processes of actualisation and individuation. In line with those of the reciprocal view, then, we can state that the virtual contains only the problematising instant itself (the Deleuzean ‘Idea’). For the Idea to become actualised (differentiacted) is for the Idea as ‘problem’ to have an actual ‘solution.’ However, this actual solution is dependent upon an \textit{already constituted intensive environment}. In other words, it is the dramatising potential of intensity that mobilizes these Ideas into extended form.

The consequences of this appear perhaps at first radical: if there is any priority given by Deleuze, it \textit{is on the side of the actual}. As a consequence \textit{the virtual has no power on its own accord}. There is no directional flow of creativity from the virtual to the actual, and the virtual does not ground the actual, as Badiou and Hallward suggest. In this sense, we are arguing for a reciprocal view of the relationship between the virtual and the actual. On the other hand what is clearly apparent,
based on our discussion of *Difference and Repetition*, is that there is much more at play here than just the virtual and the actual. Indeed, perhaps the most important relationship we have come across here is the one between actualisation and individuation. It is this relationship that truly illuminates the matter of distinction between a reading of the influence of the virtual over the actual, or one of reciprocity. Intensive individuation, as a *process of the actual*, confirms that any hint of creativity that exists in Deleuze’s metaphysics occurs *on the side of the actual*. In other words, it is with the dramatising potential of intensity that Deleuze’s metaphysics becomes creative, while the virtual only provides the function of the structuring problematic field.

This crucial element of Deleuze’s metaphysics is often overlooked, with intensity being labeled as virtual, and with the importantly distinct processes of individuation and actualisation deemed synonymous. It is the contention here that these two factors are integral to any reading of Deleuze’s metaphysics in *Difference and Repetition*, arguably his most important early statement of such matters.

**SECTION 5: CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In this paper we have come to see the lack of consensus within secondary literature concerning some fundamental concepts of the philosophy of Deleuze. These are the relationship between the virtual and the actual, and the role and place of intensity. To assess this divergence of views we can divide much of the secondary work on this area of Deleuze’s metaphysics into two main groups: reciprocity and virtual priority. So too, we have explored three general orientations towards the place of intensity within the relationship between the virtual and the actual: on the side of virtuality, actuality, or as an intermediary.

Turning to the pages of *Difference of Repetition*, we have explored these problematic areas in a detailed and systematic way. Firstly, we came to understand that the relationship between the virtual and the actual is more complex when regarded as a process, captured in the concept of ‘differentiation.’ We were faced with a problem, however, as we confronted the way in which the virtual is said to be actualised. That is, what actually *forms* the actualised object? The answer, of course, is found with intensity and the process of individuation. It is in recognizing the difference between the processes of actualisation and individuation that we can understand intensity *as a part of the actual*. This in turn highlights the more limited
role that the virtual plays as a problematising field of Ideas, with intensity as the creative determinate of the actualised, extended object. Although we have only been able to provide a somewhat cursory account of the way in which intensity becomes ‘cancelled’ in extensity, this area is one for detailed analysis based on a refreshed understanding of this process as a movement between two poles of the actual. While we have shown that the text of *Difference and Repetition* does not support a reading of virtual priority, perhaps more importantly we have put forward the view of intensity as a process of the actual. Crucially, this changes the way we think of the virtual and the actual, and opens up new possibilities for engagement with the philosophy of Deleuze, both within and outside philosophical discourse.

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NOTES

2. In this point Deleuze is guided by Duns Scotus, Leibniz, and Nietzsche. See Deleuze, *Difference*, 39-42.
4. Indeed, this is the argument we find in Badiou’s analysis.
10. For Badiou’s full argument for the virtual as “ground” see: Badiou, *Deleuze*, 43-45.
15. We should note here that much of the trouble interpreting Deleuze’s texts could very well be laid at the author’s feet. Namely, it is notoriously difficult to trace concepts through Deleuze’s oeuvre, while it could also be argued that Deleuze himself was not clear on the precise nature of the concepts in question, namely the relationship between the virtual and the actual as applied to the different contexts of actualisation, individuation and so on throughout his works.
19. Williams, *Gilles*, 8. Of note, in 2013, Williams has released a second edition—James Williams, *Gilles Deleuze’s Difference and Repetition: A Critical Introduction and Guide*. 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013)—of his 2003 work. However, while some changes are apparent on a comparative reading of both works, the linking of the intensive with the virtual still appears in the updated work, although he has softened his account somewhat by conceding that intensity has a relation to the virtual and actual.
29. Of interest here is the difficulty with separating intensity from the processes of the virtual and the actual and still retaining the ontological formulation of univocity, as if both the virtual and the actual provide the two halves of being. Intensity seen in DeLanda’s view would introduce a third process, disrupting the thesis of univocity. It follows that either there are in fact three ontological domains within the univocal being, or intensity serves to problematise Deleuze’s thesis of univocity.
32. Deleuze, *Difference*, 171.
34. Deleuze, *Difference*, 175.
38. Deleuze, *Difference*, 222.
41. Deleuze, *Difference*, 228-229.
42. Deleuze, *Difference*, 228.
43. Deleuze, *Difference*, 246.
44. Deleuze, *Difference*, 246.
45. Deleuze, *Difference*, 246.
46. Deleuze, *Difference*, 246.
47. Deleuze, *Difference*, 251.
49. Deleuze, *Difference*, 245.
54. Hallward, *Out of this world*, 3.
Sartre (1940) and Ryle (1949) took us on a tour that was entertaining in its exposure of what can mystify what we imagine. Their work gives us due caution in setting up our imaginings in a central place. Thought is liable to go haywire when we make a main theme of the imagination. Shall we philosophers raise it up for admiration, or lower it onto our laboratory bench for analysis? In paying close regard to imagination are we thus ‘on the side of the angels’? Dare we challenge the tradition of Reason that would make an odious comparison of imagination with observation, logic, and experiment? Sartre and Ryle are free of that comparison—and equally inclined not to elevate imagination on the rebound.

**INTRODUCTION**

I set out by sketching advances made by both Ryle and Sartre in understanding *imagining*. For them, it is a basic error to treat the mental image as the *object* of imaginative activity. They describe mental imagery in the context of a wide range of imaginative activity in thought and action. I reject objections to this strategy as ‘denying the reality’ of imagery.

Ryle and Sartre describe, richly, a diversity of imaginative activity for which mental imagery is incidental, at most. The subtle and attentive character of Sartre’s study in *L’Imaginaire* belies Edward Casey’s claim—that in contrast to Baudelaire
who would ‘create a world’, Sartre’s account belittles the imagination. I argue that Ryle and Sartre, in refusing to blur the difference between perception and imagination, are thus able to state more clearly what the achievement of perception owes to imagination, and how imagination and perception work so closely together within our ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ life.

Paul Ricoeur also criticises Sartre and Ryle as continuing the tradition of imagination as degraded perception; he suggests that they do not recognise Kant’s ‘productive’ imagination. Ricoeur and Casey would seem to have a misplaced commitment to the mental image as *object* of the imagination—as if that is a criterion of being serious about it. Ryle and Sartre speak of *visually imagining* rather than of a perceived *mental image*. The descriptive content of imagining is undiminished by this shift in ontology’s syntax. Furthermore, to displace the image as the central *object* frees us to attend the diversity of imaginative activity—what is involved in painting and looking at paintings, in inventions and in assessing them, in composing music and in following it. Ricoeur does become generous in his praise of Ryle’s rich descriptions of such a variety of imaginative activities. Thus his recognition of Ryle’s philosophical *practice* belies his initial characterisation of Ryle (and Sartre) as situated in the philosophical tradition of derogating the imagination. Imagination has its power not in *presenting a mental object* but in evoking what is absent—as elsewhere, *perished, theoretically possible*—or downright *fantastical*.

**ASPECTS OF SARTRE’S ACCOUNT**

Sartre describes himself as imagining as being at his desk the very Pierre whom, at another time, he can perceive there. This would be impossible if what he imagines were ‘within’ the image he formed. Quine also recognises the same point—that it is *Pegasus* (though he is fictional) and not the *image* of Pegasus that is in question when we imagine or speak of that winged horse. It then emerges as a corollary that the ‘image’ is not an object that stands to what we imagine on a par with a painting in relation to the painter’s scene. Within the painting (unlike the image) a structure of line and play of colour is the analogue of a scene.

Sartre would refer to the image not as an object but as a mode of being conscious alongside other modes such as *perceptual* consciousness and *apprehensive* consciousness. It is true that Sartre finds it virtually impossible to escape the surface grammar of the image as ‘object’. He is prepared to ask, ‘What is essential to the image?’ even as he displaces the objectual status of the image as something to be
found within consciousness. People and paintings are to be found in an art gallery but nothing is found ‘in consciousness’. As I would put it, we find imagination displayed in the art gallery when we are arrested by Magritte’s ‘Time transfixed’—a steam train with smoke issuing from the funnel, projected out from an empty fireplace.

Thus Sartre would rather refer to image consciousness than to images, even while exigencies of syntax make him revert to ‘image’ as a quasi-thing. He compromises by writing of the image as irreal. As with Ryle (as we shall see) the differences between imagining, perceiving, hoping and regretting emerge in the differences between these modes of consciousness rather than in the status of their ‘objects’. If it sounds strangely iconoclastic—image smashing—to deny the existence of mental images we may deploy ‘mental image’ as an incomplete phrase (the average human, say). An incomplete phrase is fully defined only within a more extended syntax. ‘I have a visual image of Pierre sitting at his desk’ means, as a whole, ‘I am visually imagining Pierre sitting at his desk.’ There can be no conceivable loss of content in the richness of creativity of imagination in this shift. The (pseudo) qualities of the (pseudo) mental object all appear in specifying the content of my visual imagining.

Because of established syntax, the tendency to reify the image is endemic. Even as we demote mental images, ‘intentional’ objects will rise up as things to which ‘propositional attitudes’ relate. Ryle resists that formal reification, also. If I hope for relief from the present drought, I do not posit this (non-existent) relief as having a kind of being, simply in that I do hope for it. That there will be relief from the present drought specifies what my hope is.5

In claiming that mental images are not one more kind of imagery along with objects of observation such as sketches and photographs, Sartre accommodates the quasi-objectual mental imagery as ‘quasi-observed’. The business of imagining is to bring what is absent or non-existent before the mind as if real—thus as if ready to be observed. When ‘secure’ knowledge succeeds ‘ephemeral’ perception we can ‘think all of a thing’s attributes at once’. Within any one ‘take’ when I perceive a cube there are only some of its sides and angled corners whereas when I ‘know’ what a cube is I can think ‘all its sides and angles at once: rectilinear three-dimensional object with six sides and twelve internal angles’.
There is a primary consciousness of the object not only when we think what a cube is, but also when we perceive some specific cube. In each case you can move to a reflective stage about that consciousness of the object. The difference lies neither in the object of awareness nor in one’s liability to reflect upon consciousness. The difference is, Sartre claims, that the theoretical knowledge of the cube exists ‘as at the heart of the object’ rather than taking it in from various subtended angles of vision. In perception there is a ‘multiplicity of appearances serving their apprenticeship’; in thought I ‘apprehend its entirety [as if] in one glance’.

Sartre proposes that imagining is thus ambiguously located between thinking’s overall grasp and the specific angularity of perceiving. With visual imagination, as in perception, the object ‘gives itself in profiles’ whereas intellectual imagination has no need to ‘make a tour’.

[To form an image] is to link a concrete knowledge to elements made properly representative: I never find in the image anything I have not put there [...] imagining is constructing or producing, not discovering. There is an essential poverty in the image [...] there is no ‘beam of light’ to exhibit some [hitherto] unseen relationship. [...] The ‘object’ in the image is presented as having to be apprehended in a multiplicity of acts’, but because ‘the image [itself] does not teach anything’ he reckons this a ‘phantom’ opacity. ‘[Rather] we are in an attitude [towards it] of quasi-observation, as if we were going to observe when we are not going to.’

It is because there is something ‘written’ there only to the extent that I knew what to put there in the first place, that I do not ‘read’ the page of the book that I have imagined. Sartre’s recognition of the [only] quasi-observable status of the image helps to explain how a ‘poverty-stricken’ image still has ‘a rich and profound sense’. I bring to it exactly that ‘profound sense’ that I have already learned. The image need be no more than a sign of that.

Though, syntactically, we treat the image as if a knowable object it thus appears as a mysterious object that ‘steadfastly refuses to yield up its secrets’. We have falsely considered it as an object: ‘the image never precedes the intentionality of which it must therefore be a descriptor post hoc.’ I want to jest that here we have the first rule of the image game: ‘Don’t say anything about the image’. Seriously—what you say does not adhere to the object; the description concerned the imagining process as a whole.
OBJECTIVITY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

In regarding its objects as other than itself, consciousness has its *objectivity.*

“Consciousness is exhausted in its positing”, as Sartre will say. He can distinguish imagining from perceiving—in terms of modes of consciousness rather than ‘imaginary’ objects. He can do this because he understands consciousness as a ‘nihilation’ of its object. The imagining of Pierre may be as absent (for a time), ‘elsewhere (dwells permanently too far off to expect to perceive him again), or non-existent (Pierre is fictional). In all cases, Sartre claims, there is *at least* a quasi-*observation;* you imagine Pierre as he is or *would have to be* in virtue of what we know of him. Yet imagination is only quasi-*observation* since the image will not stay steady; its spontaneity means that it refuses to submit to examination: “My image of an absent person is a certain means of not *touching* him”. To cast the image as an object of inspection is to turn it into a surrogate for your friend. The ‘image’ is a syntactical illusion cast by the internal accusative of imagining; imagining is thinking that is miscast as a kind of ‘seeing’ when it concentrates on sensible qualities, actions and events: ‘we can [only] try to react to an image [as] we do to perception.’ Imagining is charged with affect; the momentarily quasi-objectual ‘image’ is already part of the affect of which it is but a symptom.

When ‘the image’ is rethought as the accusative of an *imagining consciousness,* spontaneity emerges as a principal feature. A theory of consciousness begins to emerge from the particular instance of the *imagining consciousness.* Sartre explains the ‘image’ not by your relation to it, but to what you are conscious of. The ‘spontaneity’ that interests him need not be a delightful ‘rush’; the spontaneity is the (conceptual) indetermination, by what *is the case,* of what we imagine. Consciousness of what one imagines concerns its *object,* but as a consciousness it is thus a consciousness (of) itself. Sartre brackets the ‘of’ to indicate that one is not regressively engaged with consciousness of consciousness of.

As with ‘the city of Paris’, the ‘of’ indicates neither that the city belongs to the god Paris nor that it might have been the apple of his eye. It is the city, Paris, *tout court.* The consciousness of one’s imagining what Pierre is doing in Berlin is only this: in imagining what Pierre is doing in Berlin you are *ipso facto* in a state of consciousness. Using imagery hauntingly like Ryle’s, Sartre writes: “The image is not a piece of wood floating on the sea, but a wave amongst waves”.

When Edward Casey claimed that Sartre could find no place for Baudelaire’s claim to ‘create a world’ he was right to note that Sartre *distinguishes* the imagi-
nary from what is real. In his language, one ‘nihilates’—‘makes nothing of’—what is directly perceived. One changes one’s mode of consciousness form perceiving to imaging. There is no reason, however, to follow Casey in judging Sartre to have demoted what is imagined as being in an ‘anti-world’, or to have “repudiate[d] the productive powers of the imagination, as promoted by Kant, Schelling, Novalis and Blake.”14 We also find Casey making these same charges, and the same comparison with Baudelaire, in a paper of his written a decade earlier. Strangely, he himself then demotes Baudelaire as using mere ‘rhetoric’ or ‘poetics’ that ‘add little to an understanding of the actual nature of imagination.’

Casey’s use of ‘actual’ demonstrates how, even in challenging Sartre’s division of the real and imaginary as too sharp, he himself draws the line between a ‘poetic’ remark about imagination and one that concerns what imagination is, actually. We may take a steadier view of the imaginary by looking within Baudelaire’s actual poetry. For instance, in the famous ‘L’invitation au voyage’ the narrator, addressing ‘mon enfant, ma soeur’ creates a lullaby to make dream of a renewed childhood, to yearn for an impossible ‘luxe, calme et volupté’. Sartre’s observation of imagination’s strength in presenting its object as absent is precisely to the point of the power of the poem to create beauty in evoking unsatisfiable desire. Baudelaire would be unhinged rather than the subtle poet he is if he took himself to be ‘reporting back’ from another ‘reality’.

Paul Ricoeur opens a discussion with remarks similar to those of Casey concerning Sartre’s treatment of the mental image. He remarks that Sartre’s opening treatment of the image does not “open the description of imagination to the traits of fiction”. Ricoeur thinks that Sartre has followed too closely a tradition that considers what we imagine as only derived from what we have perceived, and that Sartre’s account deals only with the role of physical images as a vehicle of imagination. Ricoeur finds Sartre’s analysis ‘brilliant’ in describing how the material analogue ‘disappears’ in directing imaginative consciousness to its object. Ricoeur thinks, however, that by taking a physical picture rather than mental one as his paradigm, Sartre’s has reinforced ‘the privilege of the original’. For Ricoeur, the upshot is that Sartre cannot account for imagination in fiction, which need not use a physical model to direct the reader’s attention to the world of the narrative.

Ricoeur agrees with Sartre that when I imagine a friend who is in another city, it is that friend himself who is the object of my imagination. He complains, however, that Sartre never clarifies ‘the relation of [such] absence to unreality’. Hamlet is
fictional rather than ‘absent’. (My example.) Let us open this question, then, if only for a moment. What is the object of imagination when I think about Hamlet? Does Sartre need a mental image rather than a physical being as the focus of imagining Hamlet? Certainly, Sartre’s paradigm is an absent friend whereas the paradigm of what I imagine in fiction concerns the character and actions of a nonexistent figure. Ricoeur claims that here we have ‘two classes of phenomena’—to an imagined friend one might ‘ascribe to the magic of quasi-presence’ but to the other belong ‘the spontaneity of fiction’. He notes how Sartre, in describing a ‘fascinated’ consciousness, exhibits the spontaneity of consciousness and fascination as belonging to the same phenomenon. This is masterfully described (admits Ricoeur) as spellbound spontaneity or fatality. Why then is Ricoeur so doubtful that Sartre’s account of imagination could encompass fiction? When I think of Pierre as in Berlin, it is Pierre rather than some image that I am thinking of, as shown by the relevance of information that he is no longer alive, or has in fact returned and is about to enter the door. When I think of Hamlet as in a gloomy castle in Denmark, it is a fictional imagination that is at work, as evidenced by the fact that all and only the relevant information derives from Shakespeare’s script. Since intentionality applies equally, whether I imagine Pierre or Hamlet, that my friend is alive and real whereas ‘Hamlet’ is the name of a character in a play makes no difference to the problematic of imagining.

RYLE AND THE IMAGE: ‘WHY DO THE PEOPLE IMAGINE A VAIN THING!’

In a paper written a few years after The Concept of Mind, Ryle makes reference to Sartre’s work during the 1930s in L’imaginaire. He takes up the same line of thought as Sartre:

We are all strongly tempted to think of the human mind as a sort of private chamber, and to think of the things that we visually and auditorily imagine as, somehow, authentic occupants of this private chamber. Imagining then comes to be misconstrued as a special brand of witnessing the objects of which happen to be internal and private to the witness. Sartre, in his L’imaginaire, (1940), was partly concerned to attack this same conceptual misconception. There was another, connected conceptual mistake which I, like Sartre, tried to expose. Hume ... maintained that the difference between what is seen and what is visualised, between ‘impressions’ and ‘ideas’, was a difference in degree of intensity. So, presumably, very faint noises, such as barely heard whispers, would have to be auditory
images or ‘ideas’; and merely imagined shouts would have to be actually heard whispers. Which is absurd.\textsuperscript{20}

The recognition of this error is crucial to Ryle and Sartre’s success in treating imagining as directed at what we imagine—a winged horse, a perpetual motion machine or how one’s best friend is dealing with some difficulty. Neither of them would deny that there is such a thing as imagery—seeing ‘in the mind’s eye’, hearing ‘with the mind’s ear’ and so on. What they share is their diagnosis of the mystification of imagining—and consequent deconstruction of that mystification. Such imaging is not in itself an internal ‘image’ whose relation to what we imagine could be modelled on how a painting or photograph relates to what it pictures. What produces the mystification of imagining is to identify it with the occurrence of mental imagery—considered as inner pictures that we witness. To take mental imagery to be related to its object as a picture is to the object of which it is a ‘copy’ is part of the same confusion. What we attend to when we imagine—that in which we take our interest, and against which we test the accuracy and rigour of our imaginings—is the object of our imagination. We can show quite precisely why the power of the imagination is not to be identified or understood in terms of one’s propensity to produce, harbour or elaborate mental imagery considered as inner pictures that have qualities by which they represent the imagined object. We dislodge the (thus reified) mental image as centrepiece, but not in the spirit of iconoclasm.\textsuperscript{21}

One may actively imagine what is or might be without having specific and relevant mental images of it. We mull over the issues propositionally; we make a sketch of what we are trying to imagine; we converse with a friend about the issue. The power of the imagination is crucial in explaining how sensory experience generates understanding of an event that we witnessed with initial incomprehension. In gaining a philosophical grasp of the ‘role of imagination’, however, we risk reifying this ‘power of imagination’ as some single, essential and quasi-magical factor. We ‘call upon the imagination’ but we do not call upon any such single essential function. We employ and demonstrate our powers of imagination in the multiple ways we sense, perceive, observe, and infer—as we come tentatively to reason, formulate theories, and gain knowledge. There is a problem in presenting the phenomena of imagination—how things are, might be or have been. We must demonstrate the distinctiveness of imagining, but without raising up imagination as a distinct and separable item in a recipe for baking accurate reliable and well-rounded knowledge.\textsuperscript{22}
While the simple occurrence of mental imagery is not yet a work of the imagination, the way of putting the point that thus emerges reminds us of the difference between the sheer occurrence of imagery, and the power of imagination in doing something with it. The power of imagination can be involved in what we do in response to the occurrence of mental imagery. This accent upon such facts reminds us that when we distinguish imagery from the work of the imagination we are not thereby derogating the having of imagery.

Preoccupation with the image as quasi-independent representation occludes another important issue. As dealing as much with what is unseen, unknown, or non-existent, imagination is prone to induce a sense of mystique about what we imagine. If to visually imagine this red apple to be green involves perceiving an ‘inner’ visual image that is green, this would be to ‘perceive’ something that green where nothing physical is green. The very existence of visual imagery would then establish a dualism of mental and physical properties. Ryle and Sartre’s domestication of Husserl’s ‘transcendental phenomenology’ derails such an argument. Like Husserl, they used the intentionality of various different modes of consciousness to displace empiricist notions of imagination as a (faint) idea derived from its progenitor impression. Locke’s model of how a visual image relates to what is imaged is the relation of a painting to the scene painted. This robust social model, however, has the unbidden consequence that the visual image (Locke’s idea) is itself, as is a painting, coloured, spaced, and configured. The model thus regenerates Cartesian dualism.

We can further disturb the identification of imagining with having images; we observe that a good deal of imagining is akin to thinking. ‘Imagine what it would be like to’, or ‘what it would be like if’ is just about the same as ‘think what it would be like to’, or what it would be like if.’ It takes more than having an image of undergoing something to really imagine what it would be like. Ryle achieves a sensitive, detailed and ampliative essay on the varieties of imagining, fancying, pretending and producing fantasies. Part of his work consists in paying close attention to the myth of ‘hidden inner processes’ that we project onto the scene of actual capacities and tendencies. Looking in the wrong place, we thus mis-describe what we do find so as to make it fit. Yes, there are processes of mind but Ryle’s famous dispositions do not displace these; since we are no less disposed to thoughts and feelings. He understands a ‘non-visibility’ and ‘non-audibility’ of processes of thought and feeling so as to undermine an idea embedded in our syntax—that to imagine is to be a witness of images. Rather than a category mistake,
it is the misconstruction of that unobservability that makes a *hidden reality* both of imagining.

**IMAGINING AS A PRIVATE EVENT: THE IMAGE AS A ‘HIDDEN’ OBJECT**

The ‘hiddenness’ of imagining is like that of thinking. Not able to see or hear it, I wonder what you are thinking. I do not wonder at it, however, as I would wonder at your having become invisible or get irritated at your inaudible remarks. You cannot be deprived of what it is logically absurd to propose. I can listen to your confidences but not your feelings; still they are not inaudible as your whispered remark might have been. And yes, I can see some of the objects that you espied even though, just as I cannot see your imagining them, I cannot see your seeing of them. As I might see what you are seeing I can imagine it, too; I can imagine the song you might be hearing and yet could not even imagine hearing your hearing of it. Denis Brain’s playing of Mozart’s first horn concerto is running through my head; like you, sitting beside me, I hear neither his playing nor myself imagining it; that imagining is not therefore strangely hidden from our senses. I sketch the face of an absent friend, which you can look at, while you cannot look at my image of him. Ryle, after Sartre, will retort that I cannot look at it, either, and that each of us has access to what I am imagining, nonetheless.

Ryle’s critics have read him as engaged in reducing descriptions of what appears to be an inner, mental, private life, to descriptions of outward behaviour, and dispositions towards such behaviour. Some reviled him for his attempt to so demean humanity’s imaginative powers. Others praised him for his bold, though sadly doomed effort to show that we can regard people as nothing more than physical bodies engaged in outward physical behaviour. Both those ways of reading his work ignore most of what is contained in *The Concept of Mind*, and his various other writings of the same era. His method is ‘conceptual geography’ rather than conceptual reduction—he works to remedy what we lack—detailed descriptions of a terrain with which we have a practical familiarity.

Ryle opens his discussion of imagination with these words: “Theorists and laymen tend to attribute ‘other worldly’ reality to the imaginary and then to treat minds as the clandestine habitats of such fleshless beings” (CM, 232).
Thinking in this way prompts the question of where these things that we imagine, exist. It would seem that they are imagined as in this room, or in Juan Fernández, but they are seen there as ‘in the mind’s eye’, and it thus that seeing that is reckoned to require its special object, suited to such a special vision—something that is then dubbed, conveniently, a ‘mental’ image. Thus Ryle, in his project of disturbing the apparently innocuous common language that produces these ontological curiosities, takes it as a ‘crucial problem to describe what is ‘seen in the mind’s eye’ and ‘heard in one’s head’.

‘To see is one thing; to visualise, another’ Ryle declaims. We visualise with our eyes shut, or in the dark. And so too with hearing—a tune can run in the head; your neighbour hears nothing.’ We can deal with these phenomenological facts, Ryle implies in what he proceeds to do, by describing carefully what is involved, and what is wrongly assumed when we use certain idioms. For instance, Ryle will, in due course, point out that though my neighbour does not hear the tune running through my head, neither do I. If ‘inaudible’, the tune that runs through the head is not a strangely ‘inaudible’ version of what is normally audible. Thus Ryle does not ‘deny the existence of mental imagery’ in that he gives full attention to phenomena such as hearing a tune in one’s head. But to ‘hear a tune in one’s head’ is to imagine hearing a tune. To imagine something happening, even vividly, is not the same as having it happen. We can add to Ryle’s argument here. We readily concur that to hear a tune as heard in the Berlin Philharmonie running through the head does not guarantee that we are in that concert hall. That is ‘only imagined’, of course. Yes, but in that case, why should we not fully admit that hearing the music is also ‘only imagined’.

It is not true that you must categorise having a visual image as a kind of seeing, if you are to recognise the reality of having visual imagery. In a series of examples, Ryle points out how misguided it would be to take the ‘as if I were seeing it again’ as licence for concluding that my mental imagining is a kind of seeing. His homely examples satirise the very idea. A doll does not come any closer to being a kind of baby in being ever more lifelike. It is a doll, not a baby that is lifelike. A forgery does not become an authentic signature by being executed ever more convincingly. And, if I may add my own twist to his argument, just imagine (sic) that while you were vividly imagining a friend she did walk into the room. That would be a totally different category of experience.
The same argument applies to the ‘earworm’—the persistent recurrence of a tune in one’s head. The persistence and the vividness of the ‘earworm’ does not challenge the difference of category between hearing a tune in the head, and hearing a tune being played. To say, ‘it is as if I were hearing it’ does not mean that you are almost taken in by your own imaginative spontaneity. As if, when you cannot get Colonel Bogey out of your head, you were to conclude that a brass band had installed itself in your study.

A critic might respond that even if seeing something in the mind’s eye is not seeing anything, it is the having of a visual image. Hence, we must admit the reality of the image that we have. Presumably, such a critic fancies that they know of the image ‘by acquaintance’ or ‘by introspecting it’. But nothing licenses such a critic to speak of ‘the image’ as a thing to be scrutinised in any way. ‘Having a visual image’ is a phrase that is explicated as a whole—either from the homely metaphor of ‘seeing in the mind’s eye’ or by some further phrase that it spins off, such as ‘visually imaging’.

An actor whose progressive performances of dying become ever more lifelike runs no increasing risk of death. It may not seem as absurd that seeing in the mind’s eye might approach being a visual actuality as the visual image becomes more vivid, persistent, or insistent. That, actually, someone is vividly imaging something is the fact to be articulated. It is pointless for a critic of the Ryle/Sartre account to tell us of ever more vivid and persistent imaginings. The account accepts the reality of having visual imagery—of seeing in the mind’s eye. But that is not to admit the image as an entity that has the properties one is imagining to pertain to what is imagined. The situation can be no different when considering sensory imaging—‘seeing in the mind’s eye a single coloured patch’. Only the hypostasis of an object that has the properties ‘seen in the mind’s eye’ entails a dualistic consequence.

Furthermore, the Sartre/Ryle account has no particular difficulty (pace Ricoeur) in saying what is achieved when a fictional character is enacted. To say that an actor portrays Hamlet flawlessly means, for instance, that the audience remains immersed in the character as the story unfolds. The price of the ticket does not include full admission to a real though fictional world that would, ontologically, match the allegedly ‘real’ colours of a visual image.
ON HAVING MENTAL IMAGERY

Despite all that can be said about not reifying the mental image on the ground of the activity of imagining this or that, still this ‘private’ process goes on, and one can question whether Sartre or Ryle fully deal with this. To raise this question of privacy—that my imagining cannot be yours and that I cannot observe your imagining—is to shift the ground of the argument about the objects of imagining.28 That my imagining cannot amount to your imagining has the same status as the fact that my scrambling the eggs cannot amount your scrambling them. Such manifold ‘privacies’ in one’s possession of what one does are but specific forms of the general tautology, ‘I am not you’. To say, ‘Ah, but anyone can see my scrambling the eggs as well as they see your similar breakfast preparations. But only I can see my mental images.’ Whoops! Our critic had thought that one could relinquish the idea that mental images were objects to be seen, and still find trouble for the Sartre/Ryle project of understanding mind. The visual image, however, arises to be ‘seen’ (perceived’, ‘intuited’ etc.) only if reified already. Otherwise, the challenging difference between you and me—that only I perceive my image—disintegrates. Simply that I am engaged in my imagining whereas you are engaged in finding out about it, generates no aura of mystique. For similarly, if I am engaged in writing a letter then it is you who are engaged in your interpretation of that.

There is this tendency to pluck ‘mental image’ out of the noun phrase ‘the having of a mental image’ and use that part as the name of something that has its own properties. It is then that one seems licensed to say, ‘I know these properties from having the image, whereas for you have to be told, I make you a sketch, and so on. Formally, such a severance of part of an idiomatic phrase has nothing to recommend it. Quine reminded us that one could reify ‘sakes’ in the same way. I crack the eggs for the sake of making an omelette. I pluck sake out of for the sake of. Now I can tell you that it is simply in cracking the eggs that I know for what sake I do that, whereas you have to ask me, or attend to the course of my action.

One never lays these fallacies to rest because their related sources collude with each other:

i. my doing (whatever) cannot be your doing that same whatever
ii. I can know what I am doing simply in doing it whereas you must know indirectly
iii. one reads literal meanings into parts of an idiom—seeing in the mind’s eye’.
iv. one's attention is shifted by vivid imagining from its object to its content.

Consider (iv), by way of example. A reader of this paper wanted to remind me that one becomes preoccupied with a tune in the head (an ‘earworm’). The tune (in the head) becomes the object of attention. Thus one cannot escape the existence of the auditory image.

Though these reflections are posed as an argument that the auditory image is an object to be perceived, the objection presupposes the falsity of what it means to refute. For if to have a musical image is to imagine making or hearing music, then this attention to ‘auditory imagery’ is only an attending to oneself as imagining hearing or playing the music.

**SARTRE’S ANALAGON: RYLE MAKES A DIFFERENCE**

Ryle and Sartre move in parallel in undercutting the notion of the mental image as a kind of object. Sartre’s terminology of the analagon, however, leads him into trouble. The notion itself is a simple one. When I imagine something, or act in the imagination of something, there is some ‘vehicle’—the analagon—that I use to make the transition between the actual and the imaginary. In imagining my friend Pierre, I look at a photograph of him and, in gazing at that, bring Pierre to mind. A bad photograph may be enough. It may make me think, ‘That isn’t how I imagine him’. I am thus prompted to imagine him as he is. So, too, I may find a caricature that inspires my imagination better than does a photograph. Or, in imagining how a tune goes, I may whistle it, or play a moment from a recording, or sound out a few bars on the piano. On hearing or making these actual sounds I may I sense that I had moved off the track of the melody. In maintaining a fictional persona in a stage production, my analagon will consist of the usual props. The costume I put on, the deliberate limp I affect, the sounds of the prompter giving me the opening words of my speech—my imaginative ‘creation’ of my character employs any or all of these material devices. Nevertheless, I step out of character if they become the object of my imagination. Such supports and reminders ‘stage’ my imagining of myself into the character that appears to the audience in all its integrity.

When Sartre considers imagining when there is no such prop, he finds the analagon by casting the mental image itself in that role. At least verbally, this is to treat the image as if an object—something scrutinised in the way that one might
a photograph. But if to have a visual image of Pierre simply is to visually imagine Pierre (Sartre’s principal line) then this is a mistake. Since for Sartre an image of Pierre is not an object I use when I imagine Pierre we should treat, as a glitch in terminology, his deeming the image as analogon. Let us see how Ryle, without such a formal notion, uses ‘mental image’ as but a syntactical derivative of statements of our what we are imagining—whether visual, theatrical, and so on.

In describing such ‘unassisted’ imagination Ryle suggests that it is because we do so often use observable representations when visually imagining that we raise up ‘mental image’ as if it were a semi-independent thing with its own, (partially) determinable qualities. We were free to recognise the properties of drawings and photographs as objects with their own properties. It seemed harmless enough to adopt the language of ‘mental’ ‘visual’ or ‘auditory’ images, as if we might scrutinise them, also, in our efforts to imagine something. We might have thus thought that having a visual image must be a kind of seeing when in my imagination ‘it was just as if I saw Pierre. And yet, on reflection we realise, easily, that a painting of being at the seaside, however lifelike, cannot become a way of being at the seaside. No cooling breeze, no splash of saltwater, no cry of the seagulls, no matter how compelling the painting. The metaphor of ‘seeing in the mind’s eye’ (and ‘smelling in the mind’s nose’) glosses (but can never overcome) our sense of the absurdity of taking a painting of the seaside as amounting to being at the seaside. I look at a painting thus to see Brighton Beach in it. It is no less absurd, though perhaps more recondite, to suggest that having an evocative mental image of Brighton Beach could amount to seeing something. (What? Brighton Beach? Brighton-Beach-in-the-image?) Rather than staggering at absurdity we have puzzled over metaphysical meaning.

That is the error that Sartre addresses, with such nuance and thoroughness in L’imaginaire. The defect in presentation, though, is that in exhibiting the chasm between ‘seeing in the mind’s eye’ and seeing a painting, he has enjoyed the simple syntax of ‘mental image’ that makes of it a (grammatical) object. The work he does, however, is to undo its status as an object. He does not flatly deny the image. Rather, he deconstructs the whole picture of ‘mental’ objects in a ‘private’ picture gallery. His expression is then vulnerable criticism. He lets it appear that he accepts the mental image as a possible object of reflective consciousness. As an object, it is thus derogated as ‘impoverished’ in comparison with what we do see.
BROADENING THE FIELD OF THE IMAGINATION

Given the wealth of imaginative activity that Sartre and Ryle discover by decen-
tring the image in account for imagination, however, it must be unjust to criti-
cise them as derogating imagination. What we do find in those who make that
criticism is a derogation of their wider field of imagination. For instance, Casey
declares that “we do not ordinarily consider [pretending] to be [an] example of
imagining the fullest sense.” How can that be true? Surely, in pretending to be
a bear a child is imagining being a bear. In rebuttal, Casey claims this: “the basic
invariant function of imagining proper [is] the conscious projection and contempla-
tion of objects posited as pure possibilities.” If this seems to us ‘trivial’ or ‘vacuous’
as Casey fears he explains that his possibilities are not the mere ‘hypothetical’
one where we imagine ‘what might happen if’. Proper imagination’s possibilities
are those we project “for their own sake.” Are we thus forbidden to say that a child
playing at being a bear is ‘projecting objects (small alcove in her room) posited as
a ‘pure possibility’ of it being a bear cave. That possibility is ‘pure’ enough. Cannot
the child project these possibilities ‘for their own sake’? She might only later play
to entertain her parents?

This appeal to propriety is used to push us philosophers back to an imagining that
is ‘proper’ because it ‘has its own sort of object’, where that the object is an ‘imagi-
nary’ state of affairs. Circularity threatens this defence of traditional territory,
however. One cannot define imagination (proper or not) in terms of an imaginary
object. For his part, in handling the phenomenon of imagining, Ryle does so with-
out invoking a mental construct that is exclusively the concern of imagining. Once
‘mental’ (visual, auditory etc.) imagining has replaced the visual-image-as-object-of-
inner-perception we can work out consequent details without impediment. On his
side, Sartre, in demoting the mental image, does not ‘degrade’ imagining. Neither
does his move ‘intellectualise’ the imagination. Ryle’s emphasis on imaginative
activity does not make a behaviourist of him, either. Having ceased to fixate on
mental imagery as at the centre of imagining Sartre and Ryle roll out the diverse
forms of imagination. The concept of picturing, visualising or ‘seeing’ is a proper
and useful concept, but its use requires no inner gallery in which to suspend such
pictures. Tersely– imagining occurs, but mental images are not seen. I do have
tunes running in my head, but no tunes are heard (not by me, let alone another)
when I have these tunes running there. A person picturing his nursery is in a cer-
tain way like that person in seeing his nursery. The similarity consists in its being
to him ‘just as if he were seeing it’. ‘He is not being a spectator of a resemblance
of his nursery, but he is resembling being a spectator of his nursery’ (CM, 234).

AGAINST MENTAL IMAGES AS INFORMATIVE

I have remarked how, in explaining why we so easily reify images as perceivable, Ryle invokes our use of drawings, paintings and photographs:

When a visible likeness of a person is in front of my nose, I often seem to be seeing the person himself [there] though he [...] may be long since dead. Or when I hear a recording of a friend’s voice, I fancy I hear him speaking [...] in that room, though he is miles away. The genus is seeming to perceive, and one very familiar species is seeming to see something, when looking at our ordinary snapshot of it. Seeming to see, when no physical likeness [such as a photograph] is before the nose is [but] another species (CM, 240).

I should make explicit a step that is tacit in this argument. There is a point in his emphasising that ‘seeming to see, where no physical replica is present’ is [but] another species of the same genus.’ What this emphasis shows is this: in imagining something, inspiration from some physical replica was only incidental. If we can imagine something then we correct what some physical replica may wrongly suggest. Furthermore, as Ryle says (with Sartre), we can use a cartoon to prompt our imagination—often to greater effect than would be effected by a ‘realistic’ photograph. It is only to the extent that we have an initial imaginative grip on the object of the cartoon that we can see its exaggerated point. These facts show a degree of independence of imagining an absent face from being presented with a perceivable image of that face. The conclusion we should draw then (teasing out the threads of Ryle’s argument), is that there is no need to postulate a visual image as a possible object of scrutiny in order to understand how we can imagine something in the absence of a perceivable (physical) replica to guide or prompt us. When we correct a proffered photograph as ‘a very bad likeness’ we do this not by (impossibly) setting it alongside a ‘mental image’. We judge straight off that this photograph ‘is certainly not my younger brother Ted, in any way that I can imagine him.’

Fundamentally, ‘I see my younger brother in my mind’s eye’ means that I can visually imagine him—ready to correct any specific representation of him as atypical or distorting. I need no reified ‘mental image’ to scrutinise. It is not as if my ‘visually imagining something’ failed to access something equivalent to a photo-
Any real object of scrutiny that might correct me is something that, in turn, I might correct while forming what I imagine.

THE PRIVACY OF IMAGINING

It might be said that even if we do not reify the mental image, still, imagining is a ‘private’ or ‘inner’ process that is thus an obstacle for Ryle’s (legendary) project of showing that all ‘mental’ phenomena, as communicable, are described by reference to observable behaviour. What Ryle does in describing imaginary episodes is at some distance from such a cliché of his intentions. Take, for example, the canny use he makes of a subtle difference between going through a tune in one’s head and following a tune to which we listen. In following a tune that we hear, we have some anticipation of how it will go; we bear in mind how far it has progressed; we retain something of the mood and progression of melody and theme that has occurred so far. For, when we follow the piece of music in this way we must be able to anticipate—and retain. The notion that we must need the ‘back-up’ of a second-order rendition of earlier and later sections is conceptually regressive. To follow the back-up, I would in turn have to retain and anticipate the course of the music, no less than in following the first-order performance. Certainly, one may read the score while listening to the music. Still it remains that in reading any section of it we keep in mind what had preceded that, and some anticipation of what is to come. Or shall we need a meta-score to interpret the score by reference to past and future phases and phrases? And so on ad infinitum?

Ryle points out that the ‘private performance’ is not hidden away in another world. When we go through a tune ‘in the head’ we deploy this same operative knowledge

Both [following a tune to which we are listening, and going through a tune in one’s head] are utilisations of knowledge of how the tune goes [which] is exercised in […] following the tune, when actually heard, [also] in humming or playing it, and in fancying oneself humming or playing it, or [fancying oneself] listening to it (CM, 254).

Ryle’s point about the ‘purely imaginative exercise’ of hearing the tune in the head is this:

It is ‘more sophisticated than following the tune, when heard, or produc-
ing it”—more ‘sophisticated’ since it involves the thought of following the
tune, in the way in which sparring involves the thought of fighting in ear-
nest [... we might say that imagining oneself [...] humming [the tune] is a
series of abstentions from producing the noises which would be the right
ones to produce [...] That is why learning to fancy one is .. humming comes
later than learning to [...] hum [In a similar fashion] silent soliloquy is a
flow of pregnant non-sayings’ (CM, 254).

Ryle proceeds to apply this analogy to visually imagining Mt Helvellyn:

[This] process involves the thought of having a view of Helvellyn [which
is] one utilisation amongst others of the knowledge of how [that moun-
tain] should look. The expectations that are fulfilled in the recognition at
sight of Helvellyn are not [indeed] fulfilled in picturing it, but the [mental]
picturing of it is something like a rehearsal of getting [those expectations]
fulfilled [...] Thus, far from picturing involving the having of faint sensa-
tions [à la Hume], picturing involves missing just what one would be due to
get, if one were seeing the mountain (CM, 255).

It is on the basis of this analysis that Ryle explicates the role of imagery in pre-
tended actions—in games and on the stage. Ryle is not trivialising the imagina-
tion, as Casey thinks. One cannot sustain the notion Casey has—one that would
also trivialise Ryle’s approach—that imaginative and pretended action scarcely
deserves a philosopher’s attention. Casey, as does Ricoeur, calls upon literary
imagination as an exemplar. But surely the genius of an actor is comparable to
that of the playwright. A philosopher should not scorn to keep company with the
nimble wits of a child who turns a dull back garden into a dangerous jungle with
the aid of plank or two. (You would meet Ryle there.) Sartre is also interested in
the imagination demonstrated in acting. Casey claimed that Sartre’s is an “anti-
Romantic program” that “repudiates the productive powers of the imagination as
promoted by Kant, Schelling, Novalis and Blake”. This is a strange assessment.
Sartre has always had a central place in his philosophy for literary and other ar-
tistic works. His demotion of the mental image would seem irrelevant to such an
evaluation of his work on the imagination.

What is it that Ryle writes that earns him Ricoeur’s rebuke for dealing only with
Kant’s ‘reproductive’ rather than a ‘productive’ imagination? Ryle’s immediacy
in describing involvement with music and his appreciation of Jane Austin do not
announce him as ‘repudiating the productive imagination’. Casey says nothing to indicate what it is about the provinces of imagination that interest his four great figures (mentioned above) that would place what they say or produce beyond bounds of Sartre’s interest in imagination. And in any case, it is not to ‘derogate’ imagination to observe that the detail of visual imagination is sparse compared with sensory perception. It is by the use of imagination that we find our way through the sensory jungle. As Arendt points out in The Life of the Mind, it is the power of thought to ‘de-sense’ what we recollect that gives the ‘withdrawal’ into thought a particular kind of power. It is not imagination, as Casey claims, but the reified mental image that Sartre—and Ryle in his different fashion—recognise as ‘impoverished’ in content—in comparison with a perceptual object. That aspect of ‘impoverishment’ is tied to the view of the image as a quasi-object that we would inspect, as we inspect what we see or hear.

As a final example of how smoothly descriptions may proceed in the absence of reference to a reified image, we may recall Ryle adeptly taking up the imagining of odours—here we have no ready-made language of ‘smell images’. The description of imagining is in no way impoverished by the absence of a proprietary ‘object of the imagination’:

When someone mentions a blacksmith’s forge, I find myself back in my childhood. I can vividly ‘see’ the glowing red horseshoe on the anvil, fairly vividly ‘hear’ the hammer ringing on the shoe, and less vividly ‘smell’ the singed hoof. How shall we describe this ‘smelling in the mind’s nose’? [...] I have no way of paraphrasing [this] as ‘I smell a copy of the smell of a singed hoof. The language of copies and originals does not apply to smells (CM, 238).

I would remark that the smell of the hoof in imagination can be ‘vivid’, while the smell of the hoof in perception cannot warrant that sort of epithet. As Ryle puts it, “however vividly I [...] ‘smell’ the smithy, the smell of lavender in my room is in no way drowned. There is no competition between the smell and a ‘smell’, as there is a competition between the smell of onions and the smell of lavender” (CM, 239).

There is a lesson in the supple accounts of various kinds of imaginings that Ryle and Sartre’s methods allow them to construct. Their work moves directly in opposition to the derogation of imagination that is imputed to Sartre by Casey—and to both of them by Ricoeur, in his more nuanced fashion. It is in coming to under-
stand the rich complexity of imaginings, and the limited but real role of mental imagery in those general powers of the imagination that we can see ‘as from the inside’ as Ryle puts it, how our occasions of pretence, acting and parody are significant events in any life that is lived and thought through with imagination. It is in their very demotion of the mental image that Ryle and Sartre find the space for all that we imagine—something happening, how to untie a knot, what a character in the novel must do next, whether to resolve the theme of a symphony I am writing, or simply, how to continue, silently, a line of thought I had begun in conversation.39

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NOTES

1. It is not *imagineing* that is charged with the ‘impoverishment of form and content’, as Casey claims, but the mental image when considered as a quasi object, comparable with a visible thing. “Sartre on the Imagination”, *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, Ed. P. Schlipp. (Open Court, Illinois, 1981), 140. There is in the imaginary work only what is put into it. We cannot say that Hamlet is tall or short unless the text says so, or it can be deduced. That does not mean that it is an ‘impoverished’ work of art.


3. To use this example is not to say that paintings must be ‘representational’. The point is only that there are paintings and photographs in which we can see people and scenes.

4. Quine points out that when we imagine Pegasus, it is not some idea or image of Pegasus with which we are concerned. Pegasus is winged, and a horse; the idea or image is neither of those. The image of Pegasus is of something winged; of a horse that has those wings. Imagination might itself ‘lend wings’ to an idea or image as it flits into the mind to ‘take wings’ as you generate a story.

5. Author’s example.

6. While we need not follow Thomas Nagel into his *View from Nowhere*, there is a reliable distinction there. It is the distinction between perception and thought rather than between common sense and scientific theory.

7. The ‘image’ has to be apprehended, on Sartre’s account, because the image’s opacity is phantom. What I imagine tests my efforts to imagine it. Only the image considered as an object to inspect is ‘phantom’.


9. My use of this word rhymes with Sartre’s project. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*. Trans H. Barnes. (London: Methuen, 1972). See Part III, Ch. 1, Section IV. Sartre introduces *objectivity* and thus opens up a space for consciousness to secure a certain objectivity.


16. My emphasis.


21. This is to speak of ‘image demolition’ within the life of the mind rather than as the smashing of statues.

22. There are valuable precedents for treating an activity or power as autonomous but not reified.
as a separable entity to be precipitated in the philosophical test-tube. Hannah Arendt faced such a problem in her project of writing about the distinctive roles in the ‘life of the mind’ of thinking, willing and judging. Each of those activities arises only in the context of, and as colouring in the quality of, each of the others, and yet their contributions to a rich, critical and communicative ‘life of the mind’ are distinctive and different.

23. Casey complains that in his attention to such imaginative activities, Ryle is derogating imagination. Casey complains that such imaginative activities are ‘not examples of imagining the fullest sense [and not] imagination proper’. “Imagination: Imagining and the Image”, Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, June (1971): 475.

24. It might be suggested (as by two readers of this paper) that even if mental images are not what we are imagining, persistent vivid imagery commands our attention and thus makes us aware of mental imagery.

25. A. J. Ayer once remarked (maybe in self-mockery) that Ryle is asking us to pretend to be anaesthetised.

26. The remarks that I have cited of Edward Casey, in their context, have this tone.


28. There is some connection. To reify the image is to bestow upon it properties that are intrinsic to its privacy. Certainly, that exacerbates the problem of understanding such privacy.

29. A Chinese story makes a surreal joke in transgressing this logic. A painter is to be beheaded because his paintings of the emperor’s palace are yet more beautiful than the palace. The painter seeks to paint one last scene—a deluge of water so lifelike that it becomes a torrent that pours out of the palace bearing the painter away.


33. Casey misjudges Sartre as trying to save perception from “contamination” and “fall[ing] into the embrace of intellectualist illusion”. See Casey, “Sartre on Imagination”, 158. To imagine is not to perceive (Sartre) but we can perceive imaginatively.

34. Those analytical philosophers who identify ‘inner mental’ life as processes in the brain make that imputation.

35. Sartre’s point is that a photograph can be used as analogon. It may also be a work of art, or anonymous.


39. For Casey to say “Ryle denies the existence of mental images” (“Imagination”, 482) is misleading—as if Ryle were unaware that he could run a tune in his head, or visually imagine Mt. Helvellyn. It is not to under-rate the importance or richness of imagining to consider it as a form of consciousness, rather than as the scrutiny of an ‘inner’ object.
hennemetic truth as dialogic
disclosure: a gadamerian
response to the tugendhat
critique
paul healy

What is the Gadamerian truth conception? Notwithstanding its prominence in
the title of his major work, the concept of truth remains implicit, underspecified,
and correspondingly enigmatic in Gadamer's writings. In response, the present
paper undertakes to defend a conception of hennemetic truth as dialogical
disclosure and to affirm its capacity to warrant, or justify, truth claims through
highlighting its differences from, as well as similarities to, the better-known
Heideggerian truth conception. In so doing, it challenges a prevalent assumption
that the Gadamerian truth concept simply mirrors the Heideggerian. In
particular, given the prominence accorded the experience of aesthetic truth and
the model of play (Spiel) in the first part of Truth and Method, it is often assumed
that, for Gadamer, as for Heidegger, the emergence of truth is best characterised
as a sudden disclosive event, as epitomised by metaphors of “lighting” and
“lightening.” Gadamer's emphasis on the “enlightening” (Einleuchtende) toward
the end of Truth and Method further reinforces this impression.

But such similarities notwithstanding, significant structural differences between
the Gadamerian and Heideggerian projects must also be factored in, and hence
it cannot, in fact, be assumed that the former's truth conception coincides
with the latter. In particular, as we shall see, to do so would be to overlook
the prominence of the dialogical dimension in Gadamer's thinking. Balancing
these considerations, I contend that hennemetic truth is more appropriately
conceptualised as dialogical disclosure. As elaborated below, this response has merits not just in better enabling us to conceptualise the Gadamerian truth conception, but also in terms of rebutting charges of arbitrariness, subjectivism, and relativism levelled against the Gadamerian truth concept through association with the Heideggerian.³

To this end, I begin by elaborating on the differences as well as similarities between the Gadamerian and Heideggerian truth conceptions. Thereafter, I go on to contend that these differences enable the former to withstand charges of relativism levelled against the Heideggerian conception of truth as disclosure, in particular those crystallised in the Tugendhat critique. I then go on to elaborate the case for, and merits of, construing Gadamerian truth as dialogical disclosure, outlining how this enables it to eschew the spectre of relativism which continues to haunt hermeneutic truth. Correlatively, I defend the complementarity of the ontological and epistemological in Gadamer’s thinking in face of a long-standing misconception that the hermeneutic emphasis on the former necessarily excludes the latter. Inter alia, this better positions the hermeneutic approach to impact the broader contemporary debate about knowledge and truth.⁴

However, it should also be noted at the outset that this paper is not intended as a comprehensive account of either Heidegger or Gadamer’s stance on truth, still less as an attempt to vindicate the putative merits of the latter at the expense of the former. Rather, to the extent possible within the confines of a short paper, the intent is simply to defend the contention that, although underspecified by Gadamer himself, his major work embodies resources capable of responding to problems of justification as epitomised in the Tugendhat critique of Heidegger’s truth conception, in ways beyond those readily discernible in the Heideggerian corpus.

HERMENEUTIC TRUTH IN GADAMER AND HEIDEGGER: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Traditionally, as is well known, truth has been defined in terms of correspondence with the facts (such that, famously, “the cat is on the mat” is true if, and only if, the cat is on the mat). Although the correspondence definition has not been uncontroversial on other grounds, Heidegger poses a radical new challenge to it by taking issue with its metaphysical presuppositions.⁵ He does so initially in Being and Time, Section 44, where he focuses on elucidating the ontological
conditions of the possibility of truth as correspondence. Contending that an ontologically prior event of unconcealment is necessary for the thing (state of affairs, or subject matter) to show itself as it is, and hence to enable its adequation (or otherwise) to become manifest, Heidegger here identifies unconcealment (aletheia, Unverborgenheit) or disclosure (Erschlossenheit) as the primary such condition. On this basis, Heidegger deems unconcealment to constitute truth in a more primary sense than correspondence, affirming that “the Being-true (truth) of the assertion must be understood as Being-uncovering.” Hence, while not negating the significance of truth as correspondence (or ‘correctness”, as he dubs it), Heidegger nonetheless defines truth primarily as disclosure. Moreover, although he goes on to explore the truth question in greater depth and complexity in his later writings, Heidegger’s emphasis on the primarily disclosive character of truth remains pivotal and enduring, while the suddenness and immediacy of the disclosive truth event are prominent in his later writings.

But our focus here is on the Gadamerian truth conception rather than the Heideggerian. The latter is broached as background primarily because, being underspecified by Gadamer himself, it is often taken for granted that Gadamer’s stance on truth closely resembles Heidegger’s. Indeed, to an extent, Gadamer lends weight to this assessment not only by explicitly acknowledging his indebtedness to Heidegger, but also because Heidegger’s emphasis on a sudden, disclosive truth event, as epitomised by metaphors of “lighting” and “lightening”, finds clear parallels in Gadamer’s own emphasis on aesthetic truth and the model of play (Spiel) in the first part of Truth and Method. These Heideggerian resonances are further reinforced in Gadamer’s treatment of the “enlightening” (Einleuchtende), toward the end of Truth and Method. This too is event-like, is characterised by immediacy, and potentially overwhelms us with its seeming truth-disclosive force. In addition, truth, for Gadamer, is inherently contextualised and situated, embodying the possibilities and limitations characteristic of human finitude and fallibility. It is not surprising, then, that it is commonly assumed that the Gadamerian truth concept is co-extensive with the Heideggerian especially since, unlike Heidegger, Gadamer fails to explicitly detail his stance on truth. But such similarities notwithstanding, this assessment is not well justified given that Gadamer’s hermeneutic project actually differs significantly from the Heideggerian. As contended below, these differences are important because they profoundly affect Gadamer’s appropriation of hermeneutic truth and ultimately immunise it against the relativistic charges levelled at the Heideggerian.
Thus, in particular, Gadamer’s focal concern is not with Being as such, but with elucidating the operation of hermeneutic understanding with a view to valorising the human sciences and vindicating the possibility of truth beyond method. Moreover, far from seeking to eschew the philosophical tradition in favour of an originary understanding, Gadamer actively reappropriates key insights from Plato, Aristotle, and Hegel, amongst others, each of whom contributes to tempering his overall hermeneutic position and correlative his truth conception. Importantly too, given Gadamer’s involvement with the foundations of the human sciences, it needs to be acknowledged that epistemological concerns are not alien to his hermeneutic project, as is often assumed to be the case. On the contrary, notwithstanding the extent of his ontological commitments and avowed indebtedness to Heidegger, epistemological concerns, and in particular problems of justification, are explicitly to the fore in *Truth and Method*, Part II. Hence, far from eschewing problems of justification, as is often assumed to be the case, it transpires that, in keeping with his orientation toward the Enlightenment heritage more generally, Gadamer’s actual concern is with recasting the framework within which the justificatory challenge is to be discharged. Thus, while Gadamer is certainly not an epistemologist in the traditional sense, as Rockmore aptly puts it, “he does not flee the question of knowledge” but rather seeks to reappropriate it from a perspective informed by an acute awareness of “the finite, historical character of human experience.”

For these and related reasons, it cannot be assumed that Gadamer’s stance on truth simply coincides with the Heideggerian. On the contrary, the differences are at least as telling as the similarities. Furthermore, it will be contended that these differences effectively immunise the Gadamerian truth conception from the relativistic threats that allegedly accrue to the Heideggerian due to its lack of justificatory resources, as famously epitomised in the Tugendhat critique. In particular, the contention is that while Tugendhat castigates the Heideggerian stance on truth for its failure to grapple with problems of justification, the Gadamerian stance does not fall prey to these criticisms because, notwithstanding its avowedly ontological orientation, it actively embraces the challenge of justification, while remaining true to its hermeneutic commitments. In effect, it can do so because, Gadamer does not valorise ontological concerns to the exclusion of the epistemological, but instead reappropriates the latter in an appropriately hermeneutic fashion. As the next step toward defending this contention, let us now briefly reprise the nub of Tugendhat’s critique.
While viewed by its proponents as a ground-breaking challenge to the traditional conceptualisation of truth, the Heideggerian reconceptualisation of truth as disclosure is not without its critics. Of particular concern for present purposes are the relativistic threats it allegedly embodies, deriving primarily from the too-ready identification of truth with disclosure and the sudden immediacy of the disclosive truth event. These concerns have been preeminently crystallised in the Tugendhat critique.¹⁵

Essentially, two key questions motivate Tugendhat’s critique of the Heideggerian conception of truth as disclosure: (i) Can truth, traditionally construed in terms of correspondence or adequation to the things themselves, be judiciously reconceptualised as disclosure?, and (ii) can such a reconceptualisation dispense with the justificatory commitments that traditionally accrue to truth? Although contested by prominent Heideggerians, the Tugendhat critique casts doubt on the tenability of an affirmative response to the foregoing questions. That is to say, it challenges the contention that the Heideggerian concept of hermeneutic truth as disclosure can in fact support a viable truth conception capable of discharging the justificatory commitments that traditionally accrue to truth or, alternatively, of establishing that it is somehow immunised from such commitments.

Thus firstly, Tugendhat presses his case by querying whether Heideggerian disclosure can, as such, rightfully be equated with truth—or whether this effectively amounts to an unjustified stipulative redefinition. In particular, Tugendhat’s primary concern is that Heidegger ultimately valorises unconcealment (*aletheia*, *Unverborgenheit*) or disclosure (*Erschlossenheit*) to the extent of excluding adequation to the things themselves as the indispensable hallmark of truth. On the basis of a careful textual analysis of Heidegger’s development of his position, Tugendhat contends that the Heideggerian truth conception does indeed fall prey to this criticism and that, thus shorn of its “specific” (or distinctive) meaning—deriving from its adequation to the things themselves —Heidegger’s proposed redefinition of truth as disclosure fails, essentially because it loses the capacity to differentiate between true and false disclosures.¹⁶ Worse still, in sidelining the need for evidential appraisal—that is, for putting our (disclosive) truth claims “to the test”—the Heideggerian stance actually *impedes* the disclosure of truth.¹⁷ As Tugendhat has it, these problems are ultimately attributable to Heidegger’s failure to engage systematically with the epistemological dimension of the truth question.
and in particular, to meet “the Socratic challenge of a critical justification,” that is, to adequately discharge the long-standing epistemic responsibility for justifying one’s truth claims. In thus (allegedly) failing to meet the challenge of critical justification, the Heideggerian truth conception courts charges of arbitrariness, subjectivism, and relativism. (In everyday life, these are manifested in the relative frequency with which we may find ourselves overwhelmed by a sudden conviction regarding the rightness of a particular way of viewing a (problematic) situation or issue, only to find subsequently that this seemingly incontrovertible enlightening “disclosure” was in fact mistaken.) Moreover, although Tugendhat’s critique engages systematically only with Heidegger’s early treatment of the truth problem in *Being and Time*, Section 44, he maintains that Heidegger’s later writings simply exacerbate this problem. Indeed, surprisingly, the later Heidegger himself seems retrospectively to concede the limitations of equating unconcealment with truth, noting that, “one thing becomes clear: to raise the question of *aletheia*, of unconcealment as such, is not the same as raising the question of truth. For this reason, it was inadequate and misleading to call *aletheia* in the sense of opening, truth.” While the impact of the Tugendhat critique is vigorously disputed by prominent Heideggerians, it is by no means evident that the Heideggerian “corpus” embodies the resources needed to respond to the justificatory concerns it raises.

But in foregrounding these issues here, the intent is not to attempt to resolve them definitively in the case of Heidegger, but rather to pave the way for contending that, given significant differences in the constitution of their respective projects, the Gadamerian stance embodies justificatory resources which better equip it to meet “the Socratic challenge of a critical justification” which Tugendhat found wanting in the Heideggerian. Thus in what follows, it is contended that the Gadamerian conception does not lose the capacity to differentiate between true and false disclosures notwithstanding Gadamer’s espousal of the event-like character of truth and the immediacy of its disclosive impact, as epitomised in the well-known Gadamerian dictum that “In understanding we are drawn into an event of truth (*Wahrheitsgeschehen*) and arrive, as it were, too late, if we want to know what we are supposed to believe.” To this end, in what follows, I proffer a Gadamerian conception of hermeneutic truth as *dialogical* disclosure, a conception that has heretofore received limited attention in the literature. In so doing, it will become clear how, thus construed, the Gadamerian truth conception can meet the Socratic challenge of a critical justification without compromising its ontological commitments.
HERMENEUTIC TRUTH AS DIALOGICAL DISCLOSURE

What, then, of the Gadamerian truth conception? Can it avoid the spectre of relativism through withstanding criticisms akin to the Tugendhat critique of Heidegger? Can it achieve this outcome in an appropriately hermeneutic fashion, while discharging traditional epistemic responsibilities? In response I contend that, although underspecified by Gadamer himself, the Gadamerian truth conception is most appropriately construed in terms of dialogical disclosure, and that, thus construed, it can indeed withstand such charges—and in particular, those deriving from an undue emphasis on the sudden, event-like character of truth. Moreover, the comparative merits of the Gadamerian truth conception in terms of its ability to withstand the Tugendhat critique are attributable to key differences in the constitution of the Gadamerian and Heideggerian projects as already briefly delineated above. In this regard, it is especially noteworthy that, notwithstanding Gadamer’s Heideggerian emphasis on the ontological, epistemological concerns, and in particular problems of justification, are explicitly to fore in the second part of Gadamer’s major work. As elaborated below, it is this intertwinement of the epistemological and ontological that enables the Gadamerian stance to discharge its justificatory commitments while remaining true to its hermeneutic origins. More specifically, in what follows I contend that the Gadamerian stance can meet the challenge of critical justification which Tugendhat found wanting in Heidegger in virtue of complementing a hermeneutic commitment to truth as disclosure with an equally strong commitment to the need for a dialectical process of appraisal and testing, which in addition to eliminating “arbitrary,” or otherwise untenable, “fancies,” whatever their origin, also supports a dynamic learning process whereby the subject matter can disclose itself in increasingly more adequate ways.

To this end, it is important to be clear, firstly, that, despite what has often been assumed to be the case, Gadamer’s valorisation of “the enlightening” does not amount to presupposing that the disclosive event of truth is self-warranting, but is counterbalanced by his thoroughgoing commitment to the dialogical character of experience and understanding. Hence, it needs to be recognised that it is not the enlightening itself but rather the tension between the enlightening event of truth and its dialectic unfolding that most appropriately characterises the Gadamerian stance. Noteworthy in particular is the consideration that, while for Gadamer, as for Heidegger, truth entails an ontological event of unconcealment or disclosure, this in itself does not constitute truth. Rather,
a careful reading shows that Gadamer neither equates “the enlightening” with truth as such, nor confers on it a self-warranting status. Instead, he explicitly affirms that what thus comes to light “has not been proved,” but “asserts itself [...] within the realm of the possible and probable,” leaving open the question of how it is ultimately to be assessed and integrated. Given these and related qualifications, it becomes clear that rather than constituting an incontrovertible truth disclosure, the enlightening, for Gadamer, simply has the status of a possible truth claim. Crucially too, in concluding *Truth and Method*, it is to “a discipline of questioning and inquiring” that Gadamer attributes the capacity to underwrite or warrant truth, not to the enlightening as such. Furthermore, differentiating the requisite mode of inquiry from method as such, it is “the model of Platonic dialectic” that Gadamer endorses, contending not only that the thing or subject matter does not reveal itself “without our thinking being involved,” but also that only a specifically dialectical mode of thinking is capable of unfolding the logic proper to the thing itself. In thus embracing a dialectical model, Gadamer foregrounds the indispensability of dialogical questioning and testing for adequate truth disclosure. Notably too, this dialogical dimension is no mere appendage to Gadamer’s thinking, but rather, as built into the structure of hermeneutic experience (Erfahrung) itself, is integral to his position from the outset. On balance, then, it becomes clear that Gadamer does not accord the truth event a self-warranting status, but rather requires that, however it originates, what is assumed to be true needs to become the subject of a disciplined dialogical process of questioning and testing, along the lines briefly delineated below. In short, then, it emerges that, for Gadamer, the event-like dawning of truth is not self-validating, but is simply a “moment” in an ongoing dialectical process oriented toward the attuned and adequate disclosure of the matter under consideration. Importantly, as we shall see, valorisation of this dialectical dimension of truth disclosure is pivotal in enabling the Gadamerian stance to discharge the challenge of critical justification in appropriately hermeneutic terms beyond what the Heideggerian position seems to allow for.

In what, then, does this dialectic process of truth disclosure consist, and how can it succeed in discharging the “Socratic challenge of a critical justification” without falling prey to methodologism? Here the core contention is that in virtue of its embrace of a dialectical template, the Gadamerian stance embodies the conceptual resources needed to underwrite the critical appraisal and testing of putative truth claims, while avoiding the kind of enframing that renders method untenable as a medium of hermeneutic truth disclosure. Equally noteworthy is the
fact that notwithstanding the affinities with the traditional correspondence and coherence theories foregrounded by some commentators,34 the Gadamerian truth conception extends beyond what these approaches can offer in its commitment to securing the adequacy as well as adequation of truth disclosure. In valorising “completeness” as a regulative ideal35 and the importance of achieving a “higher universality” which overcomes the partiality of initial perspectives,36 Gadamer demonstrates a clear awareness that truth disclosure can fail as much through distortion or inadequate disclosure as by manifest untruth, a factor not adequately accounted for by the more traditional truth theories. In endorsing the model of Platonic dialectic, Gadamer aspires to overcome such limitations through incorporating attributes capable of testing for adequacy of truth disclosure as well as coherence and adequation as such. As Gadamer shows, in incorporating such conditions, the dialectical model can correct for the factors that typically thwart attempts to achieve adequacy of truth disclosure (for example, close-mindedness, failure to probe the topic deeply enough, to truly assess the supporting evidence, or to consider alternatives). A process of dialogical exploration and testing can thus ensure that plausible but ultimately misleading, or otherwise inadequate, interpretations are transcended, so that the subject matter can adequately disclose itself in its truth. In effect, then, the capacity to secure this outcome is attributable to the dialogical attributes valorised by Gadamer in his endorsement of the Platonic template. Most notably, these include: genuine openness, ongoing, appropriately directed questioning, sustained attunement to the subject matter, consideration of opposing views, and assessment of supporting reasons.37 Moreover, far from being an external imposition, Gadamer is emphatic that the correlative process of dialectical appraisal and testing is indispensable for enabling the subject matter to reveal itself in its own terms, contending not only that the thing or subject matter cannot reveal itself “without our thinking being involved,” but also that only a specifically dialectical mode of thinking is capable of unfolding the logic proper to the thing itself.38 Hence, as we shall now consider, this dialectical process of critical appraisal enables the subject matter to show itself in its truth through the active participation of dialogue partners who bring to light, and test, the possibilities inherent in the thing itself under appropriate dialogical conditions. It is in this way that the Gadamerian conceptualisation of hermeneutic truth as dialogical disclosure can meet the Socratic challenge of a critical justification proffered by Tugendhat as integral to adequate truth disclosure.
Thus, firstly, in appropriating a Platonic template, Gadamer eschews ready acceptance of putative truth claims in favour of an interrogative, or questioning, stance characterised by genuine openness and willingness to view the issues in broader perspective through dialogical engagement with others. Especially important is a commitment to appropriately attuned questioning aimed at interrogating proffered claims in ways that will uncover entrenched presuppositions and thereby genuinely open up the topic and advance inquiry instead of prematurely closing it off or distorting it. In thus emphasising “the priority of the question,” Gadamer alerts us to that fact that our initial apprehensions of truth may not characterise the subject matter appropriately, and that open-minded inquiry is needed to test, and if need be correct, initial impressions. In hermeneutic terms, this is necessary to ensure that the subject matter can disclose itself in its own terms and according to its inner logic, while mitigating, or eliminating, the influence of “arbitrary fancies” or untested assumptions, whatever their origin. To this end, Gadamer enjoins adoption of a Socratic attitude of “not knowing,” while emphasising the importance of rightly directed questioning and sustained attunement to the subject matter as prerequisites for advancing adequate disclosure.

Correlatively, Gadamer foregrounds the inherently dialogical character of the process of truth disclosure as epitomised on the Platonic model, contending that “the art of questioning”, integral to the disclosure of truth, finds its natural complement in the “art of conducting a real dialogue.” Indeed, counteracting the traditional presupposition (characteristic of the correspondence theory in particular) that knowledge is a matter of a static, individual judgment, Gadamer affirms that “knowledge is dialectical from the ground up” precisely because it entails considering alternative possibilities deriving from different conceptual starting points. This again reinforces our appreciation that hermeneutic truth as disclosure does not primarily depend on an enlightening truth event, but is rather the outcome of a process of well-structured dialectical inquiry, in the context of which enlightening events have an important, but not ultimately definitive, role to play. The significance of the dialectical dimension thus hinges on its potential for the mutual exploration and testing of alternate ways of conceptualising the subject matter, which reveal the inevitable limitations of untested prejudices while simultaneously opening up heretofore unrecognised possibilities for consideration. As such, it entails a process of mutual learning through conjoint dialectical inquiry, whereby seemingly persuasive but ultimately inadequate contentions are progressively overcome, as epitomised on the Platonic model.
Only in this way can one-sided interpretations be judiciously transcended so as to
disclose the subject matter in its multifaceted complexity. To this end, Gadamer
affirms that the subject matter under investigation must itself occupy centre
stage with the contributions of the dialogue partners remaining subservient
to the task of its adequate disclosure. In thus providing a bulwark against an
adversarial contest aimed at establishing the one’s superiority over the other,
this factor serves to ensure that the dialogue partners remain committed to
conjointly uncovering the truth about the subject matter and to revising their
preexisting views in light of what thus emerges. To this end, Gadamer emphasises
that “considering opposites” is integral to the advancement of truth disclosive,
dialectical inquiry. Hence, instead of seeking to demolish or dismiss them,
each partner is required to factor in the strengths of the other’s views. Indeed,
in this, Gadamer tells us, consists the “art of testing”, which in challenging the
fixity of preformed views about the subject matter, simultaneously opens up for
consideration new, heretofore unrecognised possibilities. Dialectical testing
thus simultaneously fulfils a dual function of ensuring that our understanding
is not distorted either by entrenched prejudices or “arbitrary fancies,” including
those emanating from seemingly enlightening but untested insights while, in
appraising us of heretofore unrecognised aspects of the matter, it corrects for
the partiality and one-sidedness of initial opinions, giving rise to a progressively
deeper appreciation of its richness and complexity.

In this way, the dialectical model supports an inherently developmental conception
of inquiry whereby conclusions reached at one stage are seen to be provisional
answers on the way to an increasingly more adequate understanding of the subject
matter, through the ongoing dialectical testing of proffered claims. To advance this
outcome, as already intimated, the core desideratum on the part of the dialogue
partners is to facilitate the dynamic unfolding of the subject matter according to
its inner logic by finding and building on common ground, while learning from
difference, so that “what is said is continually transformed into the uttermost
possibilities of its rightness and truth.” Given appropriate dialogical conditions,
this can eventuate in a potentially transformative “fusion of horizons” whereby, as
Gadamer famously has it, we arrive at a “higher universality” in our understanding
of the subject matter, from whence the partiality of earlier, more limited, views
become apparent. Notably, too, while a Gadamerian fusion of horizons entails a
genuinely transformative advance in understanding, its cogency is underwritten
by a principled process of “integration and appropriation,” underpinned by
a distinctive dialectical logic. Significantly, this orientation differentiates the

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Gadamerian model of conjoint dialectical testing from other justificatory models, in that its primary commitment is not simply to the justification of what is already known, but rather to the transformative advancement of understanding through a “fusion” of heretofore partial perspectives (or horizons). Moreover, since, for Gadamer, the process of inquiry is always under way and never finished, even such a transformative fusion of horizons constitutes only a provisional close (or resting place) in an ongoing process of situated dialectical inquiry which continually challenges and transcends even our most penetrating truth-disclosive insights.

CONCLUSION

In sum, then, it is contended that the Gadamerian truth conception can effectively meet the challenge of critical justification that traditionally accrues to truth while preserving its distinctive hermeneutic orientation, and this in a way that would seem to transcend the possibilities inherent in the Heideggerian truth conception from which it derives its inspiration. As we have just seen, it does so specifically through embodying a distinctive dialogical (and dialectical) procedure oriented toward securing the adequacy as well as adequation of truth disclosure. Moreover, notwithstanding the extent of Gadamer’s ontological commitments, there is nothing incongruous about this conclusion since, as has also been contended, the Gadamerian stance embodies a unique blending of the ontological and the epistemological in ways that render it capable of “warranting” truth, while avoiding the kind of objectivist enframing that renders method untenable as a medium of hermeneutic truth disclosure, as Gadamer himself clearly intimates in concluding *Truth and Method*.

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NOTES

4. This paper draws on themes initially broached in my presentation on this topic at the 2013 Athens Philosophy World Congress (due for publication in the Conference Proceedings), and in my chapter on “Truth and Relativism” in the recent Routledge Companion to Hermeneutics. Their development here has benefited significantly from these earlier articulations.
5. For a succinct summary of several of the long-standing problems besetting the correspondence conception of truth, see Daniel Dahlstrom, “Truth as Aletheia and the Clearing of Being” Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts. Ed. Bret W. Davis. Durham: Acumen, 2010, 118. It is worth noting, however, that Heidegger does not so much resolve these problems as dissolve them, by redefining truth while calling into question the ontological presuppositions on which the traditional correspondence conception is based.
8. For example: “In being presented in play, what is emerges. It produces and brings to light what is otherwise constantly hidden and withdrawn”; “The world of the work of art, in which play expresses itself fully […], is in fact a transformed world. In and through it everyone recognises that this is how things are”. Gadamer, Truth and Method, 112, 113.
11. See the Introduction in Gadamer, Truth and Method.
13. Thus, for example, Gadamer explicitly identifies the task of ascertaining “the ground of the legitimacy of prejudices” as “the fundamental epistemological question for a truly historical hermeneutics”. See Truth and Method, 277. (Emphasis added.) Likewise, as elaborated below, he deems the challenge of ensuring adequation with the “things themselves” an indispensable condition for truth. See Truth and Method, 266-67.
on which this paper is based, was originally delivered at Heidelberg University in February 1964. The outline that follows is necessarily very brief and selective, aimed simply at pinpointing the problematic identification of truth with disclosure and at foregrounding Heidegger’s alleged neglect of justificatory concerns. For a detailed analysis of the Tugendhat critique, incorporating critical appraisal of recent Heideggerian responses to it, see William Smith, “Why Tugendhat’s Critique of Heidegger’s Concept of Truth Remains a Critical Problem” *Inquiry* 50:2 (2007): 156-79).

19. “For Tugendhat, Heidegger’s writing after 1930, with its emphasis on the ‘truth of Being’, and later, on the ‘clearing’ and *Lichtung*, only exacerbates the basic error already latent in the analyses of *Being and Time* (Sec 44)”. See Smith, “Why Tugendhat’s Critique of Heidegger’s Concept of Truth Remains a Critical Problem”, 177, n. 6.
23. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 490. Clearly, the concern here is that, on Gadamer’s account too, we are overwhelmed by the sudden immediacy of the disclosive truth event in ways that undermine, or paralyse, our critical faculties. Thus, for example, Irwin interprets it as entailing that “the immediacy with which the truth of the artwork or text seizes us is such that we are overcome; [since] we do not decide to accept it provisionally but are involuntarily swept up in it”. See “A Critique of Hermeneutic Truth as Disclosure”, 67.
26. “The circle for Gadamer is going back and forth between intuition and dialectic. The
tension between these poles is precisely the engaging power of thought which characterises his ‘between’”. See Dostal, “The Experience of Truth”, 66-7.


28. “[W]hat the tool of method does not achieve must—and really can—be achieved by a discipline of questioning and inquiring, a discipline that guarantees (verburgt) truth”. See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 491.


31. See, e.g., Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 36; cf. P. Christopher Smith, *Hermeneutics and Human Finitude*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1991, 190-92. Along with emphasising that Gadamer’s commitment to a dialogical conception of inquiry has its origins in the prior conviction that hermeneutic experience (*Erfahrung*) itself has “the structure of dialogical interplay with an other within a world,” Smith also points out that the hermeneutic conception of experience simultaneously denotes “an experience of my own limits” and “openness to the other”.

32. Cf. Dostal, “The Experience of Truth”, 48-49: [A]lthough it is appropriate to consider Gadamer’s understanding of truth Heideggerian in a fundamental way, Gadamer diverges significantly from Heidegger with regard to truth. This significant divergence concerns the immediacy of the experience of truth for Heidegger and the mediated character of the experience for Gadamer. The truth overcomes us suddenly, in a moment, like a flash of lightening on Heidegger’s account. For Gadamer, the exemplary experience of truth comes when we take the time to dwell on the matter at hand (*Sache selbst*) in conversation with another.

33. In proffering this assessment it is not intended to underestimate the complexity and subtlety of Heidegger’s stance on truth. But while it could even be contended that the meditative style of thinking valorised by the later Heidegger has much in common with the kind of investigative openness valorised by Gadamer (as elaborated on briefly below), it is not easy to discern in Heidegger anything akin to the emphasis on dialectical appraisal that, on this assessment, enables the Gadamerian approach to discharge the challenge of critical justification along the lines called for by Tugendhat.


43. Cf. Rudiger Bubner, “On the Ground of Understanding” *Hermeneutics and Truth*. Ed. Brice Wachterhauser. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1994, 72-73. Here, partners, with their different points of view, come together in a conversation governed by a subject matter of common interest. It is orientation to the subject matter that leads both sides into a dialogical context and binds them for the course of the dialogue. The process is not motivated by the
chance of success of single, one-sided viewpoint, for its limits are already set by the resistance of the partner. What is much more definitive is that both sides are bound by the task of the actual elucidation of the subject matter.

The feeling that something is missing never, ever leaves you—and it can’t, and it shouldn’t, because something is missing ... Adoption is outside. You act out what it feels like to be the one who doesn’t belong.
—Jeanette Winterson, Why be happy when you can be normal

Do a psychoanalysis of Nature: it is the flesh, the mother.
—Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisible

The project that I embark upon in this paper is an enquiry into the role of the maternal body in the development of alterity in the child. I begin by drawing on a previous publication in Parrhesia, where I explore the phenomenology of the maternal-foetal affective relation through the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, outlining how the foetal body schema develops through maternally
structured movement while in utero. In that paper, I described the maternal-foetal relation in terms of accouplement—an embodied coupling entailing an affective substratum, which moulds foetal ipsiety. I also identified that within Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, the place of maternal alterity in the development of foetal ipsiety is underestimated. There is no requirement, within Merleau-Ponty’s theory of infant development, or his ontology of the flesh, for the biological mother to be a primal alterity that scaffolds the development of the child. In this paper I attempt to further explore this notion of the biological mother as a primal alterity and what this might mean for Merleau-Ponty’s flesh ontology and our understandings of subjectivity more generally. As we shall see as this paper unfolds, it is in the taking up of the stereotype of the passive and all giving mother where Merleau-Ponty most errs in his assessment of developmental alterity. In the Sorbonne Lectures he describes pregnancy as “an anonymous process which happens through her and of which she is only the seat.” Being the passive recipient, the container in which the foetus grows through the power of nature, denies the necessity of maternal interaction and engagement with the foetus as necessary for foetal flourishing.

I begin by drawing on maternal-infant bonding and attachment theory which recognises that a mother or primary caregiver is required in order to scaffold the development of alterity in the child. It has been accepted since the 1950s that children need a particular carer with which to form an affective bond in order to cognitively flourish. Through the study of institutionalised children, John Bowlby, the pioneer of bonding theory, was able to show that children not given the opportunity to bond develop autism like symptoms which increase in severity the longer a child is isolated from family life (a condition now referred to as reactive attachment disorder or RAD). Infants are most at risk of permanent cognitive impairment, should they remain institutionalised beyond the sixth month of age.

Maternal-infant bonding has been thought to develop from birth, so when a child is adopted, early placement within the adopting family is advocated in order to facilitate the bonding process. However, it has been identified that, although the cognitive impairment experienced by institutionalised infants is usually avoided by adoption, adoptees nonetheless take a different developmental pathway than their non-adopted counterparts. Although only recently acknowledged, psychologists have long suspected issues with adoption after a series of studies which date back to the 1970s, correlated adoption with psychological vulnerability and learning difficulties. Just why adoptees might developmentally face more obstacles than
non-adopted children remains unclear, and although the research does indicate that there is ‘something’ about being adopted that sets the adoptee apart, just what this ethereal something is, is yet to be clearly defined. I think Ronald Nydam describes adoptee phenomenology best when he states that “adoptees can grow up well, but they grow up differently. They must inevitably follow an unusual developmental pathway as they attend to the sound of that dissonant echo”.

In this paper, my primary concern with adoptee phenomenology is to begin the process of trying to understand this ‘dissonant echo’ and one of the conclusions that I draw is that the experience of alterity both in the self and of others in the adoptee disrupts the ‘at birth’ notion of infant bonding and attachment, leaving us with questions about the role of the biological mother in infant cognitive development.

From the outset of this project I want to make it clear that it is not my intention to pathologise adoptee phenomenology. Although sadly, disproportionate percentages of adoptees experience difficulties growing up it is unclear if this is the result of the presumption, both medically and culturally, that an adoptee ought to be ‘normal’. The failure to recognise ‘adoption’ as an alternative embodiment could in and of itself contribute to the psychological vulnerability identified, making life far more difficult than it might otherwise be for those who have been adopted. Many personal accounts of adoptee experience, such as Jeanette Winterson’s biography *Why be Happy when you can Be Normal*, tell of adoptees who negotiate their difference, their sense of ‘abnormality’, in reflective and insightful ways. As one researcher discovered, adoptees do not suffer lower than average intelligence, and often will be high achievers. What appears to cause the greatest amount of difficulty is in the negotiation of alterity, both within the self and with others, and the awareness by many adoptees that they are different to their counterparts without knowing why. In terms of this project what I wish to take from adoptee phenomenology is the premise that something is different, that this something appears to be founded in the adoption process and results in differences and often difficulties in the negotiation of alterity both within the self and with others, even in cases where adoption has occurred at birth, where family life was healthy, and sadly, where all too often, the adoptee will only discover later in life that they were adopted.

In the final section of this paper, I situate this phenomenology back into Merleau-Ponty’s flesh ontology. Drawing upon Luce Irigaray’s critique of *The Visible and the Invisible*, I agree that Merleau-Ponty appropriates the maternal body in his...
model of the flesh, and that it is this denial that allows us to imagine ourselves as individuated, but I question her claim that this translates into an overarching denial of sexual difference, if only because we are all born and we all forget our birth. For Irigaray, the inability to see the other sex within phallocentric philosophies in general emerges out of the invisibility of the corporeal prenatal condition and the inability to see the mother as the source or origin of existence underpins the inability to acknowledge the existence of a sex different from, and incommensurable with, the subject. Drawing upon metaphors of fluidity and absorption rather than a womb which nourishes through amniotic fluid, and in giving precedence to vision over touch, Merleau-Ponty, according to Irigaray, appropriates, yet denies the maternal body which encases and nourishes the foetus, a relation that for Irigaray leaves a ‘watermark’ etched into the subject’s body.

In acknowledging foetal and adoptee phenomenology, I conclude this paper with the speculation that perhaps this watermark, of which Irigaray speaks, might well be what Nydam describes as a dissonant echo, and if so, this leaves us with the question of whether Merleau-Ponty’s flesh ontology is actually a phenomenology of gestation. In other words, the question of whether the maternal-foetal accouplement that I have described is the ontology which Merleau-Ponty claims as “a prototype of Being”, a flesh that includes not only the flesh of bodies, but also the flesh of the world; a primordial intersubjectivity that subtends cognition, an ontology that provides the possibility for intersubjective communication. A close examination of the phenomenology of gestation and adoption provides us with a simulacrum of this flesh.

MERLEAU-PONTY AND MATERNAL ALTERITY

Within the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty it is through perception that we have access to the world as a relation of our embodied consciousness with the social and the organic situation in which we discover ourselves as selves. As situated, neither our world nor our consciousness is uniquely private, but shared, in that it is only as both perceiver and perceived that I exist. The substratum of this interaction is what Merleau-Ponty, in his final unpublished text, *The Visible and the Invisible*, names flesh. The flesh is not a genetic but rather a description, a name for the way that we experience ourselves as both sensing and sensed as intertwined and reversible within ourselves and with others. Merleau-Ponty most often exemplifies the flesh by the way our hands, when placed together,
can alternate between touching and being touched, each in turn but never in coincidence: “Either my right hand really passes over to the rank of the touched, but then its hold on the world is interrupted, or it retains its hold on the world, but then I do not really touch it”. The temporal gap between the touching and being touched is alterity, generated by a doubling of the flesh back upon itself, “by dehiscence or fission of its own mass”.

As a primordial intersubjectivity that subtends cognition, it is flesh, within Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, that provides the possibility for an inter-communication with both ourselves and with others that preserves the alterity of the other. The descriptions of our experiences that we give as subjective are reflections from a certain vantage, a certain spaciality; they are given from our individual perspective within the flesh. Like the touching hands, I cannot assume more than one vantage point at any given time, either I am touching or being touched. Similarly, I cannot see through the eyes of another and should I attempt to move to their position, I can only do so through the passage of time. The time that it will take to shift position opens up an unbridgeable gap between my experience and that of an other, a radical alterity that can never be closed even though we share the same world.

Alterity as an immanent experience of ourselves as other, develops sometime during the second year of life at what is commonly known as the mirror stage. As we come to recognise ourselves as situated we discover “an anonymity innate to myself”. For Merleau-Ponty, it is through the mutual crossing over and intertwining of the touching with the tangible and the visual with the invisible, that difference within the self is discovered through the non-coincidence between the corporeality which the ‘I’ inhabits (ipsisity) and the ideality that I recognise others are witnessing. Because I cannot see the body which I experientially inhabit, I come to see myself as situated through the fold or cavity that allows me to experience myself through the things that I see. Therefore, in order for us to perceive the world through the eyes of a self, we must render invisible the radical alterity of the other, subsuming her into our corporeal rootedness as an imprint of the other within the self in a narcissistic moment.

Once again, the flesh we are speaking of is not matter. It is the coiling over of the visible upon the seeing body, of the tangible upon the touching body, which is attested in particular when the body sees itself, touches itself seeing and touching the things, such that, simultaneously as tangible
it descends among them as touching it dominates them all and draws this relationship and even this double relationship from itself, by dehiscence or fission of its own mass.\textsuperscript{14}

Thus, a mature alterity requires the emergence of a double sided otherness whereby the sense of immanent alterity becomes in some ways the condition for the possibility for the perception of a transcendent alterity, and visa versa. It is thus “by a sort of chiasm, [that] we become the others and we become world”.\textsuperscript{15}

Merleau-Ponty first outlines how the infant developmentally comes into herself in ‘The Child’s Relations With Others’ where he describes how she is born into syncretism, where self and other are indistinguishable; a bodily possession that he thought could not begin until around the 8\textsuperscript{th} month of age.\textsuperscript{16} Before being able to phenomenologically engage in the world, the neonate must emerge out of being the passive beneficiary of experience to possessing herself through the capacity for embodied intentional movement; a skill which ultimately grounds perception as situated. The postural schema is the term Merleau-Ponty gives to this self-possession, this ipseity, which he argues to be formed in coordinated and familiar patterns of behaviour, moulded through the sedimentation of proprioceptive and muscular movement that sit below our level of conscious thought; “that is, a global consciousness of my body’s position in space, with the corrective reflexes that impose themselves at each moment, the global consciousness of the spatiality of my body”.\textsuperscript{17} Postural schematic movement (often referred to as the body schema) is what permits us to experience a sense of possession over our bodies as spatially situated concomitant with and through an experience of alterity.

Although Merleau-Ponty never formally revised this thesis, in his later writings there are indications of a rethinking of the developmental process outlined in ‘The Child’s Relations With Others’. In the Sorbonne lectures, for instance, he states that even though the neonate does “not remember the fact of birth, he conserves a memory of discomfort and can imagine the well-being that preceded this period”\textsuperscript{18}, a description that suggests that something is carried from the womb into the world or perhaps even that he was beginning to suspect that intrauterine life is our first world. The flesh ontology of The Visible and the Invisible, which Merleau-Ponty describes as “a prototype of Being” also potentially alters the possibility of an absolute neonatal syncretism.\textsuperscript{19} Within the flesh the relationship between ipseity and alterity is indivisible and yet reversible, so rather than ipseity preceding and developmentally grounding the experience of alterity as it did in
his earlier work, both ipseity and alterity emerge from an impersonal flesh. Thus, the infant is born of the intertwining’s of the flesh rather than needing to emerge from a homogenous existence. The implications here are that alterity is no longer experientially developed, but rather, discovered as already and always there, a claim that I will soon show, was a very insightful modification to his understanding of infant development. However, the key to this modification is in the recognition that the body schema develops in utero through a maternal alterity and this Merleau-Ponty could not have known, simply because the empirical research was not available at that time.

Research that has outlined the way that foetal movement occurs in patterned ways was one of the agreed findings to emerge out of the 1998 National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHHD) conference where a cross-disciplinary group of clinicians, neurologists and scientists, came together in order to consolidate existing findings and to formulate strategies for continuing research into foetal development. At this conference, there was concurrence that foetuses display structured bodily movements which they develop through habituation (or practicing) that begin to appear around the 9th week of gestation.¹⁰ These movements progress in complexity, appear to be adapted responses to the individual foetus’ situation and have neurological import in that specific coordinated movements appear to play a role in the nervous system development relevant to that function.¹¹ Foetal movement therefore elicits and nuances foetal neural function rather than the behaviour flowing out of the required a priori neurology. By 2008, Graven and Browne identified how researchers now understand that “the physical, sensory, and social environment of the foetus...[is] of critical importance in supporting healthy appropriate development of the brain and neurosensory systems”.¹²

For a short time, researchers were curious as to how a 9 week old foetus could possibly move in habituated ways prior to the development of the cortex, proprioception, and perception, all required for body schematic movement and reflexive possibilities were examined.¹³ Proprioception, for example, does not emerge until the 15th week of gestation, the cortex and perception, not until the third trimester of pregnancy. The answer was found in 2004, when DiPietro et al. discovered, by accident, that foetal motor activity affects maternal functioning such that the mothers’ body unconsciously responds to foetal movement in a manner that regulates that movement.¹⁴ The researchers suggest that the sympathetic maternal response may be regulating or limiting the degree of
uterine contraction in relation to foetal movement which in turn regulates and structures the way that the foetus moves in utero. Early foetal movement patterns are therefore maternally structured and regulated and this pattern is observable throughout gestation. Essentially what this means is that foetal movement patterns which form our most primal neurological structures are moulded into existence by the maternal body through what Merleau-Ponty would describe as accouplement—an embodied moving with, or coupling—the functional style of which has implications for how the child develops neurologically. Breech foetuses for example, developed normally but nonetheless neurologically differently to cephalic or downward facing foetuses. To at least some extent this maternal moulding appears to leave an imprint of maternal function.

That gestational maternal emotions may leave their imprint on neonatal neural structures has also been suggested. Suspicion that this was the case interestingly dates back to the first world war, when Lester Sontag detected similarities between maternal emotional characteristics and infant behaviour. In particular, he noted how mothers whose husbands were at war and at risk of death birthed babies that seemed to be nervy, restless and difficult to settle. More recently, studies have shown maternal emotions to be deeply implicated in foetal flourishing. Sable et al., for example, studied the responses to a survey of 2,828 mothers where the wantedness of a pregnancy was assessed according to whether the pregnancy was either mistimed and/or unwanted in otherwise healthy women. How each woman felt about her pregnancy while she was pregnant was also scaled. These researchers found that “mothers of very low birth weight infants were significantly more likely than those who had a normal-weight baby to report that they had felt unhappy about the pregnancy (odds ratio of 1.53)”.

While one might think that these outcomes could well be the result of poor personal care due to the unwanted pregnancy, this was not found to be the case. Caroline Lundquist, in her paper ‘Being Torn: Toward a Phenomenology of Unwanted Pregnancy’ describes a similar interrelation. Drawing on the phenomenon of denied pregnancy, where women do not realise they are pregnant until they go into labour, she notes how, very often, neonates born out of a denied pregnancy suffer from low birth weight. As Sarah LaChance Adams observes, this in especially interesting because the human species is one where ordinarily, the mother will suffer nutrient deprivation in favour of the foetus she carries, yet in denied pregnancies, the foetus can and often “will be deprived of vital nutrients, even when there are enough for both”. Supporting this claim is a 1994 study of
denied pregnancy by Brezinka et al. where the histories of twenty seven women who did not know they were pregnant until term, and when labour contractions began, were examined. From this small sample, four foetal deaths occurred and three cases of prematurity. None of the women committed infanticide and all were otherwise physically healthy. When queried about their denial, most women reported irregular, sometimes menstruation-like bleedings during pregnancy and few reported actual symptoms of pregnancy, such as nausea and weight gain. From this phenomenology it seems difficult to continue to sustain the view that a pregnant women is a passive receptacle that houses a growing foetus who, like a parasite, will extract its needs; a trope of compliant maternity that is immensely ingrain in both the imaginary and metaphors of gestation and birth. Although I was unable to find any studies on pregnant women whose infants were to be adopted, one might legitimately wonder if the outcomes would show a particular pattern, especially as it has been identified, at least in Australia, that the vast majority of adoptions that historically occurred in this country were coerced if not forced.

Returning to the empirical account of foetal development, we can see that by the 22nd week of gestation there are marked changes in foetal behaviour. It is at this developmental stage that we can discern postural schematic movement patterns that are the result of foetal, rather than maternal, ipsiety. In 2007, Zoia et al. published the results of their work on intentional or foetal directed movement. Their methodology was to examine the kinematic patterns of foetal movements which showed that by 22 weeks gestation foetal movement regularly involved tighter and more accurately aimed trajectories toward the target with acceleration and deceleration phases consistent with the size and sensitivity of what the foetus was going to touch. Thus, foetal movement by the 22nd week of gestation begins to display muscular and co-ordinated indicators that are highly suggestive of goal directed bodily action, and these actions begin at this stage to cut across rather than move with, both maternal body directives and maternal goal directed action. It is interesting that it appears to be these movements, which have been observed in some foetuses as early as 17 weeks, which coincide with the quickening, the first movements felt by the mother. Also at this time, the hands of the foetus will now begin to manipulate parts of her body; she begins to trace out her feet, legs, and genitals, moulding her hands around these parts. She explores her own hands and fingers and grasps and manipulates the umbilical cord. Hand to mouth movement is very common and mouth exploration appears to stimulate sucking. She also explores the uterine wall where we can see her hand firstly finding the wall and then flattening and slowly sliding the palm against the surface.
For Merleau-Ponty, the experience of doubly sensing, the sense of touching one’s self, is a crucial precondition for the development of ipsiety, and here we can begin to understand how the postural schema emerges in conjunction with, or through maternal alterity. Through foetal self-exploration proprioceptive perception will emerge concomitantly with foetal ipseity. In fact, it would seem that the unification of the body through experience is a condition of foetal experience. Once this basic self-awareness is apparent, as displayed through goal directed action and self-exploratory behaviour we can say that foetal functioning is consistent with body schematic behaviour, which is inclusive of proprioceptive awareness by around 26 weeks gestation. Foetal EEG readings then begin and the connection between the spinal cord and the thalamus completes. Following very closely afterwards, at 24 to 26 weeks, thalamocortical connections will grow into the cortex. The foetus’ preconscious body schematic substratum, a bodily familiarity which is intentional (in the Merleau-Pontian sense of bodily intentionality) and of which he or she will be perceptually familiar in a proprioceptive kind of way, thus emerges by the 26th week of gestation and will be evident in both the premature and full-term neonate. So although Merleau-Ponty’s work has proven invaluable in understanding what this foetal developmental pathway means, he did not, could not, apply his own philosophy to foetal phenomenology and so although insightful, his account of infant development nonetheless requires revision, especially in regard to the timing of some developmental milestones and to the role of the maternal body as a primal alterity which makes foetal ipseity possible.

For Merleau-Ponty, alterity as distinctions between self and other begin to emerge as a “lived distance” through the creation of a perceptual space that pushes others farther away, opening a space for the child to exist as individuated. This pushing away, for Merleau-Ponty, not only creates the felt sense of spatial separation, but also an affective space and so, as alterity develops, the space between the child and others is not just seen but also affectively negotiated. Applied to foetal phenomenology we can see that the foetus has evolved from moving with the maternal body in syncretism to a pushing away as intentional movement that opposes maternal movement, action and emotion. The pregnant woman, who, prior to the quickening, may well have enjoyed imagining her foetus, a manifestation that could only ever be temporal, obscure or for some, not there at all, may now begin to concretely experience this other. In late pregnancy I often played with my foetus by pushing my stomach in order to illicit a kick back, a game I have heard many women speak of playing, as is the use of particular movement patterns or classical music to soothe overactive or nocturnal foetal movement.
Some women report their foetus waking and moving in response to a call from their partner or having likes and dislikes of certain sounds. Foetuses also use maternal responses to modify their own. For example, foetuses have been shown to adjust their response to unfamiliar noises based on the maternal response to that noise. Through these engagements, the foetus that began as a part of the maternal body is beginning to create a lived distance within the body of a women who, in order to go about her day, will continually attempt to incorporate her foetus into her bodily habituations. This embodied negotiation between mother and foetus has developmental import because to experience ipsiety the foetus needs an experiential alterity and so can only gain the lived distance required for individuation in the presence of a maternal body which is simultaneously a familiarity and an alterity. At this stage alterity is thus a necessary imperialism that forecloses the possibility of the foetus as a radical other because during gestation it is always, at least in part, my body that moves, even if only to regain a comfortable position that accommodates that foot in my ribs.

A very startling ‘pushing away’ will of course occur at birth when the foetus becomes the neonate, launched into a world where the body schema that formed in utero will no longer serve. As Iris Marion Young describes, seeing your baby for the first time can come as a shock, the reality and relief are enormous. It is a difficult feeling to describe, seeing the reality of what was within you manifest without. There is recognition yet profound strangeness; it is wonder. Like an astronaut launched into space, the infant must now learn anew where she is in this vast spatiality, fluidless, unrestrictive of her movements and devoid of embodied maternal alterity. How much of the uterine body schema will remain after induction into this new world is very unclear. However, what has formed are the cognitive structures that will in some way influence a ‘style’ of being, a watermark that will stylise the infant’s intersubjective communications in the world. Neonates who have assumed different positions within the womb will have different yet identifiably ‘normal’ neurological structures and those who have shared the womb with a twin, especially one of similar size, will at this early stage, share both movement and affect similarity. In fact, even if these twins are to be separated at birth, should they meet again in later life they will still share a striking similarity in their styles of movements and emotional dispositions; a phenomenon that has also been observed in adoptees reunited in their adult years with their biological mothers.
If the foetal body schema has been moulded through the maternal body then one might ask about the need for a developmental continuation of this ‘style’ of body schematic movement after delivery in order to sustain the cognitive development that the foetus began in utero. Yet, the foetal body schema seems to be situated, purpose built for the inter-uterine world and not particularly well designed for life after birth; thus adaption is required whether or not the maternal body schema remains available.

A more cautious conclusion would be that at least some aspects of the foetal body schema do remain and these can be seen in the way that infants are calmed by swaddling and will draw to the mother as a source of familiarity in what is now an alien world. It also seems to explain some discrepancies in the debate surrounding neonatal imitation as infants imitate their mothers more readily than strangers in imitation trials. As they grow, securely bonded infants rely on their primary care giver for ‘reality checks’ modelling their emotional reaction on his or hers; insecurely attached infants do this less so, instead either self-testing, often to a dangerous degree, or fearing to move from close proximity to their primary carers. The securely attached child will slowly, over time and with guidance from her carer, begin to test the world on her own terms, pushing her carer further and further away, opening a space for herself as a self. Perhaps in this developmental story, it is not too far a jump to speculate that within the adoptee something of a trace, a watermark, from the biological mother might be carried into this infant world interaction, a trace that will leave her always and already a bit further away than the child who can better synchronise, form a tighter accouplement, with her primary carer.

Understanding the importance of this primary third, the biological mother, also leads me to suspect that what might occur at the mirror stage of development is the internalisation of this primal alterity, what has up until this time been an external alterity which scaffolds self-experience in the child. As Jack Reynolds has identified, it is the experience of asymmetry in our relations that founds our capacities to perceive the absolute alterity of the other as a sphere of incomprehensibility that emerges out of the asymmetry. Thus developmentally, immanent alterity may not be an internal divergence nor might it result from the visible body becoming internalised as a captivated body image as Merleau-Ponty suggests. Rather it may be the discovery that this primary (m)other, who is also a part of me, bonded to me, folded over me, is a radical other who can leave me and who I will never truly comprehend. To discover that the mother is an alterity that
is both within and yet distant from the self could open the fissure, the écart that would enclose the circuit of reversibility within the self and in doing so permit entry to the flesh in maturity. To take the mother, my primal alterity into me as an aspect of me and not of her is to be able to carry forward without her and perhaps this is why a bonded relation is so important in the first two years of life and less so beyond those years. It also explains, at least phenomenologically, why it is that we forget our birth, absorbing the very condition of our existence, our mother’s gestation, into our individuation as an alterity, an écart, a blindspot. However, before finalising this argument, I wish to introduce a phenomenology of adoption into the discussion, to better argue the claim that something from the uterine environment seems to remain as an aspect of how we develop, and ultimately experience ourselves as selves.

BONDING, ATTACHMENT AND A PHENOMENOLOGY OF ADOPTION

In March 2012, the Australian NSW Government released a final report into adoption practices in New South Wales. The report entitled Releasing the past: Adoption practices 1950-1998 was commissioned in 2000 and outlines the policies and practices within NSW Hospitals that facilitated the removal of an estimated 150,000 newborn babies, primarily from single mothers during the past half-century. The release of the report has sparked a media controversy in Australia, culminated in more State enquiries, and ultimately was the basis for the 2013 Australian Government apology to those affected by forced adoption. The overall findings have been that many mothers who gave up their children for adoption were denied their rights and that many hospital practices of the time were unlawful and unethical. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the adoption practices themselves, what is most relevant about these findings is that the more controversial actions undertaken by adoption workers and hospital staff were strongly motivated by maternal-infant bonding and attachment theory;

Such theories developed the notion that children could be placed with other, unrelated families and be ‘saved’. Studies on attachment and bonding suggested that the child could completely bond to another person, and suffer no ill effects, provided that person was available shortly after birth.

Attachment theory was developed by Mary Ainsworth in 1973, as an extension of the initial work on bonding carried out by Bowlby that I outlined in the introduction. Through an examination of the qualitatively differing styles of
bonding behaviours that mothers and infants display post birth, Ainsworth was able to define different styles of maternal-infant interaction and correlate those with particular psychosocial outcomes that graduate along a spectrum. A secure attachment is characterised by positive psychosocial outcomes in that the child is able to develop independence while also seeking intimate and satisfying personal relations and friendships with others. An avoidant attachment style is correlated with antisocial and often violent behaviours in later adult life due, according to Ainsworth, to the failure within the child to properly develop empathic connections to others. Anxious or ambivalent attachment styles display varying degrees of both a secure and avoidant attachment style. An attachment style, for Ainsworth is thus a description of the nature and interactive features of a particular maternal (primary caregiver)-infant bond.

During the 1970’s Klauss and Kennell took up and moulded the research by Bowlby and Ainsworth with the aim of bringing into hospital policy and practice a set of concrete criteria aimed at facilitating the development of secure maternal-infant bonds. Drawing upon animal studies of imprinting Klauss and Kennell argued the need for a reduction to the crucial time period for secure bonding to around 24 to 48 hours post-birth and developed a set of bonding behaviours that mothers should implement in order to facilitate a secure ‘at birth’ bonding process. Controversially, Klauss and Kennell also added to Bowlby’s thesis the need for a secure bond to be established in order to facilitate good maternal behaviours. Should a mother or mother substitute, not securely bond with her infant then she risked neglecting the child in the same way that animal mothers will reject young who have failed to imprint. Klauss and Kennell also conflated bonding and attachment theory when they applied Bowlby’s findings of cognitive retardation, as a potential risk to children who were not securely attached, a finding that Ainsworth did not report. The work of Klauss and Kennell in particular, and perhaps unfortunately, has been very influential to the policies and practices of maternity hospitals throughout the western world, even though the basis of their claims have come under much scrutiny.

Applied to cases of infant adoption, a theory of bonding as occurring ‘at birth’, facilitated by certain sorts of behaviours, such as the degree and length of time an infant experiences skin to skin maternal contact, particularly within the first 48 hours (and beyond), meant that hospitals emphasised procedures that ensured that the maternal-infant bond did not occur with the biological mother at birth. As one can image, these were very often traumatic:
I was pushed down and a pillow was shoved in front of my face. I had no idea why. I thought it must have been because I had given birth to some kind of freakish monstrosity that they didn’t think I could bare (sic) to look at ... I didn’t know that the pillow in front of your face was a common hospital policy to prevent mothers from bonding with their babies.⁵²

Yet, despite these extreme precautions, and although adoptive parents report at times extra-ordinary efforts to bond with their new charges, many adoptees seem to have experienced difficulties forming secure attachments with their new parents as per Ainsworth’s criteria. Kirshner, a social worker, describes how there is typically a shallow quality to the attachments formed by the adopted child, and a general lack of meaningful relationships in both infancy and their adult lives.⁵³ The child often reports feeling ‘different’ or ‘empty’ and seeks solitude from others. Many seem to live in their head, in a fantasy, a phenomenology that Kirshner came to label ‘the adopted child syndrome’. Triseliots, a psychiatrist who studied adoptee phenomenology, quotes adoptee no. 1 from consultation notes; “I look in the mirror and cannot recognise myself”, and adoptee no. 4; “I never really felt I belonged. I feel empty and I find it difficult to make friends or be close to people”.⁵⁴ In the NSW Australian Government report cited above, the Committee identifies how, for many adopted people, their identity has been shaped by the fact of their adoption and many can trace this back to before they were aware that they were adopted. One adoptee explains how adoption is “at the core of my very being ...It has had more than its fair share into who I am, my life experiences, my personality, attitudes, feelings about myself and about others”.⁵⁵ Erika Berzins, to cite a second example, told the Committee how,

Adoption is, and will always be, a part of who I am because it is such a fundamental part of my life experience, and as such adoption will quite often play a part in my attitude to values and belief systems in daily life as well as in response to life’s stresses.⁵⁶

Andersen, an adoptee himself whose research focuses on the need for adoptees to search for their origins, suggests that feelings of isolation, of solitude, of never having been really attached to their adoptive family and never had the feeling of real belonging, underpin the obsession some adoptees have with finding their biological mothers, and I would note that it is the mother that adoptees seek.⁵⁷
Even more interesting is recent research that allows a comparison between the psychological outcomes of children who are not biologically related to their parents. In a 2013 study by Golombok et al., parenting and children’s adjustment were examined in 30 surrogacy families, 31 egg donation families, 35 donor insemination families, and 53 natural conception families. Children’s adjustment was assessed at ages 3, 7 and 10. The results disclosed that although children born through reproductive donation obtained scores within the normal range, surrogacy children showed higher levels of adjustment difficulties at age 7 than children conceived by gamete donation. Thus, “the absence of a gestational connection to the mother may be more problematic for children than the absence of a genetic link”

Foetal developmental phenomenology and adoptee phenomenology, taken together, raise questions about the place of the biological mother in the development of our intersubjective relations after our birth and the possibility for an alternate ‘normal’ developmental alterity—one which holds within the self not one, but two alterities, or perhaps a primal and a secondary alterity. The question that interests me most is: is it possible that the echo of which Nydam speaks is a trace of the biological mother?

Has she left an imprint of herself inscribed in our neurological structures through the moulding of our movement experienced as an aspect of our identity? Is that even possible? What does this means for an understanding of the self as forming from the dehiscence of ipsiety and alterity in the flesh as Merleau-Ponty describes? If as Merleau-Ponty advocates, being produces itself through a body rooted in the sensible world, through a chiasmic intertwining of the body with itself, then what is this echo and why does it result in an embodiment that holds others further away?

IRIGARAY AND PRIMAL MATERNAL FLESH

Luce Irigaray is interested in the denial of the sexed body within philosophical theory and to carefully and clearly articulate how sexual difference is foreclosed by the way that phallocentric philosophers employ metaphors drawn from the maternal body to ground masculine models of being while simultaneously disavowing their maternal origins. In the case of Merleau-Ponty, mother becomes nature and maternal nurturance merely another infant-world interaction. As Tahlia Welsh highlights, Irigaray’s claim isn’t just that “pregnancy is a subject area
that can and should be discussed by phenomenology, but rather that pregnancy is at the heart of the phenomenological project. In this last section I wish to show both the error and the consequence to understanding humanity as devoid not only of maternal origin but also of maternal interaction. In keeping with this project, what I wish to propose is the possibility that Merleau-Ponty’s flesh ontology is an absolute appropriation of gestational phenomenology such that the flesh refers to a phenomenology of gestation that occurs in the bodies of actual women.

Outlining how Merleau-Ponty utilises a whole series of metaphors that are embedded in and derived from maternity, metaphors that are the conditions of possibility of his understanding of the flesh, which is itself the condition of possibility of intersubjectivity, Irigaray identifies the maternal as the unspoken underbelly of the flesh. Couched in terms of vision, of the strand and the sea and of immersion and emergence, Merleau-Ponty, according to Irigaray, renders invisible the womb, leaving the maternal unacknowledged in his flesh ontology:

If it was not the visible that is in question here, it would be possible to believe that Merleau-Ponty alludes here to intra-uterine life. After all, he employs the ‘images’ of the sea and strand. Of the immersion and the emergence? And he speaks of the risk of disappearance of the seer-seeing and the visible. What doubly corresponds to an existence in the intra-uterine nesting: who is still in this night does not see and remains without any visible ... Especially without memory of that first event where he is enveloped-touched by a tangible invisible out of which even his eyes are formed but which he will never see: without seeing, neither visible nor visibility in this place.

Also the target of critique for Irigaray is the way that Merleau-Ponty describes being as self-generating like the embryo, a description which clearly denies maternal interaction, origins and nurturance. Merleau-Ponty’s chiasm becomes “another world, another landscape, a topos or a locus of the irreversible”. She identifies in Merleau-Ponty’s descriptions, especially of the visible, a morphology that echoes the archaic state that one “remembers without remembering thematically”, a dimension of ourselves kept in the depths of our corporeal prehistory, etched into our bodies as a “watermark”.

Interestingly, the term ‘watermark’ is also used by Merleau-Ponty and although Irigaray does not specify a connection, the appropriation is not without reference.
In his course notes from the Collège de France, Merleau-Ponty describes the organism as an “enveloping phenomenon” whereby, “between the microscopic facts, global reality is delineated like a watermark, never graspable for objectivizing-particular thinking, never eliminable from or reducible to the microscopic” and how “Alltäglichkeit [everydayness or commonplace] is always in the in-between world, always as a watermark”. Finally, “[t]he concern is to grasp humanity first as another manner of being a body—to see humanity emerge just like Being in the manner of a watermark, not as another substance, but as interbeing, and not as an imposition of a for-itself on a body in-itself.” I have no doubt that Irigaray’s use of the term ‘watermark’ is a play on these descriptions of humanity as a watermark of Being; substituting the uterine environment for Being, Irigaray writes the mothers body back into the picture, rendering this watermark of Being, a bodily inscription left by the uterine fluid in the womb rather than the imprint of an anonymous Being.

Although Irigaray’s identification that Merleau-Ponty appropriates the womb in his flesh ontology, leaving the mother unacknowledged is well placed, I do not think that this appropriation is as clear a denial of sexual difference as Irigaray suggests. I think LaChance Adams is correct when she identifies that while it is true that Merleau-Ponty has no theory of sexual difference, many theorists critical of Merleau-Ponty’s flesh ontology, including Irigaray, make the mistake of conflating anonymity with universality. As she identifies, “the body [in Merleau-Ponty] is always situated within a biological, social, and historical context, even in its anonymous mode. This means that sex and gender will necessarily be a factor in embodied experience” He also does not completely deny the importance of the maternal-infant relation. He does after all ask us to “do a psychoanalysis of Nature: it is the flesh, the mother” and he clearly identifies that the infant’s relation to the mother is one of total identification in ways that exceed her relation with others.

It is not so much the inscription of the mother that is missed, but rather a failure to grasp the significance of this inscription for developmental alterity. In The Visible and the Invisible Merleau-Ponty writes that “[i]n spite of all our substantialist ideas, the seer is being premeditated in counterpoint in the embryonic development; through a labor upon itself the visible body provides for the hollow whence a vision will come”. Also, “[w]hen the embryo’s organism starts to perceive, there is not a creation of a For itself by the body in itself, and there is not a descent into the body of a pre-established soul, it is that the vortex of the embryogenesis
suddenly centers itself upon the interior hollow it was preparing—-A certain fundamental divergence, a certain constitutive dissonance emerges”⁶⁹ What can be seen so clearly here is the denial of the necessity of maternal interaction and engagement with the foetus as necessary for foetal development and flourishing, reducing the gestational woman to a passive environment within which an active foetus can do the work of developing within the flesh. This oversight is core, not only to understanding how foetuses develop but also in acknowledging that the flesh, as a prototype of Being, does not form through exposure to the ‘natural’ ontological chiasm of the world, but rather through the chiasm that is moulded by and through a woman’s engagement with foetal matter.

That a pregnant woman is not passive but rather engaged in foetal development is a position taken up by Frances Gray in her chapter “Original Habitation: Pregnant Flesh as Absolute Hospitality”.⁷⁰ Grounding the Levinas/Derrida notion of unconditional or absolute hospitality in Merleau-Ponty’s flesh ontology, Gray argues pregnancy to be the “original host-guest relationship” which she claims is “ethically primitive”.⁷¹ To be pregnant for Gray, is not to be a host who offers her hospitality to a pre-existing guest as a gift, but rather as an act of embodied intentionality in a Merleau-Pontian sense of habituated pre-conscious action, which facilitates an “actualising of being, an enabling of life that has not previously existed”.⁷² Gray’s substitution of the Levisonian ‘stranger’ who comes from the exterior with Merleau-Ponty’s flesh ontology as a primal intersubjectivity is insightful. However, her preservation of a foetal emergence as a ‘dehiscence or fission of its own mass’ and her description of the foetus as a second subject, one that is “a subject other than, but simultaneously the same as, the woman’s flesh, a subject who inhabits her body, a separate consciousness created in, and as a result of her bodily environment” somewhat waters down the degree of maternal engagement to that of a preconscious bodily facilitation.⁷³ The preservation of foetal development as a dehiscence that unfolds in a woman’s bodily environment, albeit a more active environment than Merleau-Ponty proposes, nonetheless preserves the notion of gestation as devoid of maternal subjectivity, and in doing so Gray opens her thesis to questions about the development of alterity within the flesh because without the mother as a primary other, the foetus could not sustain the ipsiety required to develop consciousness.

In fact Levinas, in a critique of Merleau-Ponty’s flesh ontology has himself identified that the alterity of the other cannot be accommodated within a flesh that develops through a relation of reciprocity as a fission.⁷⁴ For Levinas, while
dehiscence might explain the presence of an imminent alterity, the alterity I find within myself, it fails to account for how the infant comes to recognise the radical alterity of others in the world as different to that found in the self. In fact for Levinas, the only possibility relies upon a perception rather than an experiential difference which he argues, ultimately structures the other as a type of knowledge rather than a felt experience of the unknown. For Levinas, this forecloses the possibility of an absolute alterity of the other because the other is thereby reduced to a product of consciousness, an imperialistic projection of ‘me’ as being like ‘you’.

Claude Lefort and Dorothea Olkowski have also identified that a relation of reversibility and dehiscence fails to show how, developmentally, the child comes to experience the radical alterity of others as different to that within herself. Each philosopher in their own way insists on the necessity of something beyond the infant-world relation as necessary to scaffold the development of self-recognition. For Lefort, what a relation of reversibility and dehiscence cannot take into account is how, developmentally, alterity is, at least in part, moulded by a culture. Olkowski’s critique is similar, only for her, it is maternal nurturance and care that is the missing link, appropriated and reduced to the status of a ‘natural’ event within Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy. Like Irigaray, she argues that Merleau-Ponty’s flesh ontology strategically erases the role of the mother in order to preserve understandings of development that support a masculine fantasy of liberal individuation.

There have been several well placed responses to these critiques that support Merleau-Ponty’s thesis and for the most part the responses adequately support the specific arguments that these theorists raise. As Gary Madison identifies, “Otherness ... is constitutive of ipseity itself” and so there is no need for a developmental step, alterity is a discovery, not something that the infant must cognitively develops. Alterity exists in the incommensurability of our reciprocal relations, the greater the temporal gap, the écart, the greater the experience of the unknown. Yet this position, although true, does not adequately respond to the developmental issue because should the child always and already be for itself an other, enclosed within what David Michael Levin describes as a “circuit of reversibilities” then when and how did this occur gestationally? Not only is this question important in terms of understanding the ontology of being that Merleau-Ponty proposes, it also carries a heavy political weight. Should the zygote be self-forming through ‘dehiscence or fission of its own mass’ and not an aspect of the maternal body, the maternal flesh, then we will perhaps need to ethically rethink our conceptions of when it is that we come into being and subsequently the
policies and practices surrounding abortion and maternal consent to treatments while pregnant. Should the zygote ever be considered one with the mother then we must admit a point in development were divergence occurs and then we have the developmental problem the Lefort and Olkowski discern. The solution I have shown is that the self is formed within and out of the alterity of our biological mother, an absolute alterity that is constitutive of the ipseity that our postural schemas embody; an alterity that will eventually come within but remains outside of our infantile phenomenal world.

CONCLUSION

In Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, being produces itself through a phenomenal body, situated in the world, orientated through the mutual crossing of the touching with the tangible and the visual with the invisible. Through the intertwining of touch and vision the embryo develops into interaction, not through the dichotomy of this interaction but as a reversibility situated within the flesh. The flesh is an excess produced in this intertwining, a generation of difference that is the non-coincidence between corporeality and ideality. The body, for Merleau-Ponty is a “difference without contradiction, that divergence (écart) between the within and the without that constitutes its natal secret”.79 Because I am blind to the body from which I see the world because it is from the body that I see, vision of myself is a fold or cavity that allows me to see myself only through the things that I see.80 As Cecelia Sjoholm puts it “[t]he way that we perceive the world, therefore, presumes the suppression of an invisible other, a radical form of alterity making its imprint on our corporeal rootedness.81

Many philosophers have criticised Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy as giving an inadequate account of radical otherness due to the way we seem to integrate and suppress the other into our self. For Emmanuel Levinas, this integration forms a kind of imperialism that denies the capacity to perceive radical alterity. For Claude Lefort and Dorothea Olkowski, it leaves unaccounted the narrative of development—just how do we get from syncretic infant experience to the flesh without social scaffolding? For Irigaray, this understanding of alterity explains how phallocentrism relies upon the integration and suppression of what should be a visible other, into our own being so as to sustain a masculine world through the rendering of this radical other (the other sex), invisible.
In this paper I have examined the place of alterity in Merleau-Ponty’s flesh ontology from a different angle again, arguing through a phenomenology of gestation and adoption that the flesh of which Merleau-Ponty speaks is the flesh of the biological mother; a real embodied woman whose body has scaffolded the development of our own. Actual women whose imprint has left us with a watermark that the adoptee can more easily discern due, most likely, to the radical reformation that must be undertaken in body schematic development when there are two, rather than one primary alterities that will need to be internalised, rendered invisible within the self. As Winterson explains,

That isn’t of its nature negative, the missing part, the missing past, can be an opening, not a void. It can be an entry as well as an exit. It is the fossil record, the imprint of another life, your fingers trace the space where it might have been, and your fingers learn a kind of Braille.\(^8\)

This Braille, this watermark, the trace of the biological mother that remains, explains well adoptee phenomenology, while simultaneously creating problems for bonding at birth theories of infant development. For Merleau-Ponty’s flesh ontology, from the perspective of thematics, not much needs to change, we do not even really need to do a psychoanalysis of nature, but rather simply insert the prefix ‘maternal’ before the term ‘flesh’.

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NOTES

Committee on Social Issues. Ordered to be printed 8 December 2000 according to the Resolution of the House, 2000, Parliamentary Paper Number 600.


38. Graven and Browne, “Auditory development in the foetus and infant”, 188.


43. M. D. S. Ainsworth, M. C. Blehar, E. Waters and S. Wall Patterns of attachment. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1978. Infants seek and use emotional expressions especially those provided by primary caregivers to disambiguate potentially dangerous situations and to guide their own behaviour. Securely attached infants differ in their social referencing as compared to insecurely attached infants as-reflected by Ainsworth’s Strange Situation behaviour test. Securely attached infants reference their mothers when faced with uncertainty, and decrease the frequency of their referencing as they become more comfortable with the situation. In contrast, insecurely attached infants may either (a) reference little in novel, uncertain situations, or (b) reference persistently because of their continued uncertainty with the situation. See also S. Feinman, D. Roberts, K. Hsieh, D. Sawyer and D. Swanson, “A critical review of social referencing in infancy” Social referencing and the social construction of reality in infancy, Ed S. Feinman New York: Plenum, 1992, 15-54 which shows how infants seek and use emotional expressions especially those provided by primary caregivers to disambiguate potentially dangerous situations and to guide their own behaviour. James F
Sorce and R. N. Emde, “Mother’s presence is not enough: Effect of emotional availability on infant exploration.” *Developmental Psychology, 17,* (1981, 737-745), tested to see how maternal emotional signaling affected the behaviors of 1-year-olds on the visual cliff where the child is placed on one side a man—made cliff with a perspex bridge to the mother. Sorce et al. placed the infants on the shallow side of the visual cliff apparatus and had their mothers on the other side of the visual cliff eliciting different emotional facial expressions. When the mothers posed joy or interest most of the babies crossed the deep side but if the mothers posed fear or anger, most of the babies did not cross the apparatus. In the absence of depth, most of the babies crossed regardless of the mother’s facial expressions.


47. Ainsworth *The Development of mother-infant attachment."

48. A further attachment category, reactive attachment disorder (RAD) was included in DSM-III in 1980 and applies to children who are unable to form an ongoing bond with a particular caregiver most often due to institutionalisation, abuse, neglect, or frequent disruptions in primary caregivers. Unlike those bonded children who Ainsworth studied, RAD children have experience deprivation to the degree that they exhibit not just a behavioural style of social interaction but cognitive, physical, and social-emotional delays. RAD criteria includes symptoms such as failure to thrive, a lack of developmentally appropriate social responsiveness, and apathy. These children can improve but often suffer permanent cognitive delay. I have not referred to this category in any detail in this paper as it seems fairly conclusive that this condition develops as a consequence of postpartum circumstances. See M. M. Richters and F. R. Volkmar “Reactive Attachment Disorder of Infancy or Early Childhood” *American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry 33* (1994, 328-332).


50. See Jane Lymer *The phenomenology of the maternal-foetal bond’* PhD Dissertation University of Wollongong Australia, 2010 for this argument.


The use of such a general concept [as bonding] in research inhibits the investigation of specific circumstances, particularly since the ambiguity of ‘bonding’ (as both process and result) conflates the descriptive and explanatory functions of propositions containing the term. The circularity inherent in such reasoning may be attractive at an intuitive level since it neatly rounds up a straggly line of questions into a ring of generalizations—but it hardly advances our understanding of particular conditions that affect the relationship between children and their parent (841).

Frank W. Hatch & Lenny Maietta “The Role of Kinesthesia in Pre- and Perinatal Bonding” *Pre- and Perinatal Psychology Journal 5* (1991, 251-270) have also identified similar shortcomings. The problem that they ascertain is that the definition is so broad and unclear that whenever the concept is empirically researched, too many varying interpretations and applications are permitted. See also
W. R. Arney “Maternal-Infant Bonding: The Politics of Falling in Love with Your Child” Feminist Studies 6 (1980, 547-570) who suggests that “one can understand the widespread acceptance of bonding theory and its rapid development in obstetrics, only by concentrating on the political uses of the theory” (547). His conclusion is that bonding theory has been an unsubstantiated political tool employing discourses of biological naturalism aimed at “keeping women by the hearth” (567).

53. David Kirschner, “The Adopted Child Syndrome: Considerations for Psychotherapy,” Psychotherapy in Private Practice 8:3 (1990, 93-100). Kirschner provides a rather grim view of the adopted child’s prospects for healthy development and is concerned particularly with the overrepresentation of adopted children who have stood trial for murder in the in US arguing that though adopted children commit murders more often than commonly believed, there is resistance to making an issue of this fact. Kirschner argues this to be primarily due to the secrecy associated with many adoptions and the failure of criminal justice agencies to record the nature of an offender’s family background. From a legal posture, an adopted child is simply the child of his adoptive parents and the psychodynamics of adoption are easily overlooked in forensic mental health evaluations. He states that 500 estimated serial killers in U.S. history, 16 percent were adopted as children, while adoptees represent only 2 or 3 percent of the general population. Adoptees are 15 times more likely to kill one or both of their adoptive parents than biological children.

54. Triseliotis, In search of origins, 43.
60. Tahlia Welsh The Child as Natural Phenomenologist: Primal and Primary Experience in Merleau-Ponty’s Psychology Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013, 139.
61. Irigaray, An Ethics of Sexual Difference, 27.
63. Irigaray, An Ethics of Sexual Difference, 164.
66. LaChance Adams, Mad Mothers, Bad Mothers & What a Good Mother Would Do, 126-127.
68. Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisible, 146.
74. Emmanuel Levinas “Two Texts on Merleau-Ponty” Ontology and Altesy in Merleau-Ponty. Eds
75. While there have been many responses to Levinas's critique of Merleau-Ponty, many of which I will discuss in chapter four, let me just earmark here, that my conclusion will be that Levinas is correct to say that the flesh cannot emerge through a relation of dehiscence.
82. Winterson, *Why be Happy When You Could be Normal?*, 5.
Jacques Derrida’s *Glas* (1974) is written entirely across two parallel columns, the left column focussing on a reading of selected works by the G. W. F. Hegel, the nineteenth-century philosopher of what Derrida will refer to as ‘savoir absolu’ (absolute knowledge), and the other column, on the right, concentrating on a selection of the fiction and plays of Jean Genet, one of France’s most avowedly marginal authors, a self-confessed “traitor, thief, informer, coward and queer.”

*Glas* is one of Derrida’s most stylistically experimental texts, disregarding linear argumentation and citation standards in favour of an approach which draws upon such elements as word-play, aural resonances and textual interruptions or supplements referred to as “judases”. *Glas* is regularly grouped with *Éperons: les styles de Nietzsche* (1978) and *La Carte postale: de Socrate à Freud et au-delà* (1980) as roughly contemporaneous texts written in a non-traditional, somewhat literary style. In his 1980 thesis defence, Derrida located this group of three works within a “continued pursuit [...] of the project of grammatology”, “an expansion of earlier attempts”, whilst also alluding towards a felt need to attempt to develop a different style and performance of writing which would turn “towards textual configurations that were less and less linear, logical and topical forms, even typographical forms that were more daring, the intersection of corpora, mixtures of genera or of modes, changes of tone [...]”, satire, rerouting, grafting, etc.”
In this paper I read *Glas* with an eye towards exploring precisely this linkage between Derrida’s philosophical project and *Glas*’ highly experimental style—I argue that *Glas*’ style is intimately linked with its philosophical project. Through an exploration of Derrida’s extensive word and name play, his gesturing towards implied meanings, connotative and non-linear argumentation and dis/mis-use of standard practices of academic citation and referencing, I argue that *Glas* stages an attempt to circumvent the possibility of a complete, closed text and an absolute philosophical position and that this attempt to avoid the absolute demands this different way of writing. I suggest that *Glas* is styled around the “decapitating” of metalanguage through a rhythmic “plunging” and “extracting” of the remaindered or excluded element in and out of the text.  

*Glas* is not generally considered a hugely important work in Derrida’s oeuvre, but it has been the subject of some excellent scholarship. Many readings of *Glas* have tended to focus upon only the Hegel column or only the Genet column. Notably, these works are more often produced by Hegel scholars or Genet scholars, rather than by Derrida scholars. Peter Krapp has succinctly summed up this phenomenon, noting the major collections of works on the side of Hegel and Genet respectively: he writes, “[t]he contributions to *Hegel after Derrida* [...] all but ignore *Glas* on Genet, while the texts assembled in a special issue on Genet for *Yale French Studies* [...] manage to do without Hegel.” There is nothing essentially wrong with these approaches; certainly *Glas* is a critical work on both Hegel and Genet, even if an idiosyncratic one, which must have a place in the bodies of scholarship on these figures and which invites responses to the readings it makes of these figures. Given the relatively broad span of the *Glas*, there is, undoubtedly, also a need to localise and focus on certain aspects of the work. Many of these commentators have presented extremely incisive readings of (parts of) *Glas* and, commendably, engage with *Glas* in a considered manner, without, as Geoffrey Bennington has put it, “getting in a panic about ‘hectic wordplay’.” However, a number of the articles which have focussed on the Hegel column seem to have done so on the basis of an implicit assertion that the Hegel column is the only column worth reading; one is struck by the force with which Stuart Barnett and Simon Critchley repeatedly seek to assert that *Glas* “is not a self-indulgent exercise in textual free-play” but rather—and note the moralistic language—“a rigorous and detailed examination of Hegel”, a “devotional labour of reading”, and a “profoundly ascetic text.” Meanwhile, some of the analyses that have focussed on the Genet column of *Glas* have tended, more or less consciously, to draw a direct equivalence between the “textual strategies” of Genet and Derrida, with the more or less implicit outcome
being that they place Derrida very firmly on the side of Genet. James Creech contests that “Glas is such a magnificent intellectual achievement [...] because it is so exquisitely attuned to [the] very project of Genet.” The problem with choosing to focus on only one of Glas’ columns is not simply that one-half of the text is obscured, but rather that it encumbers a more full consideration of how the columns relate to one another. I am interested in pursuing such a consideration of the columns’ relation to one another and am particularly interested in paying attention to the text’s judases, which are often overlooked in many discussion of Glas, and which I believe are a key site for the presentation of this relation.

In the essay “Countersignature” (2004), Derrida plays on the double meaning of the French word ‘contre’ (roughly comparable to ‘against’ in English) which “can equally and at the same time mark both opposition, contrariety, contradiction and proximity, near-contact”. Derrida explains, “[o]ne can be ‘against’ [‘contre’] the person one opposes (one’s ‘declared enemy’, for example),” and also ‘against’ [‘contre’] the person next to us, the one who is ‘right against’ us, whom we touch or with whom we are in contact.” This simultaneous relation of opposition to and of touching or leaning upon can be extended to the consideration of the relation between the two columns of Glas. Indeed, Derrida suggests as much, writing that “[t]his abyssal double meaning of ‘counter’ [‘contre’] [...] is of course at work in Glas, [...] between the two columns, the Genet one and the Hegel one—and their sypholes [judas]”, “for sometimes the two columns contradict each other [...] sometimes they do not contradict each other but rather wink at each other.”

What is at stake in this paper is neither a consideration of Derrida’s relation with or to Hegel, nor Derrida’s encounter with Genet. Rather, I am interested in a consideration of how the columns of Glas come to relate contre one another and I pursue an analysis of how the philosophical work of Glas is intimately linked with its written and compositional style.

WORD AND NAME PLAY

Genet’s taking of his mother’s surname is a point repeatedly returned to throughout the right hand column of Glas. Genet was born in 1910 to twenty-two year old Camille Gabrielle Genet, a single woman usually described as either a governess or a sex-worker, and an unknown father; Genet was abandoned at thirty weeks old rather than only a few days after delivery and thus took his mother’s surname. For this reason, Derrida describes Genet’s birth-story as an “immaculate
conception.” Derrida repeatedly plays upon the similarity of the name ‘Genet’ and the plant called ‘genêt’, “a plant with flowers—yellow flowers \((\text{sarothamnus scoparius}, \text{genista}); \text{broom, genette, genêt-à-balais}, \text{poisonous and medicinal ...})\)” Derrida writes that “the mother’s name would be [...] the name of a plant or a flower, except for one letter [...] for a circumflex.” In English the evergreen shrub is known as the ‘Scotch broom’ or ‘common broom’ (because of its broom-like appearance). Thus, ‘genêt’ is figured as the common or improper cryptonym of ‘Genet’—“it is not proper because it is common”—which of course is itself already, in a different sense an improper name, because it is not the name of the father. Derrida draws attention to Genet’s frequent naming of his characters after flowers and writes that where “the proper surnames return to [...] flowers, these flowers are cut from the mother.”

Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément similarly emphasise the maternal-feminine power of Genet’s texts: “What is inscribed under Jean Genet’s name, in the movement of a text that divides itself, pulls itself to pieces, dismembers itself, regroups, remembers itself, is a proliferating, maternal femininity.” Drucilla Cornell writes that “[i]n \(\text{Glas}\), she [the mother] is inscribed in the name of Jean Genet, the blossoming flower” and contrasts this to “Hegel’s sanctimonious statements about the place of Woman in his system”, so that \(\text{Glas}\) is understood as presenting “in the second column pieces of Genet’s texts which pull apart the very erection of feminine identity that Hegel tries so patiently to secure.” Indeed, Cornell has proposed that “[p]erhaps there has never been a more careful deconstruction of Hegel’s phallogocentrism than that given to us in Derrida’s \(\text{Glas}\).”

Such an assessment of the Hegel column is not ungrounded. Through a protracted engagement with first, the notion of the family, especially the Christian family as focussed through the Holy Trinity of the father-son-holy spirit, and second, with Hegel’s (mis)reading of the Antigone myth, Derrida emphasises a strain of Hegel’s writing which in the first case, entirely excludes women and the maternal, and in the second case, constructs an ideal feminine identity which depends upon and reinforces women’s exclusion from subject-hood. Derrida suggests that the model of the Christian family may be “exemplary for speculative onto-theology.” The key familial relationship of the Christian family is between father and son, with its necessary third element, the spirit. The spirit of Christianity is the father/son filiation, “the relation of father to son, of son to father”, thus, “the Spirit is the whole”, it forms the relation in which all terms of reference are
Glasm, ruminates over the theorising of this speculative Christian family for the most part of one-hundred pages—the focus remains fixed on the father-son filial relation. In dramatic contrast to the extended focus on the mother on the other side of the page, the position of the mother with respect to this holy familial trinity becomes conspicuous in its absence which is also its exclusion. Later on in the left column, the analysis shifts towards a consideration of Hegel’s reading of Antigone. As Patricia Jagiello Mills writes, “Hegel’s interpretation of Sophocles’ play Antigone is central to an understanding of woman’s role in the Hegelian system.” Indeed, Antigone becomes for Hegel the paradigmatic figure of womanhood and woman’s unique responsibility towards ethical family life. Hegel’s reading of Antigone stresses a series of coupled oppositions, “divine law/human law, family/city, woman/man” and places great emphasis on an insistence of the pure, asexual relation of the sister and brother, a point of major interest for Derrida (for reasons which will become increasingly clear in this article). One of Hegel’s key claims about Antigone (and one which notably contradicts most scholarship on Antigone) is that she never leaves the sphere of the family because “[t]he development of human consciousness outside the family is specific, limited to man. Woman can never aspire to [...] individuality; she cannot attain particularity.” Antigone, model of womanhood in general, is positioned as incapable of individual subjecitivity; now, women in general are excluded from subject-hood in the Hegelian system. The Hegelian system, as presented in Glasm, is thus a system moded towards a masculinst position, aligned entirely with the perspective of the father (and the son)—women and mothers are either excluded all together, or else constructed as a general ideal object in a way which only reformulates and reiterates their exclusion. On such a basis, Cornell has interpreted the two columns of Glasm as staging a deconstruction of the Hegelian dialectic and a reinscription of the mother through Genet’s flowers, the enacting of “[t]he fall of Hegel”, whereby “[t]he phallus falls and with its fall goes its claim that its turgidity elects it as the transcendental signifier.”

It is well recognised that Derrida’s signature can be found repeatedly throughout Glasm. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak refers to “[t]he debris of d-words [...] scattered all over the pages” and indeed many commentators have recognised the aural resonances between ‘Derrida’ and words and phrases like ‘déjà’, ‘derriere’, ‘debris da’, ‘de dos’, ‘da’, ‘Dionysos Erigone Eriopétale Réséda’, as well as the play on the initials of Genet’s lover, Jean Decarnin, J.D., and the siglum of déjà, D.J. However, it seems that few of Glasm’ commentators notice that these cryponyms of Derrida’s name appear almost exclusively in the right-hand column of the...
text—the Genet column. And yet given that the Genet column has been so strongly linked to the feminine and the name of the mother, it seems important to remember that ‘Derrida’ is not only Jacques Derrida but also a (the) name of a (the) father, Haïm Aaron Prosper Charles (Aimé) Derrida. As we find in one of the judases in the Hegel column, “I am my father my son and myself. My name is my father.” Indeed, the Genet column ends (in as much as we can say it “ends” when there is no full-stop) with one such signature of the father’s name—“Today, here, now, the debris of [débris de].” Thus, the final words of the Genet column are literally made in the name of the father.

Moreover, even as the general discourse of the Hegel column at first appears to so radically exclude the feminine, and especially the maternal, I want to argue that there are in fact mothers’ names scattered throughout. Derrida asserts in the beginning of the left column that “In order to work on/in Hegel’s name, in order to erect it [...] I have chosen to draw on one thread [...] It is the law of the family: of Hegel’s family, of the family in Hegel, of the concept of family according to Hegel.” What follows in Derrida’s analysis would seem to focus more on the latter two items in that list, “the family in Hegel” and “the concept of family according to Hegel”. As mentioned already, there is a focus on the Christian family thought specifically through the father-son relationship to the exclusion of the mother and an extended discussion of Hegel’s ideal woman-figure, Antigone, constructed specifically in terms of her familial role and duty. But the first and constant question raised throughout the left column of Glas is “what, after all, of the remain(s), today, for us, here, now, of a Hegel?”; this is at once a question of Hegel’s legacy, and also of what remains left-over outside of the Hegelian system.

It is in this frame that Derrida reintroduces aspects of the biographical and the private into the consideration of Hegel’s system, he literally (re)introduces “Hegel’s family”. Whilst the consideration of the link between speculative onto-theology and the Christian model of the family has wholly excluded the Mother, that is, the Virgin Mother Mary, Derrida inserts a judas which notes the numerous Marias or Marias (or Marys) in Hegel’s life: “Marie Magdelan were his mother’s first names (Maria Magdalena Louisa, born Fromm), Marie his daughter’s (Susanna Maria) and his wife’s (Maria Helena Susanna).” This judas goes on to describe how Hegel, on a trip to Dresden in 1821, viewed a painting entitled Madonna of Burgomaster Meyer, of which “[h]e always took the original—that he regularly saw in Berlin—for a copy and the copy that he had just seen in Dresden for the original.” The judas also briefly quotes from a letter of Hegel’s written
in 1822: “Good morning, dear Maria, from the sunshine of Marianburg, i.e. Magdeburg, whose maid [Magd] is Holy Mary, to whom the cathedral is or was dedicated. ‘[…] It is more difficult to get out of Magdeburg than into it […]’.” In drawing attention to a range of Maries, Marias and Marys in Hegel’s life, the judas in a sense “betrays” the surrounding discussion of the filial relation between the father and the son by forcing a reintroduction of the maternal.

Moreover, Derrida plays on the homonymic relation of “Mehr” (German, “more”) and “mère” (French, mother). Raising the notion of “surplus, this more (deises Mehr)”, Derrida writes “this Mehr does not take itself into account, cannot give rise to an objective calculus, to a discursive explanation […] The relation it enters without ever belonging there, no analysis can account for according the ways of comparison to analogy. No explanatory statement (Erklärung) can say here, ‘this is equal to that’.” It seems these comments about the Mehr could equally made about la mère in relation to the Hegelian system: she enters a relation without ever belonging there (she does not belong because she has been excluded); where it may be said that the father equals the son, no such explanatory statement can say ‘she equals to that’. Further, this associating of the mère with the notion of surplus is linked to the question of the remains—and what has remained excluded from and outside of the Christian/Hegelian model of the family is, precisely, the mother. Later in the Hegel column, a similar play is made on the words “Materie” (German, matter) and “mater” (Latin, mother). Thus, in the Hegel column, the column so strongly associated with the father, patriarchy and phallogocentrism, noteworthy (re)inscriptions of the maternal and the feminine can be found.

What we have seen then is that Derrida signs in the name of the father in the Genet column and that names of the mother(s) are to be found the Hegel column. The dominant terms of recognition and analysis have been reversed—the relation of the two columns contre one another, as in opposition to one another, begins to appear also as a relation of being contre, in near proximity to or touching one another.

DESIREE, FETISH AND SEXUAL CONNOTATION

A similar effect can be identified with respect to the notion of desire as it operates in Glas’ two columns and the judases through a range of more or less implicit connotations drawn by Derrida.
The Hegelian system is held to ascribe all things a proper place—this extends to Hegel’s treatment of sexual difference. Derrida writes that, in Hegel, “[t]he separation of the two sexes’ presents a very singular structure of separation”; indeed the sexual difference is essentialised according to the physical characteristics of the sexual organs. The difference in the physical characteristics of the two sexes operates as an apparently rational basis for a series of gendered hierarchies. The “remaining enclosed” of the female organs is directly linked with feminine passivity such that “[t]he clitoris is inactive feeling in general”; meanwhile, for the male organ “the essence consists in the difference”, in its difference from the “indifferent”, inactive female organ. The male sexual organ actively differentiates itself; thus, “[t]he sexual difference reproduces the hierarchical opposition of passivity or activity, of matter to form.” The difference of the sexes is overcome through copulation: “Copulation relieves the difference.” Moreover, copulation advances specifically through marriage, “the being-one (Einssein) of the spouses” which is precisely, “the Aufhebung of the sexual difference.” Marriage is intrinsically linked with the family—“marriage is the first moment of the family”—and with monogamy, a point which Derrida repeatedly emphasises, quoting multiple passages from the Philosophy of Right: “Marriage, and essentially monogamy, is one of the absolute principles on which the Sittlichkeit [ethical life] of a community depends”, and, “In essence marriage is monogamy.” This of course accords in many ways with the association of the Hegelian system with the Christian family. Thus, with respect to the question of desire, the rational Christian family man Hegel is seen to be advancing an inherently heterosexual, heteronormative and again, phallocentric system.

At a contrast, Genet the criminal and homosexual presents a multiplicity of fragments which develops as “a theory or an event of general equivalence: of subjects [...] of terms, of contraries exchanged without end.” Derrida describes the inmates of Genet’s prison stories “who stand up straight, resembling one another and substituting for one another in silence like letters on the page, one in place of another, one counting for another.” Thus, the Genet column of Glas foregrounds the circulation of all objects without any proper place, the substitutability of objects without essence. This general substitutability and circulation is linked in Glas with a fragmentation of desire and a multiplicity of lovers, much in contrast to the Hegelian conceptualisation of the ethical unity of desire achieved through copulation/monogamous marriage. Unlike Hegel, Genet’s desire does not lead towards the rational sublation of difference through marriage—on the contrary, Derrida quotes Genet, that, “[m]y excitement [émoi]
is the oscillation from the one to the other’, the undecided suspense between two opposite [...] significations.”

This desire is thus also a non-phallic desire—it is not structured around a singular and essential object but follows the circulation of multiple and substitutable fragments. In this sense Genet’s queer desire is foregrounded as an “irrational” desire. Again this contrast between Hegel and Genet has been understood as part of a general process of deconstructing the Hegelian system, Clare Blackburn for example has discussed how “Genet’s illegitimacy, criminality, homosexuality and vagabond tendencies opposing the Hegelian values of family, (heteronormative) civil society and Christianity” can “destabilise the apparent solidity [...] of the system.”

However, again, I want to argue that desire is not just figured in so straightforward a manner in Glas, that Hegel’s desire for rationality is undercut by the intrusion of elements of Hegel’s personal and private life and that the apparent irrationality of Genet’s desire based in the play of boundless substitution is challenged by the problem of the fetish.

Mid-way through the discussion of Hegel’s interpretation of Antigone, the text is interrupted, by twelve pages of extracts from Hegel’s letters, as another judas. The letters are addressed to numerous figures: his close family friend Nanette, his fiancée/wife Marie, and his friend and fellow theologian Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer. The first letters are addressed to Nanette Endel, introduced in a brief introductory passage as “the young woman who lodged in the family house. If one is to believe a remark of Bourgeois [Bernard Bourgeois, a prominent French Hegel scholar], she ‘had inspired [in Hegel] a feeling perhaps of love [...]’ [...] Nana could always play the sister.”

This suggestion is highlighted in the extreme in the selected letters; Hegel writes,

> How much I am obliged to you [...] being good enough to compensate me by written conversation for the loss of your company [...] an imperious fate grudgingly restricts me to this alone. But it is conquered by my power of imagination [...] the sound of your voice, the soft glance of your eyes, and all else of which life boasts over written words.55

Further on: “I am surrounded on all sides by objects which remind me of you”; “As soon as you stopped holding me to piety, it was all over”; “I have every reason to assume that longer associations with you would have liberated me more and granted me a greater capacity for merrymaking”; “We would have surely
danced a lot—like the evening before my departure. I have turned in circles ever since.” Next are poems written by Hegel to his fiancée Marie. Terry Pinkard, writing Hegel’s biography, has described these poems quite well; the poems are “not exactly the basis of Hegel’s reputation in the history of thought; it is a more or less humdrum, semi-Romantic” style. Hegel uses the image of the phoenix to symbolise love as the union of two people which results in a common personality and commitment; “the phoenix symbolises the way in which what divides two lovers falls away as genuine love takes over and re-institutes itself over and over again.”

A series of extracts from letters between Hegel and Niethammer follow, which detail Hegel’s desire to not announce his engagement and to delay the wedding (and Niethammer’s discouragement of this). Then, reproduced in Glas, are two letters written by Hegel to Marie on the evening before their marriage, apparently in response to some disagreement or argument. Hegel reiterates that their love is their becoming one—“distinguishing your love for me and mine for you […] would separate our love: this love is solely ours, merely this unity, this bond”—however, the second letter ends on a rather sinister note. Hegel writes,

“You know there are evil men who torture their wives merely so that their behaviour, along with their patience and love, may be constantly tested. I do not believe that I am that evil. Yet although no harm ought ever be done to such a dear human being as you, I could almost be free of regret for having hurt you [...] be consoled that what may have been unkind and harsh in my replies will vanish through the fact that I feel and recognise ever more deeply how thoroughly lovable, loving, and full of love you are.”

This lengthy section of extracts from Hegel’s letters is usually ignored in responses to Glas. However, I believe that these letters actually play an important role in breaking up and dislocating the larger discourse of the Hegel column and in introducing contradictory elements into the seemingly total system of the Hegelian dialectic (and notably, since these are Hegel’s personal letters, these elements are drawn upon as immanent to that system). This assemblage of letters brings to light Hegel’s multiple romantic interests, Marie and Nanette—so Hegel is perhaps no longer practicing monogamy. Hegel is also seen to be reticent about announcing and advancing with his engagement to Marie—so possibly Hegel is neglecting his ethical duty towards marriage. Further, Hegel’s love entails not just union, but potentially unkindness and the threat of violence.
This section also includes an interesting short remark, in which Derrida writes: “Marie (one of three).” Who would be the third in this equation? The answer is given in the very first line of the judas: “one would have to name here Christiane”, Hegel’s sister. It is informative to read this judas in tandem with another found a little later on in the text which focuses on Christiane’s mental illness as explained (again) through Hegel’s letters, some addressed to Christiane and others to their “cousin Göriz”, who apparently assisted Hegel in managing his sisters treatment and affairs during her illness. As a sort of introduction to these letters, Derrida notes some of Christiane and Hegel’s biographical details in a highly selective and suggestive manner—he writes, “Hegel’s sister, Christiane, committed suicide in 1832, shortly after the death of her brother. She had been confined in 1820 in the lunatic asylum of Zwiefalten [...] Her ‘nerve troubles’ began in 1814 (after the death of Georg Ludwig [their father], when Marie Hegel is expecting her first boy).” Through the judas, Derrida builds an insinuation towards the possibility of a romantic or sexual desire between this sister and this brother. This is especially noteworthy given its location within a discussion of Hegel’s reading of Antigone, which has asserted and celebrated the unique a-sexual relation between the brother and the sister: “The brother-and-sister relationship—a nonsexual relationship” “Brother and sister ‘do not desire one another’. Indeed as Sina Kramer has discussed, “a current of desire thus runs underneath” the discussion of Christiane in Glas, alluding to “an incestuous desire for the sister that subtends the claim Hegel makes that recognition is only possible between the brother and the sister because there is no sexual desire between them.” In this light, Hegel’s desire takes on a distinctly different colour; it is polygamous, un-Christian, incestuous, violent, perverse, entirely transgressive and irrational.

Meanwhile, on the Genet side, the circulation and substitution of objects produces only fragments. If we are to understand Genet’s fragments as opposing and perhaps deconstructing Hegel’s system this itself raises a new problem—would this privileging of the fragment simply amount to a fetishizing of the fragment, a making of the fragment the essential object? This problem is figured in a key passage where Derrida quotes from Genet’s The Thief’s Journal; the extract is quite lengthy, but it bears extended quotation:

“Get started!”

‘With a gesture of his lively hand, he motioned to me that he wanted to undress. As on other evenings, I knelt down to unhook the cluster of

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'Inside his trousers was pinned [épingle] one of those postiche clusters of thin cellulose grapes stuffed with wadding. (They are as big as greengage plums; elegant Spanish women of the period wore them on their loose-brimmed, straw sun bonnets.) Whenever some queer at the Criolla, excited by the swelling, put his hand on the fly, his horrified fingers would encounter this object, which they feared to be a cluster of his true treasure, the branch on which, comically, too much fruit was hanging.

'The Criolla was not only a fairy joint. Some boys in dresses danced there, but women did too. Whores brought their pimps [mâcs] and their clients. Stilitano would have made a lot of money were it not that he spat on queers. He scorned them. He amused himself with their annoyance at the cluster of grapes. The game lasted a few days. So I unhooked the cluster, which was fastened to his blue trousers by a safety pin [épingle de nourrice], but, instead of putting it on the mantelpiece as usual and laughing (for we would burst out [éclatons] laughing and joke during the operation), I could not restrain myself from keeping it in my cupped hands and laying my cheek against it. Stilitano's face above me turned hideous.

"Drop it (ça), you bitch!"

‘In order to open the fly, I had squatted on my haunches, but Stilitano’s fury, had my usual fervour been insufficient, made me fall to my knees. That was the position which, facing him, I used to take mentally in spite of myself. I didn’t budge. Stilitano struck me with his two feet and his one fist. I could have escaped. I remained there.

"The key’s in the door," I thought. Through the fork of the legs that were kicking me with rage I saw it caught in the lock, and I would have liked to turn it with a double turn so as to be locked in alone with my executioner. I made no attempt to understand the reason for his anger, which was so disproportionate to its cause, for my mind [esprit] was unconcerned with psychological motives. As for Stilitano, from that day on he stopped wearing the cluster of grapes. [...] 

‘The cluster of grapes on the mantelpiece disgusted me [m’écoeurait]. One
night Stilitano got up to throw it into the shithole. During the time he had worn it, it had not marred his beauty. On the contrary, in the evening, slightly encumbering his legs, it had given them a slight bend and his step [pas] a slightly rounded and gentle constraint, and when he walked [marchait] near me, in front or behind, I felt a delicious agitation because my hands had prepared it. I still think it was by virtue of the insidious power of these grapes that I grew attached to Stilitano.

Here the cluster of grapes pinned over Stilitano's genitals clearly replaces the phallus. Like the phallus, it is a detachable object and primarily an object of signification. It is quite obvious that the cluster of grapes becomes a fetish object for the narrator, who imputes the grapes an 'insidious power' and finds himself unable to keep from holding it in his cupped hands, as some precious object, and laying his cheek against it. In response, Stilitano's demand—“Drop it, you bitch”—is perhaps a remainder/reminder of that radical substitutability and circulation of objects so strongly associated with the Genet more generally—do not touch it, do not keep it in your hand, this is no privileged object, just drop it. Stilitano (and Genet) disavow the fetish through the assertion of substitutability and circulation which denies a single privileged object. But the passage also specifically describes Stilitano’s violent response as “so disproportionate to its cause”—thus, there is also a sense that the economy of substitution has the potential to engulf itself in its own movement of fetishizing and phallus-gazing. If the cluster of grapes is to be made to fall (“Drop it, you bitch”), its substitutability becomes an essential trait, which must be rigorously defended; thus, the cluster of grapes becomes both nothing and everything, it becomes untouchable, even sacred. The economy of desire based upon a general equivalence of objects and their endless substitution seen in the Genet column is thus problematised. This is a key problem in Glas because it suggests that the fragment can no more be privileged as the grounds for a deconstruction of system or totality.

What I have sought to draw out is not simply that the judases stage a reversal of terms; it is not a matter of Genet becoming Hegel-like or of Hegel becoming Genet-like, rather it has to do with a destabilising of the categorical and classificatory tools used to determine a position with regard to Genet or Hegel or how they might be made to relate in this text. Derrida engages an indirect style of argumentation which favours plays on names and words and implied meanings or connotations. This destabilising movement is not, in Glas, simply an end in itself. Rather, it is linked with an attempt on the part of Derrida to avoid
the taking of an absolute position. This is an attempt to negate the possibility of an absolute position, to eviscerate the position of absolute knowing. Insofar as Derrida situates Hegel as the philosopher of absolute knowledge (saviour absolu) this also would mean an attempt to avoid the Hegelian position. But the Hegelian position cannot be avoided simply by aligning oneself with Genet, conceptualised as an absolutely oppositional figure to Hegel—for this too, would ultimately be to assume a position of absolute knowledge. The logic of Hegel’s dialectic already pre-empts absolute difference.

By destabilising and undermining linear argumentation and interpretation, the two columns are locked in an undecidable situation wherein one is unable to choose if they stand contre (in opposition) to one another or contre (in proximity) to one another. Thus, Glas’ indirect, evocative and complex style works towards the disruption of the self-realisation of a position of absolute knowing.

**CITATION/EXCLUSION**

Across Glas, one can perceive an occasional omission of quotation marks and a constant exclusion of page references in accordance with established academic citational standards. Derrida quotes or references Genet and Hegel, and a number of others including Kant, Sartre, Kierkegaard, Freud, Saussure, Poe, Bataille and Mallarmé freely, at length, verbatim or not, sometimes without using quotation marks, and always without citational details such as page or paragraph number. This practice, I argue, has three important effects: first, it produces a kind of confusion of voices within the text whereby it becomes difficult to distinguish Derrida’s writing from Genet’s or Hegel’s or Kant’s and so on; second, it makes it extremely difficult for the reader to discern if and when a quote has been abbreviated, altered, or cut-up; and third, it undermines the possibility of a closed, complete or self-contained text by blurring the boundaries between this text and those from which it quotes.

Marie Maclean has argued that, “[t]hroughout Glas, a game with the first person is constant in the right-hand (Genet) column”, and that, “one is often left deliberately unsure whether the voice we hear is Genet speaking, or whether it is that of Jacques Derrida.” Whilst discussions of voice have tended to appear only amongst the Genet-inflected analyses of Glas, this effect is no less true of the Hegel column. The lack of page references and inconsistent use of quotation marks, as well as the extreme length of some quotations, many of which tend
not to be preceded or followed by any kind of related commentary or reflection, makes for a difficult reading experience in which direct quotation, paraphrase, summary, commentary and argument can appear indiscernible from one another. As Magedera writes, the omission “of quotation marks and page references which would allow the citation to be precisely located outside of Glas,” causes the citations to “no longer function [...] as externally verifiable proofs”, in turn undermining “the strict division between citation and commentary.”

Related to this, the lack of citational details leads to an inability on the part of the reader to discern if and when Derrida has cut, abbreviated or decontextualized any particular quotation. Indeed, Derrida writes of his citations as “necessarily truncated, clippings [coupures], repetitions, suction, sections, suspensions, selections, stitchings [coutures], scarrings, grafts, pastiches, organs without their own proper body.” Moreover, without citational information, it becomes difficult to know which texts Derrida does and does not quotes from. Tina Chanter has very astutely pointed out a rather conspicuous absence. Chanter draws attention to a combination of moments within the Hegel column: first, the Hegel column features an extensive discussion of sexual difference and the husband/wife relationship; second, the text makes numerous mentions of and allusions to Hegel’s master/slave dialectic; and third, Derrida includes a relatively brief but rather jarring discussion of Hegel’s appalling views on Africa and slavery (drawn from his Lectures on the Philosophy of World History). With this combination of points in mind, Chanter argues that “it is notable that Derrida does not refer to Hegel’s suggestion [in the System of Ethics] that the master/slave relation be understood in relation to the difference between the sexes” and draws attention to the fact that Derrida “specifically discounts this text from his consideration, claiming that, of the texts that treat of ‘the struggle to death for recognition,’ the ‘only one to explain struggle within a problematics of the family’ is the Philosophy of Spirit.” Chanter draws upon an analysis by Christopher Arthur who explicates that a few close pages of the System of Ethics, develop the following argument: “The relation of master and servant is rooted in natural facts (at page 125) but it can acquire the stability of a social form, it can be ‘ethical’ (at page 126); this is seen in the family (at page 127).” Thus, Arthur argues that Hegel draws an “explicit linkage of the master-slave relation and marriage”78, that Hegel “makes connections between lordship and marriage”79, that “he conceptualises the family on the basis of the development of lordship and bondage.”

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It is perhaps useful to reproduce the moment in *Glas* that Chanter draws attention to:

Here intervenes the struggle to death for recognition. It is most often known under the form given it by the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Now previously three texts had treated of it: the *System of “Sittlichkeit”* (probably earlier, just a little bit, than the Jena *Philosophy of Spirit*), the Jena *Realphilosophie* (almost contemporaneous with the *Phenomenology of Spirit*), and the *Philosophy of Spirit*. This last one is the only one to explain struggle within a problematics of the family. 81

Chanter argues that Derrida’s failure to address the master/slave-husband/wife relation in the *System of Ethics* “is one of the sites at which Derrida might be said to be afflicted, consciously or unconsciously, by a blind-spot when it comes to thinking through the relation of sexual difference and slavery.” 82 Derrida’s omission constitutes, it is suggested, a failure of argumentation, a hole which renders the argument non-comprehensive, too easily disproved, incomplete, un-total. But it seems important to point out that that the *System of Ethics* is specifically mentioned at precisely the moment when it would seem to be most pertinent, and then immediately and actively dismissed. Perhaps we can read this omission, to some extent, as an active exclusion. 83 In doing so, we might consider that this exclusionary gesture sends the critical reader out, away from *Glas*, in the direction of other texts and inter-texts.

Following this logic, I would like to suggest another Hegelian text relating to the linkage of the master/slave dialect with the relation between husband and wife—one pointed out by Arthur, in the same commentary Chanter draws upon. It is another letter, written by Hegel to his friend Caroline Paulus in July 1811 (a few months before Hegel and Marie’s wedding in September). Hegel relates his happiness; Marie interjects with comments in the margins. In one moment, Hegel refers to Caroline’s husband, Professor Paulus, as “the lord and master.” 84 In the margin of the letter, Marie adds,

Despite the length at which my lord and master goes on in his epistle, and as humble as the little corner he assigns me may be, I nonetheless know that the good Caroline Paulus will not lose sight of me. I have already raised my little voice in the course of my master’s discourse. But each time I respectfully silenced myself again, though I would gladly have confirmed...
many a thing at greater length.\textsuperscript{85}

The connection made here between husband and wife, and master and slave, could hardly be clearer. There is also a clear relevance to \textit{Glas}' discussion of the Hegelian family/Hegel's family and to the text's important use of Hegel's personal letters. This letter and its marginalia do not appear anywhere within the pages of \textit{Glas}, but the letter can (re)read in light of \textit{Glas} and the letter can (re)inform our readings of \textit{Glas}.

What I am seeking to suggest is that the exclusionary gesture in \textit{Glas}, which is veiled by the text's dis-use of citational practices, functions to turn the text's inside out. The critical practice of reading \textit{Glas}, which necessarily engages with \textit{Glas'} subtexts and inter-texts, undermines the possibility of encountering \textit{Glas} as a closed, complete or self-contained text. The boundaries between this text, those from which it quotes, those it names, and even those it excludes begin to seem less clear. Indeed, as Marian Hobson has argued, in \textit{Glas}, “large portions of alien texts are held in suspension”, such that “[w]hat is being read may appear as a kind of phantasmatic production out of what is not there, or rather is somewhere else.”\textsuperscript{86}

This exclusionary gesture seems particularly important in light of the way in which \textit{Glas} engages with the conceptualisation of the Hegelian family and with Hegel’s reading of Antigone, and specifically draws attention to Hegel’s exclusion of the figure of the mother and of female subjectivity respectively. As has been mentioned, Hegel’s dialectical system is found to rely upon such exclusions. Kramer refers to this aspect of the Hegelian system as its “constitutive exclusion”; her term denotes “the structure and process by which a political body is constituted through the exclusion of some difference that is intolerable to it and against which it defines or constitutes itself.”\textsuperscript{87} As Kramer discusses, this question of constitutive exclusion “reverberates throughout Hegel’s system because of the way in which the system is organized: each part reflects the whole, a philosophical strategy of mastery.”\textsuperscript{88} If, in the Hegelian dialectic, the system’s construction depends upon exclusion, it is striking to consider that in \textit{Glas}, the exclusionary gesture instead seems to work upon system’s \textit{deconstruction}.

\textbf{FAILURE, THE REMAINS AND TRANSCENDENTAL PLUNGING}

\textit{Glas} is permeated by a smattering of self-reflexive comments that anxiously
question the text’s entire project and lament a seemingly unavoidable impending failure. In the right-hand column: “Are you going to fall precipitously into the trap?”\textsuperscript{89}; “I do not know if I have sought to understand him. But if he thought I had understood him, he would not support it [...] What a scene [...] He would feel himself already entwined [...] I wormed my way in as a third party”\textsuperscript{90}; “Anyhow, the scene will end badly”\textsuperscript{91}; “I win and lose, in every case.”\textsuperscript{92} In the left-hand column: “what happens when Hegel’s text is not read, or when it is read badly”\textsuperscript{93}; “what is it not to read Hegel or to read him badly”\textsuperscript{94}; “What would it mean not to comprehend (Hegel) the text”\textsuperscript{95}. Throughout \textit{Glas} there is a clear sense that in order to confront Hegel as the philosopher of absolute knowledge, it is necessary to account for the failure to escape Hegel and the circle of absolute knowledge—Derrida writes, “[e]verything [...] precomprehends itself, strictly, in the circle of [absolute knowledge], which always comes back to the circle, presupposes its beginning, and only reaches that beginning at the end.”\textsuperscript{96} In other words, there is a sense in which \textit{Glas must} fail.

This notion of failure is related to the motif of the “remains”. The first line of the Hegel column reads: “what, after all, of the remain(s), today, for us, here, now, of a Hegel?”\textsuperscript{97} The first line of the Genet column makes reference to Genet’s “\textit{What remained of a Rembrandt torn into small, very regular squares and rammed down the shithole}” (\textit{Ce qui est resté d’un Rembrandt déchiré en petits carrés bien réguliers, et foutu aux chiottes}) and then reads: “As the remain(s).”\textsuperscript{98} Although rather cryptic, the “remains” is probably the most important and the only consistent motif that appears across \textit{Glas}. In \textit{Glas}, Derrida searches for the remains, posing the question: “Isn’t there always an element excluded from the system that assures the system’s space of possibility? [...] The system’s vomit.”\textsuperscript{99} As this paper has sought to explore, in \textit{Glas}, woman, the mother, sexual desire, the fragment and the wife-slave are all found to “remain”.

The difficulty for \textit{Glas} is to deal with the problem of the fetishing or transcendentalising of the remains, which could see them recuperated under the logic of absolute knowledge. With this in mind, I want to focus on one concluding image in \textit{Glas}. In the Genet column, in a judas, is found the following comment: “I do not cease to decapitate metalanguage, or rather to replunge its head into the text in order to extract it from the text, regularly, the interval of a respiration.”\textsuperscript{100} I have argued that throughout \textit{Glas}, Derrida attempts to undermine the possibility of a position of absolute knowledge and that this effort is constantly at risk of being absorbed under the system of absolute knowledge. With this in mind,
my interest in the above passage has to do with Derrida’s style in *Glas*. In *Glas*, Derrida has sought a different way of writing. This is a style of writing which disregards linear argumentation, instead drawing upon such techniques as word/name play, connotation and implied meaning, and which repurposes standards of traditional academic and philosophical writing to do with citations and the referencing of one’s sources. One of the most common questions raised in response to *Glas* relates to its status as either a work of philosophy or of literature, but what this question misses is that Derrida is seeking something which *remains* between these two categories. *Glas*’ style is one of a movement of transcendental plunging by which the excluded remains (“the system’s vomit”) are taken up and then replunged into the field of their previous exclusion. This is a fundamentally immanent form of resistance and critique. *Glas*’ style is inextricably tied to the attempt to eviscerate the philosophical position of absolute knowledge—one finds arguments to be contradictory, words with multiple meanings, names and signatures in inappropriate places, texts and contexts outside the text itself, and one encounters the possibility of failure at every turn.

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NOTES

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27. Mills, “Hegel's Antigone”, 84; also see Derrida, Glas, 188a-191a.
28. Cornell, Beyond Accomodation, 155.
31. I owe this insight to a comment made by Mairead Hanrahan at the London Graduate School’s 2014 Summer Academy.
32. Derrida, Glas, 24a.
33. Derrida, Glas, 262b.
34. Derrida, Glas, 4a.
35. Derrida, Glas, 1a.
36. Derrida, Glas, 61ai.
37. Derrida, Glas, 61ai.
38. Derrida, Glas, 61ai.
40. See Derrida, Glas, 24a.
41. Derrida, Glas, 70a.
42. Derrida, Glas, 110a.
43. Derrida, Glas, 111-12a.
44. Derrida, Glas, 113a.
45. Derrida, Glas, 111a.
46. Derrida, Glas, 131a.
47. Derrida, Glas, 131a.
49. Derrida, Glas, 1242a.
50. Derrida, Glas, 43b.
51. Derrida, Glas, 38b.
52. Derrida, Glas, 190b.
54. Derrida, Glas, 151ai.
55. Derrida, Glas, 152ai.
56. Derrida, Glas, 152ai.
57. Derrida, Glas, 153ai.
58. Derrida, Glas, 154ai.
59. Derrida, Glas, 155ai.
61. Derrida, Glas, 297.
62. Derrida, Glas, 159ai.
63. Derrida, Glas, 160ai.
64. Derrida, Glas, 155ai.
72. Magedera, “Seing Genet, Citation and Mourning; a propos Glas by Jacques Derrida”, 36.
74. Tina Chanter, “‘What color is mythology?’ Antigone’s Achievement of Self-Consciousness Through a Failure to Recognize the Humanity of Slaves” *Labrys*, études féministes/estudos feministas 23 (2013).
82. Chanter, “What color is mythology?”.
83. Chanter herself made this suggestion at the London Graduate School’s 2014 Summer Academy.
90. Derrida, *Glas*, 203b
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Steve Sinn

THE “APPROACH” MADE THROUGH THE UNCERTAINTY OF VULNERABILITY

Through a consideration of the way Levinas shapes vulnerability as a form of critique this essay will attempt to argue that contemporary art can be an important site for a Levinasian ethics. After defining Levinas’s “reduction” as the approach that hears ethics through the giving of vulnerability, Double Blind (1992)—a video artwork made collaboratively by Greg Shephard and Sophie Calle—is offered as an example of an artwork that retains a trace of Levinas’s ethics through its vulnerability. To conclude this essay will also argue that the uncertainty of vulnerability is not only an important act of critique for the artwork but is also a “critical activity” for art criticism. Sometimes an artwork calls you in a way that is completely unexpected, an unexpectedness that calls for a response. An important aspect of art criticisms critique is in the vulnerability of stepping forward and attempting to retain this calling—to keep this call active—within its final analysis.

In the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas “ethics” is where the otherness of the person resists thematisation, or resists being held down as a knowable thing. A driving force behind Levinas’s philosophy is the need to keep the call of this otherness as other still, in defiance of the way this otherness can become all too
easily lost and absorbed into a thinking that orders and assembles for the clarity of comprehension. Levinas’s ethics is in the way this irreducible call can disturb and disrupt the ordering and maintenance of meaning assembled. In *Totality and Infinity* ethics is present within our social encounter, ethics is active within social exchange, whilst in *Otherwise than Being* ethics is not so reliant on the “face to face” relation. Rather ethics is more an otherness within oneself, or an otherness as the base to the “oneself.”

In *Otherwise than Being* Levinas shapes two levels, or two orders, of experience that do not fully synthesise but rather remain unstable. Levinas names these two orders “the said” and “the saying.” “The said” is assembled meaning; it is the way language can designate meaning into fixed terms for the ordering of comprehension.

For *Otherwise than Being* Levinas shapes “the said” as the “intelligible sphere to be explored.” “The said” actively assembles and joins together experience for the clarity of understanding. The ordering of “the said” operates a “putting together,” it synchronises experience and gives a structure for meaning. Opposed to this “putting together of structures” is the passivity of “the saying.” For Levinas “the saying” is an ethics where the otherness of the other person is always calling the self into question. This calling of “the saying” is one that can never be fully answered or resolved, a call as an otherness within oneself that precedes the world of action and choice. The ethics of “the saying” is always already there as part of subjectivity that does not fully join into assembled meaning. The meaning in pieces of “the saying” can be assembled by “the said”: in “the said” otherness can be diminished within the ordering for comprehension.

It is important to make clear that in no way does Levinas want to sidestep around “the said.” The said structure is not an external force, but is rather part of us in how we can express ideas and navigate our way through the world without getting lost and disorientated. Despite the dominance of the “intelligible sphere,” the ethics of “the saying” is not completely “exhausted” in thematisation. Rather a trace of “the saying” remains, a trace as the “echo of the saying.” For Levinas the major problem of “the said” is how it can override the vulnerability of being human; how the subjectivity of “the saying” can be lost to the ontology of “the said,” how the touch of the human can get lost to the ordering of “the said.” “The said” is part of us, part of our reasoning, but the vulnerability of being exposed to ethics can be drowned out in the assembling force of assembled meaning.
A problem that can arise in Levinas’s philosophy, a problem that Otherwise than Being confronts head on, is how to voice a receptivity to otherness without diminishing this otherness? How to argue for an ethics without subsuming ethics under assembled meaning, without the argument made for ethics becoming the very thing that dissolves or smothers ethics? How to name that which is before thematisation: to bring the saying of subjectivity into the thematised, without designating it as another theme to be decoded? To name ethics: to be able to retain the trace of “the saying” to “the said,” involves for Levinas a “phenomenological reduction,” a reduction that takes place in an “approach.” Levinas’s “reduction” as the approach is a way of address where the primacy of ethics is protected. The approach allows for a trace of ethics to remain within assembled meaning—if only for a moment.6

Levinas’s reduction as the approach hears ethics. It gives voice to ethics. To approach bears witness to the ethics of “the saying” before “the saying” is reabsorbed, or assembled, back into the thematisation of “the said.” In Otherwise than Being this approach does not take its shape through the action of oneself searching out explanation within the “intelligible sphere to be explored,” rather this approach works through the very physical uncertainty of vulnerability. To allow for the trace of “the saying” to pass within the said structure is to give vulnerability. In Otherwise than Being the giving of vulnerability from assembled meaning allows for the vulnerability of “the saying” to chip back at the ordering for comprehension. The saying of subjectivity calls for “the said” and “the said” can retain this call through the passivity and uncertainty of vulnerability.

For Levinas this approach is undertaken by a rigorous philosophy: it is the task for philosophy to approach ethics. In Otherwise than Being art does not make the approach: art is one step removed from ethics, or for Levinas, art removes itself from ethics.7 In “Reality and Its Shadow”—an essay where Levinas focuses his attention on art—Levinas’s position against art can be thought of as one that is opposed broadly to art as representation: that art is cut off from the demands of the world trapped in a fixed time that has its own “rhythm.”8 Whilst in Otherwise than Being, and also in Levinas’s early book Existence and Existent, Levinas’s theory on art can be thought of more specifically as a positon against art that is too insular and too far removed from the world in its movement toward abstraction.9 Edith Wyschogrod was one writer who shaped Levinas’s theory against art as being a critique against art for art’s sake.10

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To think of Levinas’s critique against art as being against art that is for its own sake can mean thinking of Levinas’s position as having similarity with the concerns of 1960s Conceptual art. This can mean thinking of Levinas’s infamous line in “Reality and Its Shadow” where he describes artistic enjoyment as irresponsible and “cowardly” like “feasting during a plague,” as a position that has real solidarity with a Conceptualism that saw the dominant discourses around abstract expressionism—discourses that were heavily focused on line, colour and composition, discourses that became founded on the authority of connoisseur judgment—as being far to removed and distant from the race riots, feminism and the Vietnam War protests that were raging outside the gallery’s clean white walls.

The way in which Conceptual art replaced the general primacy of form with the more specific primacy of the concept meant a dismantling of arts hierarchy—a hierarchy where painting and sculpture were arts supreme modes of expression—and forcing a greater move toward art as performance, art as installation, art as text, video art, Happenings etc. Rather than thinking of art as removed from Levinas’s ethics because of Levinas’s “suspicions” of art as being cut off from real world demands, could it not be more productive and more accurate to think of how Levinas’s “phenomenological reduction” could be a way for contemporary art—an art so heavy shaped by the impact of changes brought about by Conceptualism—to be an important site for a Levinasian ethics? Could we not think of art retaining ethics in terms of how Levinas thinks of philosophy retaining ethics: that art could also be in the approach formed through vulnerability, or that arts criticality activity could be in its vulnerability?

THE “BREATHTLESSNESS” OF THE APPROACH

One way that Levinas’s shapes the vulnerability that allows for the approach—and a key way in which I think we can consider the approach as an authorship for art—is by defining the approach as one that is not made through the action of the “giving out of signs” or the “giving signs”. Levinas writes:

To say is to approach a neighbour, “dealing him signifyingness.” This is not exhausted in “ascriptions of meaning,” which are inscribed, as tales, in the said. Saying taken strictly is a “signifyingness dealt the other,” prior to all objectification; it does not consist in giving signs.

And a little later:
Levinas shapes the “giving signs” as the attempt to transfer over a solid, well rounded, unified meaning from one “ego” over to another. In “giving signs” meaning can be easily transferable as a wholeness for “interpretation and decoding,” assembled meaning remains intact and maintained through an arrangement given in order to be assembled and decoded for understanding. For Levinas this transferral of fixed solid meaning, both transferred and assembled through “deciphering of the sign,” consolidates an insular individualism, it establishes and maintains a “first for-oneself” that is “at home with oneself,” covering over and absorbing the questioning of ethics.

This “giving signs” is what Levinas’s reduction needs to reduce, or unblock, in order to protect the saying of subjectivity. But this “unblocking” is not achieved through the arrangement of signs “transmitted” for the action of “decoding,” or from within the “shelter” of the said structure, but is rather achieved through the “risky” openness and “sincerity” of being exposed. A meaning in pieces unblocks, or breaks up, the fixed term and this “saying” is not heard through the action of “giving signs,” but rather through the passivity and the uncertainty of vulnerability. “The saying” that is in the “risky uncovering of oneself,” that is in “sincerity,” that is in “vulnerability,” is “the saying” that then chips back the ordering for comprehension. The “reduction” itself does not unblocks “communication;” rather this is achieved through “the saying” that “reduction” accommodates.

The approach holds back from the “giving signs,” but it does so in a way which does not mean a complete removal. Through the sensibility and corporeality of vulnerability the approach speaks a different language to, or is on a different register from, the “giving signs” within the “intelligible sphere,” or to “modality of cognition.” Without the “shelter” of the action that assembles meaning, the “exposure” of the approach waits. Withdrawing from the “giving signs” the approach waits in order to allow for “the saying” to pass unassembled: in the uncertain time of waiting the approach allows for the trace of “the saying” to

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linger a little longer. On two separate occasions, under the subheading of “The Reduction,” Levinas uses the description of “breathless,” or “holding its breath,” to describe the moment when, in “reduction,” the “echo” of “the saying” is heard. Levinas also describes his own approach, his own writing, as retaining a sense of being out of breath: that in his writing there is a “breathlessness” in the approach toward ethics. This shortness of breath in the attempt to approach can be thought of in two different ways. One way of thinking about Levinas’s “breathlessness” is that it designates “reduction” as a difficult task; that there is “a fine risk,” a “risk worth taking,” in trying to reduce the all-embracing said structure for the “moment” of “the saying”—without abandoning the demands of a philosophical treaties—only for this “saying” to morph back into the ordering for comprehension, leaving the author well “out of breath.” Ethics in Levinas’s philosophy is not within the comfort and confirmation of a knowing; rather it is within an uncertainty that must be constantly sought, constantly fought for.

Another way of thinking about being “breathless” is in the sense of the approach in the uncertain time of waiting. It is a passivity that allows for “the saying,” a passivity that involves some inaction, or a “holding back” from the action of assembling meaning within the “intelligible sphere.” This passivity could be thought of in the sense that we bear witness to the trace of “the saying” by waiting for it to pass through an approach that is “out of breath,” or through the approach “retaining its breath.” Once the ethics of “the saying” has passed, and still in pieces, we breathe back again into the action of assembled meaning.

On another occasion, this time in his concluding paragraph to the introductory note for Otherwise than Being Levinas writes of the “difficulties” of the task to name the ethics of “the saying” as being actually “marked” in his writing. In declaring his book as one that “names the beyond essence,” Levinas then describes his own approach when he writes: “The difficulties of the climb, as well as its failures and renewed attempts, are marked in the writing, which no doubt also shows the breathlessness of the author.” There is a “sincerity” to Otherwise than Being where “the difficulties” of the tasks, “its failures and renewed attempts,” are not hidden or removed but are rather “marked in the writing.” However it is this “breathlessness,” these “failures and renewed attempts,” that allows for the approach to be made.
FORGET YOUR PERFECT OFFERING, THERE IS A CRACK IN EVERYTHING... THAT’S HOW THE LIGHT GETS IN’.

Through the vulnerability of exposure that is not so reliant—or is not so sheltered—on the transparency and the transferability of the signs to be decoded, and within the uncertainty of vulnerability that waits and allows “the saying” to pass without being assembled, could the artwork be the expression of vulnerability that forms the *approach*, an expression where the artwork itself is vulnerable? Perhaps the artwork that can retain the trace of ethics is the artwork that is unsure, that hesitates or withdraws from the attempt to try and say everything. Perhaps the artwork that stumbles, that trips over and is forced to start all over again could be the vulnerability that accommodates the trace of “the saying” to pass without being assembled. While the artwork that attempt to say everything through an arrangement of signs to be decode, and also the artwork that is so abstract that it loses contact with the specificity of assembled meaning, are in danger of being removed and isolated from the demands of ethics.

In a very concrete sense *Otherwise than Being* offers us ways for both the artwork to either bear witness to the trace of “the saying” or cover over this trace. The dynamic of the *approach* is one that is not “deaf” to “the said:” it is not completely cut off from the demands of the said structure in the attempt to hear the call of ethics. Rather the *approach* protects “the saying” to “the said,” a protection that lasts but for a “moment.” The protection of “the saying” through the *approach* could be arts critical activity where the artwork is an open work because it is vulnerable. The open artwork as critique is one that is made in the dynamic of the *approach*.

In the ethical *approach* the artwork is an open work because it accommodates a crack, a crack where the artwork crumbles a little, a crack as a moment where the artwork fails in its original goal, where the artwork fails short of any symmetry, a crack that threatens the very framework that holds it. The artwork that accommodates a crack through the *approach* is not the open work because it is simply open for interpretation: open and free to be interpreted by the individual through decoding the signs given. Rather the artwork is an open work through its ability to call us into question, because of the way it accommodates a crack through the uncertainty of vulnerability. The *approach* allows room for a crack to form and from this disruption we “catch sight” of “the saying.” The crack from the *approach* is where the “indescribable is described,” where the unnameable meaning

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in pieces is glimpsed. As an approach the open artwork makes its statement, the artwork has a frame, has a parameter, it has a set down structure, and yet, “with as much right,” uncertainty, vulnerability and the sincerity of exposure circulates within it.

The meaning in pieces—“the saying” as the mess of life—is not heard through the clarity and transparency of meaning well assembled. Rather the in pieces is received by the messy uncertainty of vulnerability, by the artwork that starts trips over itself and is forced to begin all over again. The “perfect offering”—the artwork as the well-rounded and assembled address—that directs and arranges signs to be decoded, can all to easily cover over the crack that is there in the correlation of the said/saying: the crack that is there “in everything,” whilst the approach through the mess of vulnerability allows for this crack where the light of “the saying” can be glimpsed.

Rather than naming a variety of different artworks as being this open work, I would now like to consider the film work Double Blind (1992)—made collaboratively by Sophie Calle and Greg Shephard—as an example of an artwork that accommodates Levinas’s ethics. If my analysis is successful, if there is an approach in Double Blind, then the ethics of Double Blind is Double Blind’s alone: it is Double Blind’s own calling.

DOUBLE BLIND

In 1992 French artist Sophie Calle embarked on a road trip across America from New York City to California. Accompanying Calle on this journey was her American friend Greg Shephard. The adventure of a road trip becomes for both Calle and Shephard the opportunity to make a video together: the opportunity for an artwork collaboration. The final result of this collaboration is a video titled Double Blind, and like all of Sophie Calle’s artworks Double Blind starts with a specific plan, or rather, an outlined structure. For this artwork the plan is that both Sophie and Greg will each have their own video cameras and what each camera records will be composed in the editing suite as the document of a road trip: the one journey recorded from two different perspectives. It is a simple plan, but a plan none the less: a starting point, a way to begin.

There is something equally knowable and unknowable about this artwork. What I mean by this is that within a set structure—or within a set frame—the difference
of otherness is able to circulate and interrupt. The set down structure for Double Blind is the road trip as a linear narrative shaped through the binary of his perspective vs her perspective. As a road trip Double Blind begins in New York City, stumbles and trips its way toward a central scene where the couple get married whilst in their car at a Las Vegas drive-through chapel, and then—on reaching their final destination—ends with a messy relationship breakdown that acts as the film’s finale. Within this edited story line, and between the interiority of each author treating their camera like their own private diary entry, there circulates continual false starts, re-beginnings, missed turn offs, and fragmented scenes of chance moments or random encounters with strangers, which neither author has any control over.

In its approach Double Blind is an artwork that has its duration, it has the structure of a road movie—it tells a story— but in its telling a relational space remains as an undetermined territory. Chance encounters with others interrupt and the relation between Shephard and Calle is not pinned down as a theme to be decoded, set aside to be understood through the unfolding of a drama. Rather their relationship—that which is not as clear and calculable as a linear narrative—is given space to flicker in and out of the artworks parameter: the unclaimed space of the relation itself interrupts the constructed narrative that holds it. What I wish to argue here is that this flickering—this trace of what cannot be fully assembled, or what refuses to be full controlled—is held to this artwork through vulnerability. It is held through the vulnerability of allowing for unpredictable moments to interrupt, by the uncertainty of being exposed, or through being unsure. It is the “exposure” and “sincerity” of vulnerability expressed by both authors that then allows space for the call of otherness to interrupt. In an approach Double Blind itself is vulnerable: it is a moment in vulnerability rather than a representation of vulnerability.

VULNERABILITY AND “EXPOSURE”

In Double Blind the relationship between Calle and Shephard is a difficult one. The two bump up against each other, and there is a continual open friction and restlessness between the two of them as the relationship deteriorates the further the journey continues. Through an open and honest intimacy Shephard confides to his camera and speaks of the depression he is suffering; a depression that means he feels no sexual desire for Calle. For Calle this means she feels very much alone and unwanted. One of the recurring motifs of the artwork is the still image of the

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different motel beds the couple share. Through a voice over accompanying the image of an unmade bed Calle factually reports on each day—as if in a diary to record the events—that there was “no sex last night.” Another recurring theme in the artwork is the unreliability of their car. Throughout the trip Shephard’s old Cadillac convertible continuously breaks down, and the car that won’t start becomes emblematic of a relationship stuck in a bind that grows in bitterness and distrust.

In *Double Blind* both Calle and Shepard expose themselves to the uncertainty of vulnerability. This exposure could not only be thought of in terms of personal openness, of pain and disappointment, but also through their authorship that allows room for the unpredictable to interrupt. What I mean by this is that whilst for Calle and Shepard there is the vulnerability of being personally exposed, their shared authorship is also one that does not completely rely on the direct signifier or specific metaphor, or seek the transparency of codes arranged to be decoded. In their authorship—in their telling of *Double Blind*—there is a speaking through vulnerability that is not so heavily reliant on the codes to be interpreted.

At its beginning *Double Blind* opens with a voice-over where Calle informs the audience that the trip is in jeopardy before it even begins because Shephard was not ready as planned. At this moment Calle also informs us that part of the reasoning for the trip is that she feels the need to commemorate the death of her friend Herve Guibert, who had died just a few days earlier whiles she was in transit to the New York. If the original trip is in danger of not going ahead at all because of a late falling out with Shephard, then, at the very least, Calle wants to drive as far as the sea shore where she can mark her friend’s death with her own ceremony. In her opening address to the audience Calle tells us that: “even if this is going to be a disaster, we’ll go. At least far enough to bury Herve by the sea.”

In the scene where Calle commemorates the death of a friend there is an authorship that resists trying to fully capture a moment of personal grief, that resists representation, that resists speaking on the other person’s behalf, that hesitates and only allows for so much information. This resistance—this holding back or “retaining its breath”—is shaped through chance occurrences, random mishaps and stumbling’s. For example the site for the ceremony, despite its importance, is not decided by Calle. Rather it is left to Shephard to choose the location. The location chosen seems random, it is quite non-descript. It plays the role of a lone pier by the endless sea but it is not a direct reference to either Calle, Guibert or
their relationship. There is also the element of chance in the ceremony itself. Whilst Calle places her dedication of flowers and a picture of Saint Sarah into the ocean at roughly the same time as the burial in France, Calle informs us that she could not find the right flowers that Guibert would have liked and that the picture of Saint Sarah is included for no specific reason. Placing the dedication into the water Calle calls to her friend saying: “You like peonies, I could not find them. And I don’t know why this picture of Saint Sarah?”

Accompanying an image of Calle standing alone on the pier, we hear a brief recording of Guibert’s voice from a telephone answering machine and from here Calle recalls a distant memory she has of him. The memory recalled and the sound of Guibert’s voice are both details; but only fragments of a detail. This way of withdrawing that allows fragments of a detail gives space to Calle’s grief so that it can remain unassembled: it allows her relation to Herve to remain other still.

Much later in the artwork— much later into this journey; without warning; as if the memory called her rather than she calling it— Calle, as part of her diary entry to camera, speaks again of Guibert. This time she recalls a simple memory of how she would cook for him on Sunday nights. This snippet of information is our glimpse— our detailed fragment—of the life that was once shared between them. In retelling to us this memory Calle quickly retracts. She immediately acknowledges the danger of assembling the past; of thematising and memorialising the past for the clarity of a present.³⁸ She withdraws so that the relation between her and Guibert remains a detailed fragment: so that the memory remains as an interruption.³⁹ Calle holds back in order to keep Guibert as other to her in his absence by saying: “I mustn’t let my memory betray him. I’ll keep his number in my address book, his picture on the wall and one of his books always open by my bed. I’ll carry the African beads and the bad luck piece he gave me. And on every Sunday” Then Calle’s voice—her voice to us the audience—fades away under the voice of her travel companion: her memory remains as a fragment folding back into the narrative drama of a road trip. In Double Blind the memory of the other person calls to Calle, and this calling interrupts, “if only for a moment.”

FORCED TO WAIT

The vulnerability of Double Blind is also in the time of waiting and hesitation. As an artwork Double Blind moves from one scene of having to wait through to another scene of waiting. The main cause for having to wait: the main cause for
the artwork itself to be a waiting, is the old Cadillac. So many of the scenes in this artwork involve Calle and Shephard forced to wait whilst the car is being repaired—waiting in road side diners, waiting in motels, waiting at the auto mechanics. Along with the frustrations of the car there is also the time of waiting within the tension of their own relationship: a tension where we as the audience can feel we are stuck between the two of them; waiting for them to get on with it; waiting for them to talk to each other rather than confine through their camera to us the audience.

Calle herself is always waiting for Shephard’s affection; waiting for his depression to release its hold; waiting for intimacy. Whilst Shephard feels desperately trapped within this road trip, his movements limited because he is all out of money and dependant on Calle. This time of waiting—a time of not being in control, a time where the unplanned completely disrupts all plans, a waiting as a time in pieces, a time of the mess of life— is a time that is amplified in the artwork’s penultimate scene where Shephard and Calle decide to get married. In the lead up to this performed drive-in chapel wedding, a prolonged waiting is instigated by Shephard’s own hesitation. For Calle the marriage in the car seems a fitting way to mark their journey across America. However Shephard is not so sure. He is not so sure he really wants to get this involved in a Sophie Calle artwork: he is not sure if he really wants to get married, and his hesitation drags out to the extent that we the audience find ourselves being pulled along into a waiting. The unexpectedness of having to wait—the way in which waiting is forced upon Calle and Shephard—makes waiting a fragmented time that disrupts. Through Greg’s uncertainty— at this moment of waiting—the narrative program of Double Blind is pulled up, put on an extended hold, and the narrative structure of the artwork waits.

For the ending of this artwork it is Shephard who tells us his version of how the relationship fell apart. In a personal acknowledgement of his own failings, Shephard tells us that his attempt at making this film with Calle was an attempt “to try and tell an honest story.” The narrative of Double Blind is bookended with her beginning as the account of how the journey/relation began and ends with his perspective of how the journey/relation ended. What occurs between these two accounts are fragments of details: an experience in itself.

Double Blind holds to it the otherness of a relational space without this otherness being diminished, suffocated or fully assembled. It does not achieve this through the ambiguity of abstraction. Rather it maintains its constructed linear narrative,
it tells the specificity of its own story. Through its telling Double Blind gives vulnerability, and it is this giving of vulnerability that then allows for the mess, the unpredictability, the chance, the otherness that can be part of our relations with each other. This is Double Blinds critical activity: its ethics. Through the vulnerability of failing, from the vulnerability of tripping over and getting up and having to start all over again, through the vulnerability of withdrawing into the time of waiting, Double Blind allows for the trace of a Levinasian ethics—it allows for the calling of the other person, a calling that cannot be fully answered and represented as a theme—to flicker in and out of frame. Double Blind is in itself an otherness that calls for a response.

To continue the hypothesis that contemporary art is an important site for a Levinasian ethics, the conclusion to this essay will attempt to define a way for art criticism to also speak in the approach.

THE ARTWORK THAT CALLS FOR A RESPONSE AND A RESPONSE THAT RETAINS THE ARTWORK’S CALL

In recent years there has been a continuing debate around whether or not art criticism is in some form of crisis. This debate has intensified and receded in attention, only to re-intensify again. 40 The “crisis of art criticism” is thought of as a loss of criticality: that art criticism has lost its critical edge because it withdraws from playing the role of handing down authoritative value judgements and designating meaning through interpretation, becoming instead a weak relativism that is reluctant to take up a specific position. 41 From considering the terms of this debate through a talk given by art critic Tom Morton, I would like to offer a Levinasian approach for art criticism as one that makes its statement through judgement, undertakes a specific analysis, has agency in declaring its position, declares its own critical response to an artwork, but at the same time retains a sense of the uncertainty and vulnerability in stepping forward and making such a response. 42 That judgement itself can be a vulnerability: that judgement can be the critical approach.

The vulnerability of art criticism could be thought of here as being within the difficulties of retaining the spark of an artwork, or within the difficulties and risk of responding to a moment where the artworks call puts oneself in question, without the responds being the very action that assembles and smothers over this call. A vulnerability in art criticism could also be understood as generated from being

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part of a plurality of community involved in critical debate. What this would mean is that art criticism as an approach—a dynamic approach that is not “deaf” to either “the said” or “the saying”—does not avoid the agency of declaring a critical position, nor does it abandon subjective judgement. Rather it is the vulnerability of stepping forward and declaring a response that can help retain this moment of being in question.

In art criticism to speak through the approach would be to allow space for a crack to form in the analysis. A crack in the form of doubt and hesitation that puts the analysis itself under question. A questioning that comes from both the artwork and from the reader. Sometimes facing an artwork can involve the vulnerability of having to wait, waiting for the artwork to call, to call your name, to call you forward, to call when least expected. As an approach art criticism can keep this call active by retaining a sense of this initial doubt and hesitation within the criticism’s final analysis.

THE MESSY INVOLVEMENT OF ART CRITICISM

Tom Morton is one art critic who defines art criticism in terms of this vulnerability. In Morton’s contribution to a forum on the crisis of art criticism, a forum titled Judgement and Contemporary Art Criticism held in Canada in 2010, he spoke of this vulnerability as a series of “intimacies.” For Morton, art criticism is based on a “set of intimacies” that are “between the writer and the work, the writer and the art, the writer and the reader, and the writer and him or herself.” These “between” spaces of intimacies are present within the act of responding. To respond to the artwork means for Morton the intimacy of being unsure: the uncertainty of the critic’s own involvement with the artwork. Such “intimacy” can mean exposing oneself to a community that is in critical debate and the intimacy of being exposed to the risk of failure. In Morton’s definition of art criticism, intimacy does not replace judgement, rather intimacy is what precedes judgement. This pre-judgement is an intimacy that falls in an undetermined between space, an intimacy as an exposure that is of greater importance than the judgement that follows. To be able to retain this intimacy is of great importance for Morton: to be able to hold this initial intimacy is a critique. A key aspect of this critique is not to diminish the subjective role. As a Levinasian approach this would mean that the doubt and hesitation that can be experienced within the initial encounter with an artwork can be retained within the final objective analysis.
The intimacy of art criticism for Morton is the vulnerability of responding through one’s own commitment and involvement. For Morton there is “human frailty” in all art criticism; a “frailty” that gets lost and forgotten when it is absorbed by privileging objectivity over the subjective. By shaping objectivity as a falsity Morton favours instead the mess of uncertainty, the messiness of personal involvement as the possible site for the subjective response as a “critical activity” (my emphasis). Morton writes:

To get down and dirty with art, to feel its grain and let it feel yours, is subjective sure, but it is also the most meaningful critical activity I can imagine. To refuse this is to refuse the fact that all of us cast a shadow and that it will sometimes fall across a work of art, not only obscuring it but also, and paradoxically, making it in a strange way whole. Only vampires, after all, possess no shadow, and a vampire is something a critic should never aspire to be.

The mess, “to get down and dirty,” is a shared intimacy where one’s own involvement in an artwork through the act of responding—an involvement that allows a shadow to “fall across a work of art”—can make the artwork speak again, not on its own but rather now in the community of critical debate; “making it in a strange way whole.”

The intimacy and uncertainty of personal involvement involves here for Morton the risk of failure. Intimacy opens the possibility of failing to respond to the artwork’s call, of failing to retain the artwork’s calling, of assembling its meaning in pieces; a failure of not retaining the original “heat and intimacy of a first encounter,” of diminishing that intimacy through interpretation. To retain the intimacy of the “first encounter” means to retain the chance of failure; to retain the question of failure; to retain a doubt and hesitation that always questions one’s own authority, a hesitation that holds back from the “giving signs,” a doubt and hesitation that allows space for the call of the artwork to interrupt. To retain the intimacy and hesitation that is prior to judgement—to retain this intimacy within the judgement itself—means to retain the intimacy of the artwork’s call. For Morton this also means retaining the uncertainty, the diversity, the complexity of a readership or a community in “critical debate.” To accommodate this complexity—rather than sucking the life out of an artwork by designating it with meaning—is, for Morton, a “critical authority” as a “mode of address that is true to their subject matter, their readership, and themselves.”
The intimacy of the between space for Morton is not just between artwork and critic, critic and reader, but is also between “the writer and him or herself.” This indicates a bind between the objective critique and the subjective voice: that “critical activity” allows for the subjective response to circulate within the objective analysis. Through the vulnerability of hesitation the approach retains the initially “intimacy” of the artworks call. As a “critical activity” the mess of vulnerability allows for the artwork “to be in a strange way whole:” allows for the initially “intimacy” to remain active.

The crack in the artwork calls me forward. For art criticism to retain this initial calling it needs its own vulnerability—the vulnerability of stepping forward and making a specific response. In the dynamic of the Levinasian approach, art criticism can make its judgement, declare meaning, and yet, in its final analysis, retain the initial “exposure” to the artworks call. Through the crack formed by the uncertainty of vulnerability a glimpse of the initial exposure remains: through the vulnerability of hesitation a subjective response circulates within the objective analysis. In the consideration of Morton's talk, the vulnerability in art criticisms approach was defined as both the uncertainty of trying to retain the artworks initial calling without diminishing this call as designated meaning, and the vulnerability that is within the very act of contributing to the diversity of a community in debate. In a Levinasian sense, the importance of art criticism, the important task of responding to an artwork and giving it life in a community of critical debate, is a “fine risk,” a “risk worth taking.”

Sometimes an artwork calls you forward, it calls you to respond, it calls to you when you least expect it. This call is not the artwork as a subjectivity of the saying. Rather the artwork can retain a trace of ethics. My hope is that this essay has given a sense of the importance of a Levinasian ethics to art: that contemporary art is an important site for a Levinasian ethics. Through Levinas's definition of “the saying” and “the said” art can determine the danger of assembled meaning that ignores the uncertainty of vulnerability. Through a passivity and a vulnerability the dynamic approach is a “critical activity” that allows the irreducibility of “the saying” to chip back the assembling forces of assembled meaning, if “only for a moment.”

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NOTES

1. The way Levinas terms “the said” as “synthesis of apprehension” is the reason why I have named “the said” as assembled meaning and the ordering for comprehension. See Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2006, 38.

2. This “putting together” is also why I use terms like ordering for comprehension and assembled meaning to define ‘the said’. Levinas writes: “Our task is to show that the plot proper to saying does indeed lead it to the said, to the putting together (my emphasis) of structures which make possible justice and the “I think””. See Levinas, 46.

3. In terms of an ethics as always already there, John Drabinski writes: “I come to myself as already called by the other, already interrupted, already [...] traumatised and obsessed. […] My traumatic awakening initiates an account of what comes to be called ethical subjectivity.” See John E Drabinski, Sensibility and Singularity: The Problem of Phenomenology in Levinas. New York: State University of New York, 2001, 8.

4. Levinas writes: “In this said, we nonetheless surprise the echo of the saying, whose signification cannot be assembled.” A saying as an echo perhaps because of the way that ‘the saying’ circulates within “the said,” “the saying” as heard, or perhaps because of the way “the saying” despite being absorbed by “the said,” always returns again, like the person who just passed by. See Levinas, 27.

5. Levinas speaks of the “reduction” as the approach when he writes that whilst the “echo of the saying” gets absorbed into the noun that designates, the “apophansis is still a modality of saying. The predicative statement [...] stands on the frontier of a demethamatisation of the said, and can be understood as a modality of approach and contact” (Levinas, 47). In Otherwise than Being, Levinas terms language as an “apophansis.” The apophansis is a noun/verb combination where the actual word itself is the noun/verb entwined. The “noun” in Levinas’s apophansis is the said structure of language: the way language names and designates meaning. Whilst the “verb” is existence: it is the verb “to be,” or the verb to exist (Levinas, 35). Through Levinas’s “apophansis” the time of existence, the anonymity of the “there is,” resides unassembled within the noun that designates meaning. Despite the noun that retains the verb the dominance of the “noun system” can, all too easily, cover over and absorb the “rustle” of existence. However the loss of the “verb” to the “system of nouns” is not Levinas’s main concern. Rather Levinas’s key concern is that the assembling force of assembled meaning absorbs the saying of subjectivity. By stating an “apophansis,” by arguing that the noun that designates meaning can do so without smoothing over the “murmur of silence,” Levinas is laying the ground work for his main thesis that the thematised said does not completely absorb the saying of subjectivity. If the “apophansis” is a noun/verb correlation then this allows space for Levinas to think of a said/saying correlation where “the said” is not given priority over “the saying”—that within “the said” there is always the trace of “the saying” within experience there is this always already there “the saying” as a meaning in pieces.

6. In Otherwise than Being, Levinas will refer to the way “the saying” can be witnessed through reduction— but for a moment—and Derrida picks up on this in his response to Otherwise than Being which is tilted “At this moment in this work here I am.” That in the “work” the saying of subjectivity that raises up and says “here I am” is witnessed, if only for a moment. See Jacques Derrida, “At This Moment in This Work Here I Am” Re-Reading Levinas. Ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indianapolis Press, 1991, 24.

7. In Otherwise than Being art acts as the window to the anonymity of existence. For Levinas existence has a cold fact-ness to it that is impersonal. Levinas terms the anonymity and the bare fact of

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existence as the “there is.” In both Existence and Existents, and in Otherwise than being, art provides us access to existence time, or to the “there is.” Art purely speaks of the anonymity of existence. In Otherwise than Being this is predominantly a negative for Levinas because of the way this access to the “there is” can be separate from “the said,” distancing us from justice and politics in assembled meaning, and isolating us from ethics. Whilst art exposes Being, or whilst the artwork hears the “murmur of silence,” it does so in complete “isolation.” Art for Levinas goes too far: it fails “to recognise the said,” it loses touch with assembled meaning. Without “the said,” art for Levinas has its own capacity to square itself off from the world and become “exotic.” See Levinas, Otherwise Than Being, 41; Emmanuel Levinas, Existence and Existents, trans., Aiphonso Lingis (1947; repr., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2011), 53.


9. In Otherwise than Being Levinas’s descriptions of art as the window to the time of existence sounds very much like painting within the language of abstraction when he talks about art as “[T]he palette of colours (my emphasis), the [...] meandering of forms (my emphasis) [...] all these modal notions—there is resonance of essence.” (Levinas, 40). A secondary source of evidence that Levinas is discussing the language of painting moving toward abstraction comes not from Otherwise than Being but rather from Existence and Existents. In Existence and Existents Levinas makes very specific references to Cubism as the art that exposes us to the “there is”: that the Cubist style functions as the window into the “there is.” Levinas, Existence and Existents, 46.


14. In Levinas’s theory of the artwork as purely the window to the anonymity of existence, Levinas is very broad and general in his discussion on what art is. There is not given to us any attempt to consider contemporary attitudes, styles and theories around art at the time of his writing. Rather art is defined as if it is just one thing. The reason why Levinas gives such a broad definition of art is because he is trying to define a core foundation—that fundamentally art speaks the “verb.” What Levinas is trying to do here is make use of art as an example in order for him to display an aesthetics that speaks the “verb” without the “noun”; to show an opposite to the “noun system.” Art is used in Otherwise than Being to display, or give an example of, his theory that a language can be all “verb.” If there is a noun that dominates over the “verb,” and there is a “verb” that is distant from the “noun,” then Levinas can asks: Is there not also an “apophansis” that can be a noun/verb correlation?

15. In Otherwise than Being art is denied ethics: art cannot be in the method of the approach simply because its language speaks “the verb.” By determining art as “the verb” Levinas misses an opportunity for the artwork to be a site for ethics.

16. Levinas, Otherwise Than Being, 46.

17. Levinas, 48.
18. Levinas, 48.
19. Levinas writes that “exposure has a sense radically different from thematisation” (Levinas, 49). A vulnerability of exposure does not fit into an assembled signified. The vulnerability of Yoko Ono’s Cut Piece (1964) speaks a different language to assembled meaning, and yet its exposure and uncertainty of vulnerability is not deaf to “the said.” Cut Piece has a structure, it has a duration, a limitation, and within the boundaries of her performance the vulnerability circulates uncontrolled. Yoko Ono, Cut Piece, single-channel digital video transferred from 16mm, 1964, Performed by the artist, Carnegie Recital Hall. In terms of feminist art Rozika Parker and Griselda Pollock speak of a feminism intervention where “there has to be a struggle not only about the content of representation but about the signifying systems which are points for the production of definitions, meanings and positions for subjects.” Does the uncertainty of vulnerability speak a different language to these systems? See Rozika Parker and Griselda Pollock, “Introduction: Art, Politics and Women” Art and the Women’s Movement 1970-85. London: Pandora Press, 1992, 92.
20. Levinas defines the reduction in the time of waiting when he writes: “The subject then cannot be described on the basis of intentionality, representational activity, objectification, freedom and will; it has to be described on the basis of the passivity of time” (Levinas, 53). If the approach holds with it “patience” or the “passivity of time”— if the approach is one that waits, that hesitates—then the subjectivity of the saying can then be described.
21. Under the sub-heading “The Reduction” Levinas writes that “[T]he reduction of this said unfolds in stated propositions, using copulas, and virtually written, united anew into structures; it will let the destructing it will have operated be” (Levinas, 44). What I take Levinas to mean by this is that there is a passivity needed in order to accommodate the passivity of “the saying.” Reduction allows for “the saying” to “be” and it is then “the saying” itself that chips away at “the said.”
22. “The said, contesting the abdication of the saying that everywhere occurs in this said, thus maintains the diachrony in which, holding its breath, the spirit hears the echo of the otherwise.” And “[T]he unsayable saying lends its self to the said, to the ancillary indiscretion of the abusive language that divulges or profanes the unsayable. But it lets itself be reduced, without effacing the unsaying in the ambiguity or the enigma of the transcendent, in which the breathless spirit retains a fading echo” (Levinas, 44).
23. Levinas, xiviii.
24. “But a fine risk is always something to be taken in philosophy” (Levinas, 20).
25. In chapter one, under the subheading “Sensibility,” Levinas writes: “Signification, prior to being, breaks up the assembling […] On the hither side of or beyond essence, signification is the breathlessness of the spirit expiring without inspiring, disinterestedness […] the breakup of essence is ethics. This beyond is said, and is conveyed in discourse, by a saying out of breath or retaining its breath” (Levinas, 14).
26. In terms of this risk that needs to be undertaken Paul Davies writes: ‘We have seen that Otherwise than Being is a book under a sort of threat. It is always about to be fragmented, always about to come undone. It handles that threat not simply by warding it off, but by continually transforming it into an obligation, the obligation to continue.’ See Paul Davies, “A Fine Risk: Reading Blanchot Reading Levinas” Re-Reading Levinas. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991, 223.
27. Levinas writes of breathlessness as a “holding back” when he writes: “And ask if this breathlessness or holding back is not the extreme possibility of the spirit, bearing a sense of what is beyond the essence?” See Levinas, 5.
28. As with the above quote in footnote 19, ethics can be “conveyed in discourse” through “a saying
out of breath or retaining its breath.”

29. Levinas, xiviii.


31. It is Levinas’s son Michael who refers to his father as a “philosopher of cracks.” In a biography on his father Michael says that in his father’s philosophy there is a “kind of instability in the elaboration of a concept […] in the conceptualisation that really expresses the crack in the concept. This goes well beyond something dialectical, it belongs to the order of the fissure. The concept is in the process of being born and it is put back into question at the very moment in which it is formulated.” See Salomon Malka, Emmanuel Levinas: His Life and Legacy. Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2006, 262-264. As a personal note Michael recalls his father’s advice as: “Sometimes the thing suffices in its incompleteness.” For Michael the incompleteness is our own incompleteness; the crack for Michael is the vulnerability of being human. For Michael the crack is “essentially the humanity, or the body, or the shame of the body. He calls this the face […] The crack—that’s the face.” See Malka, Emmanuel Levinas, 265. Hagi Kenaan also speaks of this crack when he writes: “The presence of the face creates a crack or a breach in the frontal order of the things that appear.” See Hagi Kenaan, The Ethics of Visuality: Levinas and The Contemporary Gaze. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013, xx.

32. My interest here is that art can be in danger of misunderstanding Barthes “birth of the reader” to mean that the artwork is free and open for an individual’s interpretation. Rather than understanding Barthes “Death of the Author” to be arguing for a type of authorship where the readers ideologies or maintained position can be called into question. See Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author” Image, Music, Text. London: Fontana, 1977, 142-148.

33. Levinas, 53.

34. Levinas, 40.

35. I define “the saying” as meaning in pieces because of the way that Levinas defines “the saying” as the “signifyingness cannot be assembled” (Levinas, 27).

36. No Sex Last Night was the title for the artwork when it was shown in public cinemas.

37. Waiting by the pier Calle says “Greg promised to have me by the water at 9am. It is the first promise he’s kept.” But then on leaving Calle comments “Of all the places to bury him, why here?”

38. Of assembling Levinas’s “past that was never present” (Levinas, 24).


40. Writing in the “afterword” for the book that recorded a forum on art criticism titled Judgement and Contemporary Art Criticism, held in Canada in 2010, James Elkins writes: “In the last year there were at least five international conferences on art criticism. On the weekend the Judgement and Contemporary Art Criticism I was at another conference on art criticism in Copenhagen. A few months before, in October 2008, there had been yet another conference on art criticism in Bogota, Colombia, and in summer of 2010 there was a large, four-day conference on the subject in Beijing.” See James Elkins, “Afterword” Judgement and Contemporary Art Criticism. Ed. Jeff Khonsary and Melanie O’Brien. Vancouver: Artspeak and Fillip, 2010, 155.

41. A loss of critical debate is thought of as not just within art criticism but also within art more broadly. What this means is that galleries and art institutions favour values such as entertain-
ment, beauty, wonder, participation and inclusivity ahead of critique. For art theorist Hal Foster a withdrawing from critical debate—a reluctance to take a critical position—is a weak relativism, a relativism that permeates through art as a “post critical” condition. Hal Foster, “Post-Critical” October 139 (2012, 3-8).

42. Whilst art as the verb is not the “apophansis” because it hears only the “verb,” for Levinas the study of art, the responding to art in the form of the exegesis, is the “apophansis.” After defining art as the language that attempts to separate itself from “the said,” Levinas argues that writing on art, or a response to art, brings the artwork out of its “isolation.” The “exegesis” can be a study on the artwork and also not lose what Levinas sees as art’s main function. The artwork calls for the extension made by exegesis, the extension back into “the said,” and in answering this call, the written response can take the shape of an “apophansis,” the shape that both designates meaning and also retains within it the “resonance of the essence,” or the “there is.” See Levinas, 40-41.


44. For Morton “even established critics are always auditioning, stepping nervously onto the stage.” Morton, “Types of Intimacy”, 38-39.


46. In terms of having one’s own voice Morton speaks of a distrust in the argument against value judgement that says that the critic is in danger of merely speaking about themselves, that this not speaking about oneself suggests some mythical super critic. Morton writes: “it’s hard to think how this might be avoided—we have nothing but our better or worse selves through which to process the world. There is, after all, no possibility of a super critic, producing super text or super writing. Discontented as some of us may be with human frailty, we cannot transform the shambling journalist Clark Kent into superman.” In terms of intimacy Morton seems to be favouring here the messy Kent ahead of the clean and always right super critic. See Morton, “Types of Intimacy”, 35.

47. Against the criticism that the art magazine that he writes for (frieze) is “belletrist” and always in the affirmative, Morton defines objectivity as fake unnatural response when he writes: “the appearance of objectivity is, in the end, precisely and only that.” Morton, “Types of Intimacy”, 35.


49. Morton seems to suggest toward the mess of life when he writes: “If the critic is willing to ask where is freedom and adventure, and what does it mean to be awake, there remain messy, plural answers to be found.” Morton, “Types of Intimacy”, 36-37.

50. Morton speaks of this vulnerability when he writes that: “the most wakeful of them are always aware of the beautiful, maddening failure of their project, which is to say the failure of language in the face of anything but itself.” And when Morton writes: “As with all writing, what matters here is honesty, along with the hope that one might communicate against the odds.” See Morton, “Types of Intimacy”, 40.

51. Morton, “Types of Intimacy”, 42.

52. In his essay “Criticism v Critique”— an essay that responded to the debates around the “crisis in art criticism”— and also specifically as a response to the forum Judgement and Contemporary Art Criticism, JJ Charlesworth agrees with Morton’s analysis. A key point for Charlesworth is that judgement does not need to be purely understood as a positioning of objective authority, but rather that judgement can be the site of subjective experience and the participating in dialogue. Charlesworth also shares this sense of intimacy in the response that is part of a community in critical debate. In a radio interview that discussed his essay Charlesworth talks about a desire to speak of criticism and the possibility of judgment as “a space of evaluation which forms community

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around a particular work, that judgements are not objective but form through [...] discursive practice.” And again this time separating judgement from an authoritative voice Charlesworth says: “Obviously it is true if you have a division of power between people who make judgements and people who receive them then there is something authoritative (about) judgement, but if judgement is some form of practice that occurs between people then that gives it a different shape.” For both Charlesworth and Morton the agency in taking a critical position can be the expression of an intersubjectivity. See J. J. Charlesworth, “Criticism V Critique” British Art Monthly 346 (2011, 7-10). And for the radio interview see: www.artmonthly.co.uk/magazine/site/category/talk-show.

53. “Most writers who have visited an exhibition with the purpose of reviewing it will have felt the flickering presence of the future reader at their elbow, chiding them not only to look and think harder, but to do so with an eye and mind that are not quite their own. This is more difficult than the dubious notion of critical objectivity assumes. While it’s clear that the reviewer cannot approach a show as a viewer [...] neither can he or she approach it as the viewer [...] Caught up in the wobbly magnetic field generated by these two poles, they must develop a mode of address that is true to their subject matter, their readership, and themselves—one that evokes the absent exhibition rather than merely describe it, and one that evaluates it in terms broader than those provided by personal preference [...] If anything still signals critical authority [...] it may be the ability to do this.” See Morton, “Types of Intimacy”, 39-40.

54. For Levinas it is from this formation of an “exegesis” as an “apophansis,” from this response to art, that we rise out of the anonymity of “essence” to become the “Here I am” of individual subjectivity. The responding to the artwork is, for Levinas, the movement towards the “I” in “Here I am:” toward the saying as subjectivity that raises from the “there is,” not to be separate from existence but rather to be “otherwise than being or beyond essence.” Levinas’s definition of the art “exegesis” in Otherwise than Being becomes the “hypostasis” of Existence and Existents. The project of Existence and Existents was to move away from the anonymity of the “there is” to an “instant” where the individual subject, despite being bound to existence, rises out from this anonymity, from this “silence that resounds,” to be an individual subject. The same project in Existence and Existents is played out in Otherwise than Being, the project that looks for a movement away from the “murmur of silence,” toward a saying of subjectivity. The “exegesis” on art as an “apophansis” makes such a movement. In terms of this link between Existence and Existents with Otherwise than Being see Robert Bernasconi, “Forward,” in Levinas, Existence and Existents, xiv-xv.
Encounters between phenomenology and cognitive science are nowadays no longer a novelty. The decades that have passed since Hubert L. Dreyfus told MIT researchers that they could learn something by reading *Being and Time* have seen the rise of a flourishing discourse that has become greater than the sum of its parts. Recent times have seen what began as a primarily critical interaction, with various authors (including Dreyfus himself) drawing upon phenomenological accounts to reject computational models of the mind and the quest for what Haugeland called ‘Good Old-Fashioned Artificial Intelligence’, develop into a more constructive, positive discourse that seeks to unite the disciplines in mutually-enriching research projects. Various streams within the contemporary study and philosophy of cognition draw upon the resources of the phenomenological tradition to anchor, substantiate or flesh out their accounts of cognition as always-already situated and purposive. Given the prominent role that Heidegger’s account of Being-in-the-world played within the initial movement of phenomenological critique, the question of how it might most fruitfully engage with what we could call the ‘positive turn’ towards a collaborative dialogue between phenomenology and cognitive science presents itself with a natural urgency.

One way of answering this, of course, would be to deny or at least doubt the feasibility of such a constructive partnership. There is, after all, a continuing debate about the possibility of reconciling naturalist and phenomenological perspectives...
in general, to which the project of *Being and Time* adds complications of its own. This paper, however, will proceed from a different starting point. It will set aside these more basic doubts, granting that a cooperation of this nature is possible and worth pursuing for the sake of exploring what kind of approach to cognition then offers itself as a suitable interlocutor for Heidegger’s early phenomenology.

My goal here is to suggest that one particularly apposite candidate for joining in a Heideggerian conversation can be found in the enactivist tradition. Enactivism has a long history of phenomenological entanglements. These have, however, focussed largely upon the work of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty; the potential for bringing a Heideggerian perspective to bear upon this intersection of perspectives has often been hinted at, but rarely developed. I want to show here why I think that there are compelling reasons for exploring that partnership and striving towards something like a Heideggerian enactivism. My case will hinge on two main claims: firstly, that the emphasis upon the inextricable intertwining of agent and world renders enactive models of cognition particularly congenial to a mutually enriching dialogue with Heidegger’s account of purposiveness; and, secondly, that the temporal structures of the enaction of meaning resonate profoundly with Heidegger’s model of the relation between temporality and practice. In drawing out these points of intersection, however, I am seeking not so much to summarise an inquiry as to motivate it. This paper endeavours to participate in a conversation that can be taken much further once the topic has been established. Concomitantly, my discussion operates within certain limits. On the one hand, the need for defining the connections that I wish to illuminate necessitates that I take an interpretive rather than interrogative approach to each of the perspectives I discuss. On the other, my aim of rendering these junctures visible precludes a detailed investigation of the further insights and especially the tensions that they can generate. I will have done all I hope to do here if the notion of a sustained Heideggerian enactivism intrigues as a path worth exploring.

1. A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF ENACTIVISM

The enactivist tradition originated in the study of biology, arising as a response to the enduring question of what defines life. Its distant philosophical ancestors can be found in the philosophies of biology and life advanced by thinkers such as Jakob von Uexküll and Hans Jonas, who affirmed the inseparable connection between an organism and its environment, and posited that the former encountered the latter in terms of significance defined by its own concerns, chief among which
was the crucial striving for survival. In their landmark review of enactivist cognitive science, Froese and Ziemke note that the discourse was influenced heavily by von Uexküll’s emphasis upon self-perpetuation as a characteristic distinguishing living from non-living entities, and by his theory of the Umwelt—the environment which an organism encounters in ways uniquely shaped by its perceptual apparatuses, and upon which it depends, not only in order to persist, but to be the kind of entity it is in the first place. Meanwhile, the thought of Jonas, a student of Heidegger, offered the insight that living organisms were not only distinguished by self-perpetuation, but a form thereof that a) is metabolic in its exchanges with the environment and b) has to contend against the possibility of annihilation (rather than something just continuing by default because there is no threat, no way that it could cease to be). This means that the organism cannot be understood as what it is in abstraction from its environment. That is, for Jonas, the environment enables the organism to be what it is by being that against which the organism defines itself, that which means that the organism is something rather than nothing by making real the possibility of such nothingness as well as providing the conditions and material for the nature of the something.

The inception of the enactivist approach as we know it today can be traced to the publication of *Autopoiesis and Cognition* by Francisco Varela and Humberto Maturana, which outlined what the authors—then working in theoretical biology—took to be the set of conditions defining biological life. There, Varela and Maturana proposed that a system is alive if it displays what they call autopoiesis, meaning that it is a distinct self-unity that generates its own identity and maintains itself against the threat of disintegration, with its components producing and reproducing the processes that produce them. An autopoietic system is autonomous, in that it is its own product; it does not exist in order to bring about something else, to accomplish some externally-defined end, but rather to be and perpetuate itself—its identity is its task. This identity is not, however, cut off from that outside itself; indeed, in producing itself and “the topological domain of its realization as such a network”, it is fundamentally coupled with that against which its identity is defined and with which it must engage in order to be the kind of system that maintains itself. A system that is never perturbed, to use a favourite term of Maturana’s, is not an autonomous identity; in the words of Varela, “a universe comes into being when a space is severed in two”—the identity of the system cannot exist without that against which it defines itself; it and its other produce and define one another in an extricable symbiosis. The autopoietic system’s interaction with the space within and against which it maintains itself
cannot be defined in terms of “inputs or outputs”, for it is much more intimate than such an exchange.\textsuperscript{13} This is not a kind of system that is left unmarked by something passing through; rather, it is a balanced self-organising whole that encounters ‘perturbations’ with its entirety, responding holistically to a situation in terms of its own self-production.

Autopoiesis was originally conceived as a defining feature of very basic organic structures and the parts thereof, rather than describing anything occurring at the macro-level of, say, consciousness or experience. Indeed, both Maturana and Varela initially strongly resisted the extension of their concepts to any domains outside of biology.\textsuperscript{14} However, the usefulness of their framework in analysing a diverse range of systems (including, for example, social groupings), coupled with Varela’s own turn towards adapting autopoietic theory into a model of embodied perception and activity, led to it being applied across the broad spectrum of phenomena associated with cognition, from its simplest building blocks and manifestations—such as in single-celled organisms—to the complex behaviours of human beings. This discourse developed into what we now call enactivism through the publication, in 1991, of \textit{The Embodied Mind}, which Varela co-authored with Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch. There, autopoiesis became the foundation for an account of human cognition that took the latter to be always-already situated, embodied and—crucially—active, such that practice and movement came to be seen as crucial to perception and consciousness. That text also saw Varela and his collaborators embarking upon a comprehensive engagement with the phenomenological tradition that had long influenced Varela’s thought, a dialogue that would later turn to examine its own ambitions and limits in the collection published as \textit{Naturalizing Phenomenology}.\textsuperscript{15}

In addition to motivating a more explicit intersection with phenomenological thought, this transition from defining basic life to analysing human cognition also prompted the refinement of enactivism’s conceptual repertoire, as autopoiesis came to be seen as insufficient to fully capture the complexity of what enactivists take cognition to be. Most significant for my present purposes is the development of a notion that Ezequiel Di Paolo, arguably one of the movement’s most notable contemporary proponents, calls \textit{adaptivity}.\textsuperscript{16} Adaptivity here denotes an autopoietic system’s ability to track its progress against the standard set by the conditions required for its continued existence and flourishing, and is now increasingly taken to constitute a further key condition defining what it means for an organism to be a cogniser. This brings to the fore the dynamic, fluid nature of organismic
self-production that is at the heart of enactive cognition. In isolation, autopoiesis constitutes a binary condition, an either/or of survival or disintegration. An adaptive autopoietic organism, however, is capable of more than just absolute presence or absence—it can do better or worse; it can keep annihilation just far enough from itself, with its distance from the point of no return now a variable upon which a great deal hinges; it can generate norms that govern its patterns of responsiveness to perturbations and other circumstances.

Enactivism sees cognition itself as an inherently relational process, a mutual shaping between organism and environment that generates—or enacts—a meaningful world determined by the goals, needs and capacities of the former. The situation in which a particular organism finds itself is meaningful in relation to the organism’s needs and goals, the most fundamental of which is to sustain its own existence in the face of factors that could dissolve its self-identity. At a very basic level, for example, accumulations of chemicals and particular configurations of matter only become ‘nutrients’/’food’ and ‘sharp objects’/’danger’ from the perspective of an organism to which these things matter because they are benefits or risks to its self-perpetuation. This enaction of meaning (which can, of course, become very complex for higher-level organisms) produces and structures the organism’s world, which in turn is defined as a network of interrelated significances that are determined by the various purposes of the organism and its underlying concern for self-perpetuation.

2. TRACES OF IMPLIED POTENTIAL: ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN HEIDEGGERIAN AND ENACTIVIST PERSPECTIVES

Now that basic introductions have been made, so to speak, and we have some idea of what the enactivist perspective entails, I want to bring Heidegger back into the conversation. Before I move on to show just why I think that these two are such suitable interlocutors for one another, however, I want to highlight the promise and urgency of their potential partnership by drawing out some of the brief, tantalising meetings they have already shared. While the promise of a ‘full-blown’ Heideggerian enactivism has not been taken up in the literature, it is important to note that the discourses have often intersected with one another in various ways, arguably rendering the lack of a sustained engagement all the more puzzling.

One significant point of contact lies in the philosophical connections that enactivism and Heideggerian phenomenology share through the work of von Uexküll and
Jonas. Jonas was—as I noted earlier—a student of Heidegger’s. *The Phenomenon of Life*, the work of his that had the greatest influence upon contemporary enactivism, engages with Heidegger’s thought as both a positive source of insight and an antagonist.\(^\text{17}\) Von Uexküll’s work, meanwhile, was widely read by participants in the phenomenological tradition—including Heidegger himself, who wrote approvingly of the biologist’s affirmation of the importance of “the relational structure between the animal and its environment”.\(^\text{18}\) While the Heideggerian perspective that I am interested in reconciling with enactivism is the one outlined in *Being and Time*, it is interesting to note that Heidegger later, in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, identified von Uexküll’s work as one of two “essential steps” which could help biology progress to a phenomenologically-sound conceptualisation of life, the organism and the environment.\(^\text{19}\) Heidegger goes so far as to say that his phenomenology could offer the kind of “radical interpretation” of von Uexküll’s ideas that would lend them “the fundamental significance they could have”, and that “the engagement with concrete investigations like this is one of the most fruitful things that philosophy can learn from contemporary biology.”\(^\text{20}\)

This is not, of course, uncomplicated praise. In that same work, Heidegger also strongly differentiates his concept of ‘world’ from von Uexküll’s *Umwelt* and, crucially, rejects the latter’s insistence upon a continuity between humans and non-human animals—a contention that, indeed, points to a more general challenge for the pursuit of a Heideggerian enactivism. The range of entities upon which each discourse focuses (and the kinds of entities to which they are willing to attribute the structures that are central to their respective models of world navigation) arguably differ enough to generate significant tension between Heideggerian and enactivist approaches. I do not think, however, that this tension fatally undermines the prospect of dialogue, for reasons that I can only touch upon very briefly here. Enactivism is a well-matched partner for Heidegger’s early phenomenology, not only because of their conceptual sympathies, but because of the gaps and underutilised resources that each reveals in the other. Here, I would suggest that this friction invites us to reconsider how we think a broadly Heideggerian framework must conceptualise the distinction between human and non-human animals. The resonances between Heideggerian structures and the model of the enactive cogniser serve as one starting point for a re-imagining of the ways in which an entity might participate in the former. Further exploration of this is beyond the scope of what I can hope to do here; for now, all that I wish to draw out is that the complex history that Heideggerian and enactivist ideas share in itself provides significant motivation for a deeper, prolonged dialogue.\(^\text{21}\)
Interactions between enactivist and Heideggerian discourses have not, of course, been limited to their mutual entanglements with the philosophy of biology; there have also been more recent and direct encounters. As I noted earlier, enactivism has a significant history of engaging with the phenomenological tradition, albeit primarily in the form of Husserl’s work and, more recently, that of Merleau-Ponty. Here, Heideggerian thought is by no means ignored; it is often mentioned—mostly, however, as part of general lists of frameworks sympathetic to situated cognition, or of examples of phenomenological thought. That is, it is not explored in much detail. I think that one can discern a pattern of almost-but-not-quite meetings between the perspectives which flows onwards through much of the contemporary literature. There are many dialogues between enactivists and Heideggerians, but these are generally not about the relation between enactivism and Heideggerian phenomenology itself. When Heideggerian concepts are discussed, they are dealt with in isolation and often quite briefly. What we have, then, is something of a precedent that tempts further exploration—an existing set of entanglements and glancing connections whose very elusiveness makes the possibility of a prolonged encounter all the more promising. An entwined history is not, of course, the primary reason that I want to offer here in urging that this potential be realised. The stronger motivation for bringing these perspectives together lies in their conceptual sympathies; it is to a discussion of these that I shall now turn.

3. GESTURES TOWARDS A HEIDEGGERIAN ENACTIVISM I: BEING-IN-THE-WORLD AND THE ENACTION OF MEANING

I want to suggest that the phenomenology of purposiveness that Heidegger offers us in *Being and Time* and its contemporaneous texts resonates with the enactivist model of life and cognition, intersecting at points that can serve as both connecting anchors and sites of illuminating friction. Here, I shall focus on two such nodes. These are, firstly, the manner in which each framework conceptualises the relation between the world and the entity that navigates it; and, secondly, the relation between temporality and practice that operates either directly or implicitly within each model.

Turning first to the matter of the entity-world relation, I want to suggest that the enactivist view of cognition as an inherently relational process resonates with the Heideggerian conception of Being-in-the-world through, on the one hand, shar-
ing its insistence upon the inseparable entanglement of entity and world, and, on the other, striking a comparable balance between undermining the subject-world dichotomy and maintaining the distinctiveness of the worlded entity. Enactivism and Heidegger’s account both describe the relation between entity and world as one that is mutually constitutive and inextricably interdependent. Each aspect renders the other intelligible; each is an enabling condition of the other and, indeed, part of the very definition of what it is to be as it is. The world is, for both discourses, conceived as more than a mere set of environmental circumstances; it is a network of purposive significance generated and oriented by the entity’s purposes, needs and capacities. Conversely, for both frameworks, the entity in question is only what it is through having a world; neither can be what it is apart from the other, such that ‘apartness’ here is not even intelligible.

Recall that, for Heidegger, the way that Dasein relates to its world must not be understood in terms of the latter containing the former; of a subject covering a pre-determined, value and purpose-indifferent objecthood with a merely superficial cloak of salience and meaning; of a transaction between two bounded and separable realms, a fragile congress whose very conceivable must be secured by proofs anchoring one utterly different pole to the other.26 “Dasein is its world” (BT, 416 [364]). Here, we find a sharing of Being; Dasein’s world is part of the ontological structure of its very way of Being. Being-in-the-world is an indivisible relation whose constituents cannot even truly be labelled such, for this would imply the adhesion of potentially distinct parts. Dasein would not be without world, and world is structured by Dasein, for its worldhood is constituted in relation to the network of purposive significance oriented around Dasein’s projective means-ends directedness. Dasein does not encounter a blank, brute given that it imbues with “subjective colouring” (BT, 101 [71]), but a contexture inviting and shaped by practical engagement, entities defined in terms of either their equipmental role or lack thereof.

The enactivist tradition arguably depicts the interconnection between cognising entities and their world in a comparable way. The enacting cogniser is defined by its world-generation and concomitant capacity to respond to the significances it produces; it only comes into being through its relation to circumstances which it must navigate.27 For enactivists, cognition is inherently situated, rather than a context-independent transaction between the enclosed and potentially isolable spheres of minded computation and external worldly stimuli. It is the sense-making interaction between a self-perpetuating system and its environment, enacting
a meaningful world that in turn continues to shape the system itself. Neither the autonomous cogniser nor the world that it both generates and interacts with to generate itself can be conceived as what they are apart from one another or their role in this interplay.28 Such a cogniser does not encounter a value-neutral set of properties and parameters; it navigates a world of meaning defined by its needs and self-concern. It does not encounter a certain quantity of particular chemicals, but rather enough (or too little or a surplus of) nutrition; it does not meet aggregates of matter, but obstacles or tools. This world is only meaningful, is only what it is, from and for the perspective of an identity that is concerned for its self-perpetuation and encounters its environs in terms of what helps or hinders its flourishing; the world is for the sake of the worlded entity..

At the same time, however, both discourses also imply that this rejection of the entity-world (or, should we be willing to take up the additional conceptual baggage of such a term, the subject-world) dichotomy need not entail the complete loss of a distinctive locus of concern. I would argue that Heideggerian and enactivist analyses both urge us to take account of the need for a perspective from which and for which the world is oriented, an entity that renders the notion of a world structured by ends and needs intelligible—for these must be had by something. Dasein is not positioned over-against its world, or isolable from it, but it is also not equivalent in kind to the tool-relations and functional significations that constitute the latter (BT, 67-71, 78-86 ff [41-450, 53-59 ff]). Tool-use is integral to Dasein’s manifestation of its way of Being, but Dasein is not equipment or a tool-relation; it is differentiated from other entities by the very understanding of Being that enables it to understand their ways of Being and engage with them (BT, 27-32 [7-12]). Heidegger’s account challenges us, I think, to see the relation of Dasein and world as a unity that at the same time does not dissolve either or equivocate one to the other; they cannot be separated, and yet there is in Dasein that understanding and concern of Being which orients the structures of the world, which render worldhood possible. For the enactivist perspective, meanwhile, there is also an emphasis upon the inseparable integration of the cognising agent and its context without surrendering the ability to define or insist upon a locus of purpose around which the significance generated by the interaction of a being and its environment is oriented. The generation and maintenance of a distinct self-unity is, after all, that which defines autopoiesis, that which constitutes a necessary condition for both life and cognition. Enactivism defines cognition in terms of the system’s very ability to maintain a boundary—albeit porous, structural and functional (rather than spatial), and mutually constituted by the world it generates—
and to persist as an autonomous unity; there must be that which can *enact*. This identity is not static; it can be in a state of flux through the changing couplings with its environment and its crucial responsiveness and adaptability in the face of perturbations; however, there must be something to which we can attribute a concern for its continuation and through which the very notion of flourishing in the face of threats against itself—indeed, of a threat as such, of the possibility of disintegration—attains meaning. The enactivist framework, then, is an attractive potential interlocutor for Heideggerian phenomenology because both—in their own ways, distinctly yet harmonically—emphasise the interrelation of entity and world without thereby surrendering the ability to speak of a centre of purpose for and through whom that meaning is generated. “Dasein is its world” (*BT*, 416 [364]), and its world is structured by the functional significations defined in relation to Dasein’s purposes, yet Dasein is also that nexus of concern for whose sake purposive significations are laid out. For enactivism, too, the entity at issue, the protagonist of its tale, is not itself—is, indeed, not at all—apart from its environment and the world it enacts, just as that world is constituted by relationally-generated meanings; cognition is a complex, inextricable mutual entanglement. Yet there is that locus which renders the very notion of the significance emerging through cognition intelligible, something to which the conditions it faces matter, in relation to which the meaning brought about by enaction is defined. This resonance is, I think, particularly significant if we consider the context within which many recent debates about the relation between phenomenology and cognitive science take place. The kind of cognitive science that is most often involved in discussions about such potential partnerships is one for whom cognition is not ‘skull-bound’, and one that takes claims about the situatedness of the cogniser and the immediacy of the world to mean that we must challenge the relevance of believing in an agent who is at all distinct from that which they navigate. I think that the view of the Dasein-world relation that I have set out places constrains what kind of model of cognition Heideggerian phenomenology can engage with, in that I think it demands it be partnered with an approach that rejects an entity-world opposition without losing sight of something that relates, of a Being to whom this relation matters and that is constituted by it. I think that the enactive approach fulfils this requirement remarkably well. That is, if we think that pursuing a dialogue between Heideggerian phenomenology and contemporary cognitive science is a worthwhile endeavour, then the conceptual sympathy between the former and enactivist forms of the latter for which I have tried to argue here can, I would say, serve as a significant reason for settling upon enactivism as a fitting match.
4. GESTURES TOWARDS A HEIDEGGERIAN ENACTIVISM II: TEMPORALITY AND ENACTION

The second of the two ‘nodes’ of intersection between the discourses that I want to explore here originates in the way that temporality operates in both accounts.\(^3\) I shall suggest that a Heideggerian model of temporality profoundly resonates with the temporal dimension of meaning-enacting cognition to such an extent that we can read the former, not as a structure foreign to and hence imposed upon the latter, but as already structuring it in a sense. That is, the temporality of enaction is already proto-Heideggerian in a way that clears a space for dialogue between them and invites us to bring the two frameworks together.

4.a. Heidegger’s Model of Temporality

Making this connection between Heidegger’s conception of temporality and the temporal dimension operative in enactivism visible will require that I first devote some space to summarising my reading of the account of temporality offered in *Being and Time* and its contemporaries.\(^3\) Since offering a more comprehensive description or analysis thereof would far exceed the space that I have here, I will focus on roughly sketching out what I take to be three vitally significant characteristics of the way in which Heidegger deals with temporality—ones that, I shall suggest later, we can also recognise in the kind of temporality involved in the enactivist view of cognition. These features are, firstly, a complex, inextricable entanglement with purposiveness; secondly, an emphasis upon radical futurity; and, finally, a fundamental connection to self-concern.

4.a.i. Purposiveness

It is my contention that, for the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, the relation between purposiveness and temporality needs to be conceived as a complex reciprocity, in which each element shapes the other; temporality unifies and enables practice and purposiveness, even as it is itself inherently affected by the latter. If we were to take his text at face value, then the necessity of temporality to practical engagement can be captured in the profound yet simple notion of a foundational relation: temporality unifies and underlies practical engagement. According to Heidegger, temporality, as a fundamental condition of the possibility of our experience, unifies all the structures that comprise our particular way of Being, which includes Being-in-the-world. Temporality is the crucial glue binding all the
elements and processes that Heidegger ascribes to our existence into a coherent whole, providing “the unitary basis for its existential possibility”; it “regulates the possible unity of all Dasein’s existential structures” (BT, 402 [351]).

I would argue, however, that Heidegger’s account also suggests—even if it does not do so explicitly—that we must conceive of temporality itself in purposive terms. That is, temporality does not just ground practical engagement while itself remaining untouched by that connection; the latter also shapes the former, to the extent that temporality itself cannot be understood adequately without taking purposiveness into account. Consider, for example, Heidegger’s insistence upon the horizontal nature of temporality. The ‘horizon’ is that towards which temporality reaches and projects. Each modality or, in Heidegger’s terminology, ecstasis of temporality (past, present and future) has a Wohin, a where or whither to “which one is carried away”, which Heidegger also calls the “horizontal schema” (BT, 416 [365]). This schema is different for each ecstasis. This horizontal schema of each ecstasis is defined in what I would call intrinsically purposive terms. The horizontal schema of the present ecstasis is the in-order-to—the assignment that defines the character of equipment and its role in a network of tasks, functions and other equipment. The horizontal schema of the past is that upon which Dasein is thrown or abandoned, cashed out by Heidegger in terms of Dasein having “been delivered over to entities which it needs in order to be able to be as it is” (BT, 416 [364]). That is, in order to realise its directedness towards its ends, towards itself as the ultimate sake of its ends, Dasein must deal or engage with other entities. Finally, the horizontal schema of the future is given by Heidegger as the ‘for-the-sake-of-which’, the primordial self-concern, the acting and striving for the sake of itself, for the sake of its own being, that orients the various networks of practical significance that constitute Dasein’s world and its navigation thereof. Stating that the future of original temporality “is carried away” towards this for-the-sake-of-which renders the former fundamentally purposive. It means that the ecstatic outwardness of the future stretches towards an intrinsic mattering, a sake, a purpose that is enacted in Dasein’s existence as an ability to be. Dasein’s relation towards its Being is, after all, a “competence”, a capability, that is not “something by way of an extra” for Dasein, but its “Being-possible. Dasein is in every case what it can be, and in the way in which it is its possibility” (BT, 183 [143]).

These horizontal schemata are crucial to originary temporality functioning in the manner that Heidegger’s account requires it to. According to Heidegger, we cannot understand temporality without taking into account its fundamental, radi-
cal openness, its outward-directedness. It is this that enables Dasein’s transcendence, the always-already being outside of itself—and being enmeshed with other entities—that underlies the very having of a world and constitutes the ever-prior letting-be through which the possibility of everything Dasein encounters must already be disclosed. This reaching-outwards reaches towards something, projects upon that which in turn renders that which is projected and the projecting itself intelligible, a structuration that we must acknowledge if we are to properly conceive of temporality and its functioning; to do temporality justice, as it were, we must address its openness, and to do the latter requires responding to it as horizontal. If we cannot understand temporality (and its role in constituting our way of Being) without understanding its horizontal nature, and if the horizons of temporality are intrinsically purposive, then we cannot understand temporality adequately without considering it in purposive terms.

4.a.ii. Radical Futurity

Heidegger’s account is also, I think, characterised by giving the future—cashed out in terms of a radical and projective openness—a particularly important place in the structure of temporality. This point can be broken down into two distinct but interrelated claims. These are, firstly, that Heidegger’s model of temporality privileges the futural mode of temporality; and secondly, that this futurity is conceived in terms of a radical indeterminacy. I will briefly lay out each of these in turn.

With respect to the first of these points, it is worth noting that *Being and Time* asserts the special importance of futurity quite explicitly. For example, Heidegger writes that the reason that he has “always mentioned the future first” is that it “has a priority in the ecstatical unity of primordial and authentic temporality”, such that the future is the latter’s “primary phenomenon” (*BT*, 378 [329]). The text gives us two reasons for this prioritisation of the future: the futural ecstasis renders possible the anticipatory resoluteness and Being-towards-death that constitute authenticity and are crucial to the structure of Care, and it is intrinsically connected to Dasein’s existentiality. It is the latter, arguably less apparent point that I want to draw out here. Heidegger writes that “[s]elf-projection upon the ‘for-the-sake-of-itself’ is grounded in the future and is an essential characteristic of *existentiality*. The primary meaning of existentiality is the future” (*BT*, 375-376 [327], original italics). Recall that existentiality refers to the defining feature of Dasein’s way of Being, that is, its comportment towards its own Being, its under-
standing itself “in terms of a possibility of itself” (BT, 33 [12]). For Heidegger, this understanding of and concern for its own Being that makes Dasein what it is, and its capacity to stretch towards possibilities for and of itself, are inherently and primarily futural. Blattner captures this well when he notes that temporality “is the ontological sense of Dasein as ability, as something that presses ahead into its self-understanding”. This privileging of Dasein’s projection ahead, beyond, into possibility gives the futural dimension of temporality an extraordinary significance. Dasein is a primordially futural way of Being—not in a sense of being disconnected from past, present or the unity of the three ecstases, but rather in that futurity guides Dasein’s structuration through the very unity in which the future partakes.

This futurity is not one that can be captured in terms of prediction or a concrete anticipation of a determinate goal; this brings us to the second of the two claims that I put forward at the start of this section. Heidegger often emphasises that the projection of a Worumwillen, the stretching outwards into possibilities, does not equate to having a particular goal in mind, whether thematically or otherwise. Even in the case of specific concrete practices, the particular goal of a specific task orients the activity and tools engaged with in its accomplishment, but is not always held in mind or focussed upon. Heidegger distinguishes the directedness towards an end from the attainment thereof, and, indeed, its concretisation or determination. This view of purposive end-directedness, coupled with the notion of the originary future as the underlying openness that discloses realms of Being as such, gives us a conception of futurity as radical indeterminacy. The futural is, for Heidegger, an open stretching outwards that is not centred around, nor caught up in the striving for the realisation of, anything determinate. This is an indeterminacy that enables determinacy, grounding the possibility of making and conceiving of particular choices.

4.a.iii. Self-Concern

The final of the three characteristics of Heidegger’s account that I wish to highlight here is the connection that it draws between temporality, practice and the self-concern of Dasein. It is this self-concern that defines, and is defined by, futurity and therefore also suffuses Dasein’s coming-towards-itself as it takes over its having-been. This relation between temporality and self-concern is one of each shaping and being shaped by the other. On the one hand, that anything can matter to Dasein is due to its temporal nature, for, according to Heidegger, only an
entity structured by a unity of past, present and future can stretch towards possibilities of its own, towards itself as possibility, can encounter anything as having a sake—and can be directed towards its own Being as the sake for which it does anything. On the other, it is this mattering, this capacity to pursue self-concern and the ripples of what we might call the more concrete ‘sub-concerns’ of practice that shapes temporality itself, as we have seen. Heidegger’s account implies that Dasein’s self-concern and its concomitant pursuit of related concerns are inseparable from, and crucial to, temporality.

4.b. The Heideggerian Temporality of Enaction

Heidegger’s account, then, invites us to understand purposiveness as inherently temporal and temporality as shaped by purposiveness; to view the futural dimension as having a special significance, one that can be cashed out in terms of a radical indeterminacy that transcends mere predictive or anticipatory models of futurity; and, finally, to take temporality as being structured by and structuring the self-concern that defines Dasein. I now want to suggest that the autopoietic enacting of meaning carries within itself a temporality that also and already bears a similar shape. Guided by the three features that I have set out above, I think that we can trace the outlines of a Heideggerian temporal structuration within enactivism, suggesting the kind of deep resonance between the two approaches that calls for a more extensive dialogue between them.

Firstly, I would argue that the autopoietic enacting of meaning also displays the kind of complex mutual shaping of temporality and purposiveness that we can find in Heidegger’s account. On the one hand, the purposiveness underlying enaction is unintelligible from an atemporal perspective. The self-generation and maintenance of an autonomous self-unity must happen across time. After all, the organism’s purposive aiming towards the overall end of survival, as well as its more immediate needs in successfully navigating environmental circumstances, are structured by a directedness towards something which has not been reached yet, and end that is not meaningful apart from an integration into the organism’s overall temporal stretching into past and future. This temporal continuum renders the system’s present situation intelligible, for it is the same self-unity that has existed previously and been shaped by particular past circumstances whose continuance is at stake here. The world of significance enacted in collaboration with the environment is a temporal one. On the other hand, the temporality of enaction is itself thoroughly purposive, for it is manifested and has meaning in terms
of means-ends directedness, of the purposive carrying over of a past identity into the future as, both, a goal to be striven for, and the motivation of immediate ends.

Secondly, I think that we can also read the temporality of autopoietic cognition in future-weighted terms. The meaningful world generated by the activity of the organism in collaboration with its environment is arguably defined by an orientation towards futurity, in that the future survival of the system that provides the framework for all its actions and the salience that it produces in conjunction with the situations it encounters. Moreover, it is the directedness towards more immediate goals thrown up by the perturbations it undergoes that renders its activity intelligible as cognition. The survival of the organism is not merely a simple not-yet that is to be anticipated or drawn out in a concrete plan, however. This is a future that will never arrive or be finally accomplished. It is an ongoing futurity that orients everything else, and that can never be closed off, for the striving towards it can only end, not with being grasped or secured (for these are not possible) but with the annihilation of the framework that it rendered meaningful, with the disintegration of the system. For the autopoietic, adaptive system, stasis is death; there is no endpoint, only the ultimate ceasing of those processes of resistance and precariousness that define the organism’s very life. This is, moreover, a radically open future; it is not one of explicit planning or awaiting of a certain event, but a fluid and adaptive orientation that gives meaning to, and renders possible, the organismic responsiveness to salience.

Thirdly, and finally, the temporality of enaction is, in my view, also always-already oriented by the self-interest of the organiser, even as that self-concern is inherently temporal. From an enactivist perspective, it is the self-concern of the organism that defines and drives cognition, enabling it to exist; there would be no cognition, no autopoiesis, adaptivity or autonomy without or apart from the fundamental drive of the system to persist. This is a temporal self-concern, for it makes no sense without an understanding of the organism’s self-perpetuation through time, or of the object of that concern as self-unity with a history and a striving to have a future. This is also a self-concerned temporality. The temporality of enaction is of the organism and for the organism; its futurity is structured by the drive towards self-continuation, its pastness through the tracking of the organism’s trajectory of flourishing across a field of beneficial or detrimental outcomes, and its presence through the intersection of these in the active moment of self-maintenance.
Beyond pointing towards a promising conceptual sympathy between Heideggerian phenomenology and the enactivist model of cognition, this tripartite intersection between the temporalities operating within each framework also serves to illuminate their shared emphasis upon the importance of temporality. For both perspectives, temporality is crucial to understanding the entities at the centre of their respective narratives, and indeed their accounts as a whole. The enactivist tradition makes this point quite overtly, particularly in its engagement with phenomenology. Varela himself contended that explaining our experience of time was “an acid test of the entire neurophenomenological enterprise”, a notion taken up by many enactivist accounts - including, for example, by Evan Thompson in *Mind in Life*, arguably one of the most significant contemporary contributions to the discourse. In the case of Heidegger’s account, meanwhile, this temporal orientation is one that is often occluded by the tendency to focus upon the first division of *Being and Time*. While arguing for this point in detail is beyond what I can accomplish here, I would say that fully appreciating the potential of that period in Heidegger’s thought requires us to take account of the vital role that he ascribes to temporality in structuring all aspects of Dasein’s way of Being. If, as I suggested earlier, we can read Heidegger as claiming that temporality and purposiveness are intrinsically intertwined, founding and structuring one another in a complex mutuality, then we cannot understand the analysis constructed in the first division of *Being and Time*, for example, without seeing that temporality is at its core—a place which it also ought to find in our readings.

In my view, this means that these discourses can be brought into a fruitful conversation, not only about the content of their models of temporality, but about the significance that they ascribe to them. On the one hand, the Heideggerian position that I outline above entails that any attempt to utilise Heidegger’s conceptual framework in order model purposive cognition must also grapple with the important role that temporality plays within it. Enactivism is particularly well-positioned to do so in light of both, its own insistence that temporality is crucial to investigating and explaining cognition, as well as the resonances between the temporal dimensions of enaction and the structures Heideggerian temporality. On the other hand, this deep congeniality between Heidegger’s account and enactivism surely makes the former a particularly interesting potential interlocutor for a tradition like the latter that has such a long history of interest in both phenomenology and the analysis of temporality. The majority of enactivist discussions that connect these two fields focus mainly on the works of Husserl and, to a slightly lesser extent, of Merleau-Ponty; I find it puzzling that so little attention is
CONCLUSION

The phenomenological tradition has been drawn into many kinds of encounters with the study and philosophy of cognition, including not only the now well-known critiques of certain paths that the latter took, but also more collaborative interactions grounded in the hope that phenomenological insights might be incorporated into new ways of investigating what it means to experience and navigate the world as we do. In this congenial atmosphere, the question of where Heidegger fits into these conversations urges itself upon us. *Being and Time* was, after all, so central in those early, more hostile interdisciplinary engagements. How might Heidegger’s narrative of practical engagement and Being-in-the-world situate itself within this relatively new landscape? One particularly potent way of doing so, I have suggested here, would be to enter into a dialogue with the enactivist tradition that has grown out of Varela and Maturana’s autopoietic theory of life. Enactivism already carries traces of phenomenology in its blood, an inheritance that manifests more strongly with each new generation of texts. The compatibility of contemporary enactivism with Heidegger’s ideas has, however, rarely been explore. This lacuna ought to puzzle the reader of *Being and Time*, for there are such profound resonances between the two discourses that their coming together seems almost fated, rich with the promise of generating philosophically fruitful friction and mutually illuminating dialogues.

Here, I have focussed upon two nodes at which these perspectives intersect. The first such conceptual sympathy lies in the way in which each portrays the relation between the entities that form the protagonists of their respective analyses and the worlds that these entities navigates. For both, the Heidegger of *Being and Time* and the mainstream enactivist tradition, entity and world are bound in a complex, insoluble tangle of mutual constitution, permitting neither to be understood or, indeed, to be apart from the other. This position allies Heideggerian phenomenology and enactivism in the context of contemporary debates over the extent to which cognition merges cogniser and world. That is, they share an outlook that rejects dichotomous interpretations of the entity-world relation while maintaining the view of the entity as a locus of concern for which the world is what it is. The second site of harmony between the discourses is grounded in how each views the nature and role of temporality. The model of temporality that Heidegger sets out in the era of *Being and Time* can, I contend, be read in terms of
three key features, that is, a complex mutual founding relation between temporality and purposiveness; an emphasis upon a radically indeterminate futurity; and an inherent connection between temporality and self-concern. In my view, these structures can be recognised already being at work within the temporal dimension of the autopoietic enacting of meaning that enactivism describes, such that we can view the latter as already operating within a Heideggerian temporality. Each discourse’s temporal orientation can shed light upon the other through their mutual resonances. The importance that both assign to temporality, moreover, strengthens this bond; the phenomena that each seeks to explore and explain cannot be adequately captured or accounted for without an understanding of temporality. I think that these reflections offer us reason to think that, if we wish to pursue a dialogue between Heideggerian phenomenology and contemporary approaches to studying cognition, then we should look towards enactivist versions of the latter as especially promising interlocutors for the former.

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NOTES

1. This paper is drawn from sections of my recently-submitted doctoral thesis, *Dasein’s Temporal Enaction: Heideggerian Temporality in Dialogue with Contemporary Cognitive Science*; sections 1-3 are from chapter 5 of that thesis, and section 4 includes partial sections of chapters 3 and 8.

2. This now-famous description of Artificial Intelligence research (and allied fields) that saw cognition as fundamentally computational and symbol-manipulating first appeared in (and throughout) the work of John Haugeland. See John Haugeland, *Artificial Intelligence: The Very Idea*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985. My discussion here refers to the discourse’s shift in focus, that is, from the kind of phenomenologically-grounded critique of cognitive science that Dreyfus developed, to a developing phenomenologically-sound cognitive science. See Hubert Dreyfus, *What Computers Can’t Do*. New York: Harper and Row, 1972. This is not to say that this project—exemplified by the approaches of figures such as Gallagher, Noë, Wheeler, Varela and Zahavi, as well as Dreyfus himself—has universally replaced the more critical perspective. Most accounts undertaking the ‘collaborative approach’ also develop phenomenology-based critiques of various models of cognition. Moreover, the ‘positive turn’ is by no means unanimously accepted, and still faces scepticism from a variety of perspectives.

3. Of course, this question has been posed and addressed in various ways throughout the literature—including perhaps most prominently in recent times by Michael Wheeler. See Michael Wheeler, *Reconstructing the Cognitive World: The Next Step*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005. This paper does not seek to negate the possibility of other viable approaches.

4. As I will note later, many enactivists who engage with phenomenology—including Francisco Varela and Evan Thompson, for example—mention Heidegger briefly as one of a number of phenomenologists with whose views they take their tradition to have some compatibilities, often on the basis of what they describe as general phenomenological tendencies (such as the rejection of the subject/object dichotomy or the emphasis upon contextual situatedness). Heideggerian thought receives somewhat more attention in the ‘perceptual enactivist’ discourse, which (primarily through the work of Alva Noë) built upon Varela’s claims about the importance of embodied action in structuring the cogniser’s world-navigation to construct what is by now arguably a distinct research project that focuses exclusively on the importance of action and movement in perception. This is not, however, the kind of enactivism that I am interested in here.


10. The enactivist conception of autonomy has varied significantly and controversially over the decades; in addition to its definition being disputed, there has been much debate over whether it constitutes a separate condition for cognition to autopoiesis, and whether either can be taken as a sub-category of the other. In this paper, I will only draw on the way it is discussed in Maturana and Varela’s essays. For that treatment, see for example Maturana and Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, 80.


21. That these connections between Jonas, von Uexküll and Heidegger point to potential connections between contemporary enactivists and Heideggerian perspectives has even been suggested—albeit not yet taken up—by enactivists themselves. Froese and Ziemke mention that “Heidegger's existential account of the living mode of being still deserves further study, especially in relation to the biological foundations of enactive cognitive science”. See Froese and Ziemke, “Enactive Artificial Intelligence”, 241.

22. I am not, of course, ruling out that the brevity of enactivism's engagement with these ideas may be motivated by plausible doubts about their utility for enactivist approaches. One important potential reason for such scepticism may be that Heidegger says little about embodiment, whereas
this issue is central to many contemporary enactivist accounts. However, I would maintain that the resonances between Heidegger's general framework and enactivism are sufficiently significant yet too underexplored to generate interest in a prolonged dialogue. After all, I am not suggesting that Heideggerian phenomenology is the only or best interlocutor for enactivism; the need for dialogue between them is not built upon each being able to address all of the other's major concerns, but rather upon the significance of the points at which they do intersect—particularly with respect to temporality. I think that, just as—for example—Merleau-Ponty's analyses of embodiment may offer enactivist insights that it cannot find in other phenomenologies, so Heidegger's account of temporality can (for reasons that I can only begin to touch upon here) offer enactivism something unique, vital, and salient to some of its core concerns. Similarly, its existing intersections with enactivism may well offer a Heideggerian approach more reasons and room for re-imagining the role of the body within its framework. Heideggerian and enactivist discourses will be enriched by adding more of each other's insights to their respective conceptual repertoires than they have at present.

23. The only notable exception here can be found in Fernando Ilharco's conference paper, “Building Bridges in Phenomenology: Matching Heidegger and Autopoiesis in Interpretive Research”, which was presented at the Second International Workshop of the Phenomenology, Organisation and Technology Workgroup, at the Catholic University of Portugal in Lisbon in September 2003. Ilharco draws on what he takes to be phenomenological accounts of essence, language and the destruction of the history of ontology to link the way each discourse figures in information systems and interpretative organisational research.


25. One significant example of this is the way that Heidegger’s analysis of *Befindlichkeit* has featured in the discourse. One of the few Heideggerian concepts that has been discussed frequently in enactivist literature, it features in both classic and contemporary texts in a manner that exemplifies the tendency to take up Heideggerian concepts while mentioning their relation to Heidegger’s overall account only briefly or not at all. See, for example, Francisco Varela, “The Specious Present: A Neurophenomenology of Time Consciousness” *Naturalising Phenomenology: Issues in Contemporary Phenomenology and Cognitive Science*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, 266-314; and Giovanna Colombetti, *The Feeling Body*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013.

26. Throughout this section, I am drawing upon Heidegger’s discussion of Being-in-the-world and his contrasting of his model with other conceptions of the entity-world relation. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009, 78-148 [52-113]. Henceforth, all direct quotations from *Being and Time* will be noted as BT by parenthetical reference in the text. As here, these will list the page numbers of both the translation and the original.

27. For examples of such an account of cognition, see Di Paolo, “Autopoiesis,” 429-452ff; Froese and Ziemke, “Enactive Artificial Intelligence,” 466-500; Thompson, *Mind in Life*, 3-165ff, especially 3-87; Evan Thompson, “Life and Mind: From Autopoiesis to Neurophenomenology. A Tribute to
being-in-the-world, temporality and autopoiesis  ·  283


28. This is point is often made by enactivists discussing their tradition’s emphasis upon the always-already situatedness of the cogniser. For a particularly illuminating discussion, see Ezequiel Di Paolo, “Extended Life” *Topoi* 28:1 (2008, 15-20).

29. Situating enactivism like this is admittedly somewhat controversial, for some participants in that tradition (such as Di Paolo) have contended that enactivism should be seen as either allied to, or even more radical than, extended or distributed models of cognition. See Di Paolo, “Extended Life”, 9-21; and Michael Wheeler, “Mind in Life or Life in Mind?” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 18:5-6 (2011, 148-167).

30. Accounts connecting Heidegger’s model of temporality with the enactivist tradition have, I think, often come very close to being realised, without ever fully being pursued. One good example of what I mean here is provided by Varela himself, since he notes that the Huuslerian model of temporal experience that constitutes his primary phenomenological source is not always useful or sufficiently developed, whereas Heidegger had “a great deal to say about the topic.” See Varela, “The Specious Present”, 297. Indeed, he later draws upon Heidegger’s accounts of absorption in practical engagement, the un-ready-to-hand, and Befindlichkeit; however, instead of considering what Heidegger had to say about these elements’ connection to temporality, he does not pursue the idea. Ilharco’s paper, mentioned earlier, once again is notable for at least suggesting this connection, offering a short paragraph of analysis.

31. The limitations of scope and space here mean that I will not be able to offer a detailed account of Heidegger’s different temporal concepts, such as *Weltzeit* or *Temporalität*.

32. For Heidegger’s discussion of horizons here, see BT, 415-418 [364-366].

33. Heidegger defines the *Um-zu* throughout his discussion of Being-in-the-world; see especially BT, 95-102 [66-72].


37. See, for example, BT, 385-386 [336].

38. Heidegger hints at this in places like BT, 285-286 [336-337].

39. See, for example, BT, 285-286 [336-337].

40. Di Paolo makes this point particularly insightfully when he argues in favour of adding a notion of adaptivity to enactivist definition of cognition, contending that such a fluid concept is crucial to capturing the dynamics of life in terms of a “multi-scaled and directed temporality”. For him, there is “a minimum temporal granularity in adaptivity” that is necessary to make sense of sense-making, to account for the ways in which “the ongoing coupling with the environment, and the precariousness of metabolism, make their collective action [of the organism’s adaptive systems] also self-renewing, thus naturally resulting in valenced rhythms of tension and satisfaction.” See Di
Paolo, “Autopoiesis”, 444-445. (Original italics.)

41. Varela, “The Specious Present”, 267; for Thompson’s response, see, for example, Mind in Life, 329.

42. While many commentaries do overlook the importance of temporality within the analyses of Being and Time and its textual contemporaries, there are, of course, scholars who have taken up the challenge of giving temporality a central role in their readings. These include, of course, Blattner’s seminal treatment of the subject, in Heidegger’s Temporal Idealism; Françoise Dastur, Heidegger and the Question of Time. Trans François Raffoul and David Pettigrew. Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1998; John Haugeland in Dasein Disclosed: John Haugeland’s Heidegger. Ed. Joseph Rouse. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013; and Jack Reynolds, Chronopathologies: Time and Politics in Deleuze, Derrida, Analytic Philosophy, and Phenomenology. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012.
Élisabeth Roudinesco identifies the publication of Foucault’s *The Order of Things* (hereafter OT) in April, 1966 with the point of “entry of the mass media on the stage of theory.” “Journalists,” she notes, “would soon feel authorized to transform structuralist intellectuals into charismatic stars, glorifying—or stigmatizing—the complexity of discourses they in any event referred to as ‘esoteric’.”

Within this novel arrangement, the closing lines of OT—infamously signalling an imminent “death of man” with the wager that man would soon “be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea”—offered an easily consumable encapsulation of the text’s anti-humanist sentiment, taking root in the sympathetic context of 1960s Paris, and in turn catapulting Foucault’s image above headlines screaming of “the greatest revolution since existentialism.”
Although Foucault’s subsequent position as the most prominent figure of French anti-humanism was due in no small part to the media’s uptake of the “death of man,” within a year he would come to take issue with the concept’s development into “something of a slogan,” indissociable from what he would later term “the most difficult, the most tiresome book [he] ever wrote.” In becoming such a slogan, the concept had been so dislocated from Foucault’s complex discussion that he entertained withdrawing OT altogether from further publication. In a telling interview given in 1967, Foucault found himself forced to remind a largely adoring public that whilst “[i]t is obvious that in saying [...] that man has ceased to exist I absolutely did not mean that man, as a living or social species, has disappeared from the planet.” He became “increasingly irritated by the uncomprehending enthusiasm of his large new public,” but also “by the equally uncomprehending animosity of a growing number of critics.” That Jean-Paul Sartre was key amongst these critics indicates the high stakes of the debate surrounding the death of man. In what was to become a public tête-à-tête between the two most prominent representatives of the respectively humanist and anti-humanist schools of thought, Sartre responded to OT in an interview published in L’Arc, attempting to figure his own project as having already declared, after Marx, the death of man as a “sort of substantial I.” In turn, he cast Foucault as not only having missed the boat by quite a long shot, but failing to account for Sartre’s own figuration of the subject as surging negativity.

Foucault, perhaps rueing his decision to remove late passages directly criticizing Sartre’s Critique of Dialectical Reason from the final manuscript of OT, drew on the latter in repeatedly casting Sartre in the mould of the “19th century philosopher,” “vehemently dissociat[ing] himself from Sartre and his era” in a 1968 interview, and in particular with the manner “in which a philosophical text, a theoretical text, finally had to tell you what life, death, and sexuality were, if God existed or not, what freedom consisted of, what had to do in political life, how to behave in regard to others and so forth.” The notion of man in this debate thus remained less an explicitly contested notion than an empty cavity, open for each participant to fill with their particular formulations so as to in turn chastise the other side. “[T]he debate about the death of man,” as Béatrice Han-Pile notes, “was not a genuine dialog but rather a case of philosophers talking (voluntarily or not) at cross purposes.” It was then notable for “provid[ing] a contrario insight into the nature of real philosophical exchange” as nothing more than “an exercise in solipsism”—a point that the conclusion to Foucault’s subsequent book, The Archaeology of Knowledge, illustrates most strikingly, in its staging of a dialogue “as
a kind of drama: an extended encounter between a figure who is clearly Foucault, and a hostile interlocutor” clearly identifiable as Sartre.14

The contemporary intervention of the “non-humanism” of François Laruelle into this debate on the death of man (which must be marked as a highly gendered and largely obsolete term within Anglophone scholarship, albeit one that still retains a great deal of philosophical and historiographical import) takes as its point of departure both this particular insufficiency of the philosophical approach to the question of man, and the dictatorial aspect of philosophy itself. In his essay ‘A Rigorous Science of Man’ from his so-called Philosophy II period, Laruelle grounds his approach in the axiomatic assertion that man is a priori foreclosed to philosophy as an object of thought, leaving each philosophical attempt to appropriate him as merely symptomatic of an age-old attempt to appropriate a real lying outside its purview. Laruelle instead explicitly refuses to “confus[e] the end of man with the decomposition of humanism,”15 by developing a “rigorous science of man” concerned with the description of “phenomena lived by ordinary man, phenomena that are invisible, in principle, to philosophy”.16 It is the task of this article to consider Laruelle’s non-philosophical intervention by detailing Laruelle’s position vis-a-vis both sides of the humanism/anti-humanism “divide.” It will focus in particular on Laruelle’s relation to the Foucauldian critique, which probably remains the most prominent instance of anti-humanism.

FRENCH ANTI-HUMANISM

The roots of the distinct notion of humanism at stake in these developments can arguably be traced back as far as the Age of Enlightenment, although they are perhaps more clearly manifest in the left-Hegelianism of Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx (especially in the latter’s concepts of labour alienation and species-being as they occur in his so-called “early works”). However, its modern continental architect is clearly Sartre, whose phenomenological account of existence effectively rescues and reappropriates theological attributes that were once given to God exclusively so that it might establish the preeminent freedom of man, the individual human being. Sartre himself traces this legacy of humanism back to the work of René Descartes, who he claims provides “a splendid humanistic affirmation of creative freedom, which [...] forces us to assume a fearful task, our task par excellence, namely, to cause a truth to exist in the world, to act so that the world is true.”17
Equating freedom and creation, in arguing that divine freedom “is pure productivity [...] the extra-temporal and eternal act by which God brings into being a world,” Sartre suggests that it is precisely this freedom which forms the foundation of all truth. The guiding principle of humanism, he declares, is that “man is the being as a result of whose appearance a world exists,” envisaging the human individual as constantly but futilely moving toward a state of completion: the ens causa sui of productive divinity. As Vincent Descombes notes, the “distinctive feature of humanism is this will to recovery and reappropriation of divine attributes, amongst them the most precious of all, the power to create and to ‘bring the world into existence’,” finding meaning and value in the freedom of the individual to take responsibility for their behaviour within the constraints of their own facticity, and thus emphasizing the originarity of existence over essence, understanding the latter as a continual project toward which one works, rather than a predetermined ideal from which one individuates. “[I]f God does not exist,” writes Sartre, “there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being before it can be defined by any conception of it.”

Sartre’s philosophy, enormously influential at the time—both within the intellectual milieu of France and in broader Western thought—draws upon the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger in order to describe what he considers a distinctly non-metaphysical, existentialist ontology. As he writes in Being and Nothingness, “ontology appears to us capable of being defined as the specification of the structures of being of the existent taken as a totality,” whereas metaphysics raises the question of “the existence of the existent,” such that the former merely attempts to describe the nature of being as it appears to consciousness, whilst the latter strives to explain the origin of such a structure. Yet, as we have seen, Sartre’s intense popularity also brought with it an acute scrutiny of his philosophy, beginning with Heidegger himself, who in the Letter on Humanism disavows Sartre’s interpretations, criticizing him for falling into the trap of understanding humanity as “determined with regard to an already established interpretation of nature, history, world, and the ground of the world, that is, of beings as a whole.”

For Heidegger, who argues that humanism proper actually first emerges in the Roman Republic, the self-proclaimed existentialism and humanism of Sartre’s project is at odds with his own fundamental ontology from which it is partly derived: the swapping of existence and essence from their traditional Platonic formulation is inadequate for escaping the strictures of metaphysics and onto-theology.
Heidegger writes, “the reversal of a metaphysical statement remains a metaphysical statement”—for it still suppresses the question of the destiny of Being, and masks the essence of man qua ek-sistence.25 Humanism, according to Heidegger’s account, universalizes a false image of man—following the tendency of all humanisms to presuppose “the most universal ‘essence’ of man to be obvious”—as an autonomous being, luxuriating in its own freedom. Heidegger, by contrast, attempts to think Dasein as necessarily shackled to the ecstatic time of ek-sistence, and thus thrown into specific social and historical circumstances over which it does not and cannot have full control.26

In the aftermath of Heidegger’s rather pointed critique, a number of French philosophers (the cohort that we would typically now designate the structuralists and post-structuralists) leapt at the opportunity to denounce Sartre, the great intellectual star of the rive gauche, and more specifically to demonstrate the extent to which their own approaches were able to overcome the dogma of humanism. One might interpret such battles as symptomatic of the broader contestations by which the terrain of philosophical discourse is mapped out, an auto-warfare that challenges the dictates of individual philosophers in order to shore up the predominance of the philosophical discipline and modality of thought more broadly. Continually waged over the past two-and-a-half millennia, philosophers fall over themselves trying to prove their projects more radical than those of their competitors, and more drastic in their attempts to upset reified orthodoxies.

We can observe such anti-humanism in the structuralist Marxism of Louis Althusser, whose authoritative position within the aforementioned university gave him considerable theoretical sway over many ensuing students. Althusser opposed the trend toward theoretical anti-humanism that he witnessed occurring in the French Communist Party, describing it as an “ideological” rather than “scientific” concept, insofar as it “really does designate a set of existing relations,” but cannot “provide us with a means of knowing them.”27 He dismissed the newly translated Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844—which had enabled scholars and activists to embrace a vision of Marx as humanist, concerned with the alienation of man’s species-being through the brutality of labour—as yet another manifestation of the bourgeois idealism peddled by philosophers from Kant onward. Inasmuch as the Manuscripts justified the primacy of the autonomous human subject as a means for masking social relations and thus enabling the normalization of labour exploitation, Althusser rejected the Hegelian and Feuerbachian legacy of humanism within Marx’s early works.
Drawing instead on the “epistemological break” of Marx’s 1845 German Ideology, Althusser aspires to develop a scientific form of Marxism that comprehends the subject as an epiphenomenal product of larger ideological structures, and of a historical becoming-without-subject. As Knox Peden puts it, “Althusser’s heralding of science was less a return to a bygone positivism than the resurgence of a rationalism only briefly eclipsed during existentialism’s heyday in France,” adopting “Gaston Bachelard’s concept of the ‘epistemological break’ [...] to describe both the moment that Marx took leave of the ideological humanism of his youth for the science of Capital, as well as the moment that any given subject moves from the terrain of ideology to the discourse of science tout court.” The conceptualization of a self-contained, self-sufficient, and autonomous science, sundered from all socio-empirical exigencies, was in effect the return to an Enlightenment rationalism valorizing the theoretical sciences above all else.

Moving away from the directly political concerns of Althusser’s work, but with a similar focus upon the illusory nature of the humanist subject, Jacques Derrida’s post-structuralist anti-humanism declares that even Heidegger is unable to escape the impediments of the humanism that he condemns, for his thought is “guided by the motif of Being as presence [...] and by the motif of the proximity of Being to the essence of man,” such that “the thinking of the truth of Being, in the name of which Heidegger de-limits humanism and metaphysics, remains as thinking of man.” Heidegger’s attack on Sartre, in other words, remains within a metaphysics of presence that privileges the question of proximity between man and Being. Jacques Lacan (whose work on this question actually precedes that of Althusser), similarly denounces the notion of any self-present unity of the subject, instead foregrounding the scission that lies at the heart of subjectivity, and the according impossibility of unmediated reflection upon itself. Finally, Gilles Deleuze denounces “humanism’s exaltation of the human fact,” contending that the image of the self or ego is merely a stratified representation of a pure, uninhibited encounter with the sense that precedes it, and which forms the condition of real experience. In all of these accounts, humanism is criticized for its reification of man as a concept synonymous with a self-present interiority of thought, and the concomitant occlusion of those various forces (e.g. relations of production, discourse, difference, etc.) that these anti-humanist philosophers view as providing the conditions that precede and exceed such a concept.

The anti-humanism of Foucault’s OT continues this line of critical inquiry, attempting to identify the evident decomposition of humanism at the hands of
FOUCAULT AND THE DOUBLET

The emergence of man as doublet, placed at “the point of origin of every type of knowledge,”34 gives way to a newfound imposition of necessarily “interrogating man’s being as the foundation of all positivities,” “the basis of which all knowledge could be constituted as immediate and non-problematized evidence.”35 But man was therefore also in a position to “become, a fortiori, that which justified the calling into question of all knowledge of man.”36 In the absence of an absolute transcendence within the ambiguous structure of the doublet, the transcendental remains to a certain degree “subject” to temporal subsumption by the empirical; that is, to a reversal in the critical formulation, whereby an empirical determination of man operates in the mode of a “pseudo-transcendental” condition of possibility of the transcendental itself.37

According to Foucault, this potentiality manifests at the “surface level” in the problematic relation of the human sciences to that of science and philosophy respectively, in the form of a “double and inevitable contestation”:

that which lies at the root of the perpetual controversy between the sciences of man and the sciences proper—the first laying an invincible claim to be the foundation of the second, which are ceaselessly obliged in turn to seek their own foundation, the justification of their method, and the purification of their history, in the teeth of ‘psychologism’, ‘sociologism’, and ‘historicism’; and that which lies at the root of the endless controversy
between philosophy, which objects to the naïveté with which the human sciences try to provide their own foundation, and those same human sciences which claim as their rightful object what would formerly have constituted the domain of philosophy.\textsuperscript{38}

For Foucault, the “existence” and “untiring repetition” of these two particular relations between the human sciences and science and philosophy respectively “for more than a century, do not indicate the permanence of an ever-open question; they refer back to [man as] a precise and extremely well-determined epistemological arrangement in history.”\textsuperscript{39}

It is the ambiguity inherent in this arrangement that, most worryingly for Foucault, enables the human sciences to posit empirical determinations in the form of pseudo-transcendentals. As a result, insofar as each scientific endeavour is either subject to the foundational claim of the human sciences, or (in what amounts to the same) actively seeking to determine its own conditions through recourse to psychologism, sociologism, etc., the “danger” of “tumbling over into the domain occupied by the human sciences”—the “danger of [...] anthropologism” proper—is ever-present.\textsuperscript{40} Likewise, in the case of philosophy, its “dangerous familiarity” with the human sciences enables a transition from the traditional, critical form of the relation between the empirical and transcendental—maintaining the latter’s claim to epistemological determinacy, as seen in Kant’s first Critique—to that of an “impure,” anthropological mode that “makes epistemic determination ultimately dependent on its empirical, causal counterpart.”\textsuperscript{41}

Anthropologization, according to Foucault, is “the great internal threat to knowledge in our day” given its promotion of the empirical into the pseudo-transcendental, and its consequent rendering of the transcendental-empirical relation into one of vicious circularity.\textsuperscript{42} The death of man as the death of a (post-)Kantian epistemic structure is thus an event to be welcomed for its occlusion of the possibility of anthropologizing thought in the first instance. In later contending that “the ambiguity of man as both subject and object [...] no longer seem[ed ...] a fruitful hypothesis, a fruitful theme for research”, Foucault was clearly figuring OT to be the last text of its type: a final anti-humanist manifesto of sorts deployed against the forces of anthropologization, and so effective on the historical scale.\textsuperscript{43}

Now whilst OT gained much of its popular purchase from attempting to tie this particular configuration of philosophy, resultant from the recent invention of
“man” as doublet, to the local event of humanism’s decomposition, the reality of the situation (as Foucault’s subsequent minting in 1967 of modernity’s epistemological arrangement as “anthropologico-humanist” perhaps symptomatizes), is that the very relation between the problem of anthropologization and that of humanism was in fact very poorly articulated by Foucault, if at all. That is, despite its centrality to the “death of man” thesis, precisely how Foucault’s critique of the anthropologization of modern thought translated into an effective critique of humanism proper remains—somewhat ironically given the aforementioned centrality of the notion to the text’s spectacular uptake in the humanism/anti-humanism debate—almost entirely unaddressed by Foucault. As Han-Pile would have it, “The Order of Things has succeeded so well in narrowing the meaning of ‘man’ to the empirico-transcendental double that the gap between ‘man’ and its humanist incarnations seems fairly unbridgeable. Yet for Foucault’s critique of anthropology to bite on humanism, such a gap needs to be bridged.”

If one had failed to read Foucault’s tome closely, simply following (in the aforementioned terms of Roudinesco) the media’s widespread substitution of the complexity of its account for a glorification of its “esotericity,” and its drawing of a direct causal link in this manner, the intervention of the media onto the stage of theory meant that one was in all likelihood able to confidently identify the collapse of humanism with the death of man. On the other hand, Foucault’s failure to provide “any explicit account of how the various humanist conceptions of man” were in fact related to his own account of man as “epistemic structure,” as ambiguous doublet, meant that to have effectively engaged with the text was to come away with little to no determinate means with which to effectively bridge Foucault’s critique of philosophy’s subjection to modernity’s anthropological configuration and his immense dissatisfaction with humanism proper.

Within the charged socio-political context of 1960s Paris, it is clear how the former potentiality could override the latter. Despite the sheer difficulty and irregular structure of this “terrifically uncongenial” text—“rendering itself practically impenetrable to the lay reader”—OT offered an irresistible expansion of the sense of radicality to be enjoyed from participating in a revolt against the philosophical humanism so dominant at the time. Such revolt had, to be sure, pre-existed the publication of OT in various forms, yet OT seemed to allow such participation in the local downfall of humanism and the most important thinker of post-war France in Sartre, to be identified with that of the broader collapse of a nearly two hundred year old arrangement governing the entirety of the human sciences and
philosophy as such. A serious questioning of the theoretical tenability of such a relation would therefore be confronted at each point by a number of interested parties: a sympathetic “readership” rejoicing in a newfound, expanded sense of revolt; a mass media seriously invested in maintaining that relation and so entertaining (knowingly or otherwise) the slippage of the term “man” within a largely vacuous, sloganistic formulation; not to mention a newly famous author symptomatically casting the relation, as we’ve noted, as “anthropologico-humanist” in interviews subsequent to OT’s publication.

In the glaring absence of Foucault’s explicit discussion of the problem, Han-Pile identifies three potential approaches through which a bridge could be constructed, and their respective failures in each case. First, to entertain the idea of Foucault’s having misread the humanist account of man in a manner analogous to Sartre’s aforementioned misreading of the “man” of OT seems somewhat disingenuous or “premature.” Second, to attempt to figure Sartrean man and OT’s man as in fact identical is even more problematic given, as we’ve seen, the wide disparity between the two notions. Finally, to have Foucault contend that humanism proper, and its conception of man in particular, remains determined by the epistemic structure that is “man,” faces three challenges.

Firstly, the “slippage” of anthropologization was shown by OT to be a “typical” but by no means “necessary” philosophical manoeuvre. Even though the aforementioned “contestation” between the human sciences and philosophy was, according to Foucault, “inevitable” under the epistemological arrangement of “man,” the option remained open at all times for philosophical abstinence from the “confusion of the empirical and the transcendental.” As Foucault’s earlier, posthumously published Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology—submitted in 1961 as a minor thesis and widely understood as the precursor to OT—illustrates, philosophy could and indeed did maintain itself in a critical rather than anthropologized mode (in the form of Kant’s first Critique) meaning that “there is no reason to think that the empirico-transcendental structure” in the form of doublet, “is intrinsically flawed” (a point Laruelle will seriously contest below). It is thus important to note that Foucault’s approach remains in this sense a fundamentally critical one; that one must identify OT as an extension, an attempt to shore-up the fundamental components of the strictly critical modality of philosophy. Moreover, and at the risk of further saturating this case of the philosophical divide between humanism and anti-humanism with irony, Han-Pile points out that Sartre’s early phenomenology in fact constitutes “a type of humanism more aware of the
dangers of anthropology and keen to preserve the separation of the empirical and the transcendental.”

Secondly, what Han-Pile identifies as the “implicit normativity of Foucault’s analysis,” or more precisely its vacillation between the neutral presentation of the “surface effects” of a given epistemological configuration, and an explicit isolation of humanism as the most pernicious of such surface effects—a gesture only further exaggerated in Foucault’s engagement with the media following the publication of OT—seriously problematizes the “apodictic” aspirations of Foucault’s archaeological approach and its findings, given that it leaves Foucault open to the humanist charge that he “did not practice what he preached, and that his discourse was no less normative than theirs.”

Finally, in utilizing the evident decomposition of humanism—“due in large measure to the structuralist development”—to substantiate the archaeological claim regarding the death of man as epistemic structure, Foucault falls into a viciously circular argument. He cannot deduce this demise from the mutation of Western thought’s epistemic structure, so far as such a mutation remains undetermined within his account (hence the empirical course to humanism’s decomposition as “evidence”). Foucault can only take past epistemic mutations as precedents for upcoming ones, not as sufficient causes, meaning that the death of man strictly exists only as a possibility in OT, subject to what Foucault terms his purely descriptive discourse’s “problem of causes,” and so the object of what is strictly a “wager” that man is “perhaps nearing its end”. Yet of greater concern is that to utilize the evident decomposition of humanism in such a way would be to replicate the anthropological manoeuvre that his archaeological analysis works so hard to diagnose and so condemn, for:

if one takes seriously the characterization of ‘man’ as the historical a priori which has formed the condition of possibility of knowledge since the end of the eighteenth century, then the logic which consists in using empirical observations to infer its disappearance is somewhat dubious: by definition, transcendental conditions are immune to empirical refutation.

One could retort, Han-Pile continues, that the historical dimension of man as epistemic structure (the “historical a priori” of modernity) leaves it open to modification by “empirical changes”—with the spectacular advent of OT’s publication perhaps being amongst them—but to do so would still be to privilege the causal
mode of determination characteristic of the empirical over that of the epistemic determination of the transcendental, and thus in a manner that can only be seen as replicating the anthropological manoeuvre. Intriguingly, and perhaps most importantly for our discussion below, if Foucault’s critique were to indeed be guilty in this sense it could therefore “be seen as a further development (rather than a way out)” of thought’s anthropologization: “man’ may have a greater life expectancy than anticipated.” Foucault’s attempt to supplement OT’s structural inability to clear its final hurdle by rhetorically tying the anthropological to the humanist (both within OT and, as we’ve shown, in the public domain more broadly) not only left him just as guilty of capitalizing on the hazy figuration of “man” in the death of man debate as his interlocutors, but more worryingly had him mirroring these despised objects of his enquiry.

Although it would be too simplistic to present it as a mere response or rebuke to this Foucauldian account, the non-humanism of François Laruelle intervenes at precisely this point of failed identification between the death of man and the fall of humanism, and the hermetic enclosure of the philosophical that it exhibits. Foucault’s response to humanism (in addition to those of his various anti-humanist contemporaries) is simply not sufficient for Laruelle, from whose perspective they would appear to still remain too humanist (or perhaps more precisely, too philosophistic, which remains in effect a residual humanism), whilst simultaneously and paradoxically not humanist enough.

LARUELLE’S CRITIQUE OF BOTH HUMANISTS AND ANTI-HUMANISTS

The problem is that as much as these philosophers present themselves as having undermined the mythology of the unitary philosophical subject, they still remain attached to the fundamental Parmenidean axiom that “thought and being are the Same.” In all of these accounts it is the philosopher who is able to think beyond the merely epiphenomenal representation of the subject as a unitary entity. As a consequence, this figure of the philosopher—“the human par excellence in speaking, knowing, acting” is posited as the individual who is able to think the real in the synthesis of empirical, everyday experience with the category of being that both conditions it and legislates over it. Thus, regardless of any philosopher’s specific position in regard to subjectivity, there is still a unitary locus of thought present, insofar as the philosopher presumes it possible to think the real in the terms that she or he has established. This is what Laruelle refers to as the claimed sufficiency of philosophy, whereby it is assumed that all is philosophizable, thus universaliz-
ing philosophical thought in relation to the real. Whilst the anti-humanisms of these thinkers (Althusser, Lacan, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, etc.) are accepted by Laruelle as in earnest, he questions the extent to which anti-humanism as such is capable of escaping a broader *philosophism* that still presupposes the primacy of thought *qua* being: “the confusion of One and of Being.”

At the same time though, it would seem that these approaches are still not actually humanist enough by Laruelle’s standards—or more precisely, he claims that they are still unable to think man, the human individual, in a rigorous and scientific sense. “Philosophy such as it exists, precisely because it can be an anthropology, does not know man,” he writes, “it knows the inhuman, the sub-human, the too-human, the overman, but it doesn’t know the human.”

Unlike Foucault, Laruelle has no intention of defending philosophy against the human sciences. Instead, his project of non-philosophy seeks to defend man—“ordinary man,” as he refers to it, who “really exists, and is really distinct from the World”—against both of these fields of study, because in his view philosophy, anthropology, sociology, psychology and so on and so forth all think something *other than* man. In contrast to these seemingly failed approaches, Laruelle attempts to identify ordinary man as a radically finite, immanent individual, irreducible in his multiplicity and irreplaceable in his singularity.

Philosophy, Laruelle contends, regardless of where specific philosophers see themselves as sitting on the humanist/anti-humanist divide, is guided by a desire to universalize itself by identifying the All, or totality (i.e. that which *exists*, which *is*, under the aegis of *being*) with the *real*. Philosophy thinks man, and thus thought, in terms of being (or whatever manifestation this category takes within a particular philosophy). In effect, philosophy tries to couple man to its universals. On this point, Laruelle writes:

> [i]t identifies man with generalities or attributes, with a knowledge, an activity, a race, a desire, an existence, a writing, a society, a sex; and it is once more the philosopher who pushes himself forward behind the mask of these generalities—the philosopher requisitioning man in the service of his aims and his values, which are very specific but which need the cover of the universal.

The result is that philosophy *conflates the lived experience of the ordinary man with the universalized and abstract category of being*, such that the former remains un-
thought by philosophy, because its real conditions are filtered through these universals.

Founded upon a “mixture and parallelism of man and logos,” philosophy is a mode of discourse, and accordingly its (linguistic) communicability must be assured: it is a basic principle of philosophy, albeit an unspoken one, that truth must be communicable through philosophical categories. This blending of man and logos means that rather than beginning with the solitary, contemplative individual, philosophy instead is formed in the mixture-form of two concepts: man and being. With this in mind, we can then frame the divide between humanism and anti-humanism that we explored earlier in this article. Whereas the former understands these two terms as synonymous (such that for Sartre, man is characterized by his being-for-itself and being-for-others), the latter demotes man in the name of being, revealing that man is in fact the product of some other substance or impetus (for the Foucault of O’T, man is nothing but the “reduction [...] to the structures within which he is contained”). For the anti-humanists then, man as concept is doubled between the vulgar empirical experience of the individual as given, and the superior forces that underpin this representation (as givenness): a relationship that only the philosopher can apparently perceive and synthesize.

Non-philosophy, in contrast, claims to be founded upon the truth and essence of man as the real, not merely as a being that resides within it. It is a “question of treating, from the start, the real in the strict sense as philosophically unengendered or non-constituted.” The first consequence, and the most basic axiom of non-philosophy is not so much that man exists (this is what philosophy tells us), but that man is already-given: the individual does not require the givenness of being, for they are determined and complete from the outset. This ordinary individual is both finite and inalienable. It is undivided and indivisible, preceding all forms of claimed universality, for as Laruelle notes, “all these universals [...] do not amount to even the most modest beginnings of a specific science of man, distinct from the science of historical man, speaking man, social man, psychological man, etc.” The ordinary man does not need philosophy, for he is not alienated or in need of rescue, to identify the being that lies unrecognized either within or beneath him. Laruelle notes:

"science must be unique and specific if it would be a real science and cease to be a techno-political phantasm; and it is man who must be irreducible in his multiplicity if he would cease to be this anthropological fetish, this
somewhat drab phantom that is but the shadow of the Human Sciences, that is to say of the self-screening light of Reason.\textsuperscript{72}

The unusual corollary of this is that the All is not all: man does not belong to the world, man is introduced into it, and is distinct from it. The real is not the same as the world, for non-philosophy identifies the latter as given specifically through philosophy. The non-philosophical project therefore manifests as a rather odd mode of humanism (a “non-humanism,” as we should probably refer to it, following Laruelle’s own pattern) that seeks to think a \textit{generic}, rather than merely \textit{possible} reality of man: man as \textit{the One}, rather than as being (in either the ontological or ontical sense).

\textbf{THOUGHT ACCORDING TO THE ONE}

The purpose of non-philosophy, proclaims Laruelle, is to think the radical immanence of the One, but to avoid doing so in philosophical terms, which would seek to think it in \textit{other terms}, as we have already seen; instead, he claims that non-philosophy thinks “the One insofar as it succeeds Being as well as the Other and Difference as the principal theme of thought.”\textsuperscript{73} The One, as synonymous with both the real and the ordinary man, is entirely foreclosed to thought as an object of knowledge: we do not, and cannot think about the One, he argues, without reducing it to the Other (as occurs in philosophy, which posits the real as thinkable through the transcendent givenness of being, and thus idealizes the conditions of its thought). Philosophy, although it usually asserts its capacity to think the real in itself, does not allow the real to act, for it attempts to know it (and thus interpret it) in specifically philosophical terms, and thus categorically reduces the real to the representational structure of \textit{decision}, in which the real is divided between an empirical and an ideal component. Man is thus cleaved between his everyday experience of the world and the category of being through which this experience is both conditioned and judged.

Whereas philosophy is dependent upon a \textit{reversible} causality between being and the real, such that the latter can only be thought on the basis of a synthesis of the \textit{a priori} and the empirical (an act of mediation between transcendence and immanence of which only the philosopher is capable), Laruelle instead remains committed to an understanding of the real as both radically immanent and utterly inaccessible to thought. Man is, in his account, foreclosed as an object of thought. This real, the ordinary man, the \textit{non-philosophical One}, is not a being,
nor a vector of becoming. It is not in any way manifest, and contains no transcendence, division, exteriority, or negativity. It is a unity, but does not, as in the case of the empirico-transcendental doublet, unify differences within itself (which would make it unitary—a cardinal distinction in Laruellian terminology). It is given-without-givenness; that which is already-given prior to all thought, that which is immanent only to itself and in itself. Unlike prior philosophers, whose ideas demand communicability, the One does not need to be described in any manner. For non-philosophy then, we don’t attempt to think about the One, nor even to describe—for in trying to do this, we inevitably represent it as an object in a manner that would make it determinable by thought—but rather, we think according to the One.

This, then, is not a humanism premised upon the attempt to know or understand what the human being is; on the contrary, it is based upon a force of thought immanent to man, unalienated by the transcendence of philosophical categories. To think about philosophy from the finitude of the One, and thus of man in his most ordinary form—a perspective that Laruelle refers to as vision-in-One, and which “determines non-philosophy [...] as a positive practice of philosophy rather than as something that would subtract itself from philosophy’s self-sufficiency”—is to think it from a perspective which suspends its sufficiency in order to treat it as inert “material.” Philosophy thus provides non-philosophy with the data from which it operates, transformed into simple phenomena, the latter operating through a mode of thought appropriate to the real, and where philosophy “can no longer be the presupposition (in the traditional sense) of this thought,” for “it is only its presupposition without auto-position,” relative to the real. Suddenly, philosophy finds itself no longer in a position of presumed sufficiency (and hence primacy), but instead, on an equal footing with those regional (i.e. extra-philosophical) phenomena over which it once claimed dominion. The “auto-decoupage of the philosophical body,” surrounding it with the trophies of those extra-philosophical ontologies over which its superiority is given and self-evident, is utterly suspended.

The object of non-philosophy is therefore not experience, but these various regional knowledges and practices with which such experience is given and situated, presenting itself as a transcendental modality of thought in relation to these knowledges. Its purpose is “to deprive philosophy of its transcendental claim over the real and to tightly fasten it to experience,” such that philosophy becomes the simple a priori of all possible experience. All philosophy attempts to think the real (and hence the One, for the real is always thought philosophically in a
unitary manner), but when thought from the perspective of vision-in-One, what is revealed is the way in which this attempt actually stymies the heterogeneity of thought, for the latter (in its non-philosophical guise) is not a being, but rather, determines-in-the-last-instance all thought of being. The non-philosophical One, unlike the categories of philosophical transcendence, cannot be exhausted or alienated, for it is in all cases already-given. It is not an excess, it does not over-flow. Likewise, as we have already seen, whilst we can attempt to describe the One (either non-philosophically through axioms, or philosophically through decision), the One has no need of this description in order for it to be real. When we speak of ordinary individuals, we are speaking of “real essences, lived in experiences that are pre-political, pre-linguistic, etc.—true immediate givens.” Determination-in-the-last-instance is thus the unilateral determination of philosophy by the One.

This determination, which forms the transcendental condition for philosophy as material, is entirely irreversible: philosophy does not determine the real at all. Observes Alexander Galloway:

Laruelle’s “last” is not a chronological last, nor is it “last” like a trump card (which is always played last). It is a messianic last. Laruelle’s last philosophy is last only in the sense of “the last instance,” an immanent and finite last-ness that trumps nothing, supersedes nothing, and indeed is not a “meditation” at all in the proper sense of the term as reflection-on or consciousness-of. Rather, Laruelle’s in-the-last-instance means roughly “in the most generic sense”. Laruelle’s messianism is therefore neither ancient nor modern, neither special nor particular. But merely generic. The last, the least, the finite.

Non-philosophy aims “to refuse philosophy its principal pretension and to be entitled to say that it does not reach the real, even if necessarily maintaining certain relations with it.” Not to negate or revolt against philosophy, nor to replace it, but to bring it down a peg or two, so to speak. The causal (non-)relationship thus established, whereby the One gives philosophy without philosophy giving it anything in return is referred to as a unilateral duality. Truth, in a non-philosophical sense, is not a knowledge, a concept, an intuition, or a mode of phenomenological perception—it is a process of thought that gives-without-givenness. It is a truth, Laruelle argues, involving a radical indifference to the world, premised upon a real which is “absolutely distinct from and even indifferent to empirico-ideal reality,” and thus the effectivity of philosophical decision.
It is important to note at this point that the One, in its non-philosophical manifestation, is not the totality of all that exists (the solipsistic or sophistic position), for existence itself (i.e. the state of being) is a philosophical category. Philosophy, as we have already witnessed, is characterized by the Parmenidean conflation of thought and being: the presumption that all is by its very nature philosophizable. Accordingly, whilst it was only Kant who first explicitly identified and formalized this connection, making being inseparable from thought through the identification of an unknowable thing-in-itself that literally cannot be thought, and thus identifying a realm apparently unable to be colonized by philosophical ideality—a position that Quentin Meillassoux infamously designates correlationism, “the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other”—it would seem that, contra Foucault, this suture is not necessarily an innovation in Kant’s critical project: all philosophy, in its mixture of the empirical and the ideal, necessitates the codetermination of thought and being. Kant merely uses this identification in order to shore up his own credentials, and those of philosophy more broadly: it is only the philosopher, he infers, who is able to at least somewhat resist the temptations of reason and keep him or herself wedded to the true objects of knowledge.

The real, writes Laruelle, is “like Kant’s ‘thing-in-itself’: unknowable and even unthinkable, but with the difference that it is not so from transcendence but from immanence (the One and not the Other) foreclosed.” Non-philosophy seeks to pull apart the Parmenidean (correlationist) ligature, such that thought becomes the necessary condition of being. The result is that the One and the real are best understood as the inalienable and immanent identity of the individual human ego: “[n]on-philosophy ‘postulates’ that the Ego is already revealed through-and-through in its proper mode before the manifestation of being and thought.” This does not mean, however, that the One is equivalent to the transcendental subject of post-Kantian philosophy; conversely, the subject, from the perspective of force-(of)-thought, is determined-in-the-last-instance by the ego, and it is this ego—the ordinary man—that we understand as the One.

Non-philosophy is, therefore, an attempt to develop a new theory of man: one in which the ordinary individual exists as the radically immanent, necessary but insufficient condition of all thought. This individual is human but also non-human, in that they are foreclosed to all thought, all language, and all representation that might ascribe the qualities we would normally associate with the human being.
upon them. Man, according to this account, is just an axiom, rather than a concept or the object of a concept. We do not describe him, but we act as him. The ordinary, inalienable man, as distinct from the world which philosophy claims he inhabits, is the real. The ego precedes being and thought. The result, in summary, is an odd brand of humanism: one that seeks to preserve the individuality of the ordinary man by foreclosing our ability to speak of him—refusing to allow man to be reduced to an object of knowledge. The One, as the ordinary man, is that which is unspeakable, incommunicable, and thus unphilosophizable, but which forms the necessary but insufficient condition for philosophy. Rather than claiming a knowledge of man, non-philosophy provides an “ignorance where natural, popular consciousness inheres,” prioritizing the emergence of thought in its diversity and multiplicity over its colonization by philosophy.86

LARUELLE AND FOUCALUT

From this discussion above, Laruelle can be seen to figure his approach in a manner parallel to that of Foucault, offering not only a diagnosis of the problems at hand, but in turn attempting to actively participate in the very process of mutating thought, to effect a transition from the circularity of “the unitary paradigm.”87 Accordingly, he clearly echoes a number of concerns central to OT, such as that of the circularity inimical to the doublet form, the philosophical proximity to the anthropological, and the threats posed by the human sciences in particular to science. Yet it is in this last instance that the point of differentiation between the two is perhaps most clear, as articulated in Laruelle’s declaration that “[w]e shall not take up the old combat: defending philosophy against the human sciences”—or what, in OT, would equate to a defence of the critical formulation of philosophy against the anthropological slippage—“[r]ather, we defend man against this authoritarian family in league against him.”88 More specifically, Laruelle shed some further light on the relation between his non-humanism and OT in a recent interview, when noting the moment in which

little by little, I identified the Principle of Sufficient Philosophy, and above all its form, its expression [...] the doublet form of philosophy. Foucault identified a transcendental-empirical doublet. But that's not all—there is a second, transcendental-real, doublet, which we can see at work in Kant, in Heidegger. There are two doublets, three or four terms.89
In so adopting the doublet form and extending it beyond Foucault’s comparatively localized critique to philosophy tout court in the form of the principle of sufficient philosophy, of philosophy’s reliance on the reciprocal determination of two “partially undetermined” parameters or “terms,”90 Foucault’s own position—or, more specifically, his struggle in attempting to bridge his account of the death of man as epistemic structure to the decomposition of humanism—would come under the purview of this principle. This is to be seen, we contend, in what would amount to Laruelle’s responses to each of the three aforementioned challenges OT would face in attempting to bridge the gap between the death of man as epistemic structure, and the evident demise of humanism—what, we contend, equates in each instance to an effective “trumping” of Foucault’s response in this particular book to humanism.

Firstly, the ongoing tenability of the doublet structure in philosophy, only entertained in OT through an emphasis of its potential but not necessary enabling of an anthropological inversion of the critical formulation (and thus limited to post-Kantian philosophy), is maintained by Laruelle’s expansion of the range of doublet form so as to figure the circular, self-sufficient manoeuvre of reciprocal determination (regardless of a particular philosophy’s “terms”) to be characteristic of the philosophical, as the primary symptom of unitary thought. Furthermore, the fact that, as Han-Pile points out, Sartre’s early phenomenology constitutes “a type of humanism more aware of the dangers of anthropology and keen to preserve the separation of the empirical and the transcendental,”91 strengthens Laruelle’s point regarding the hermetic nature of philosophical revolt in this sense, with revolt remaining precisely philosophical.92

Secondly, the “implicit normativity” of Foucault’s analysis, opening it to a possible charge of formally mirroring the humanist manoeuvre of reifying the image of man as synonymous with a self-present interiority of thought, finds a drastic rebuttal in Laruelle’s suspension of philosophy’s auto-position and auto-donation, not only figuring philosophy as just another regional knowledge, but safely avoiding the privileging of man in his rendering the latter entirely foreclosed to, and in a position of unilateral determination with, thought proper.

These previous two points come to combine in the third Laruellian response to the challenges faced by OT. The fact that the circular relation articulated between the evident fall of humanism (an empirical matter) and the transcendental matter of the death of man as epistemic structure replicates the very structure of anthro-
polologization by effectively inverting the critical relation between the empirical events and their transcendental conditions, would seem to, again, validate the Laruellian diagnosis of the philosophical as always-already operative in line with the principle of sufficient philosophy. That even in an attempt to exit from the philosophical arrangement that forms the philosophical object of its philosophical critique, philosophy cannot help but repeat the fundamental components of the latter’s gesture. If, as Han-Pile contends, man as epistemic structure, as empirico-transcendental doublet, can indeed then expect a greater life expectancy than bestowed upon him by the closing wager of OT, Laruelle would not be in a position to disagree; indeed, he needn’t do so, for in bestowing upon “his” “ordinary man” a lengthy lifespan, philosophy and the epistemic structure that determines it (and its particular treatment of man) continues on resigned to the level of regional knowledges, determined in the last instance by a real entirely foreclosed to it.

CONCLUSION

Laruelle thus offers not only an innovative (although obviously still highly contestable) means for analysing philosophical doxa, but also an important and timely provocation regarding the place of man in philosophy, and in discourse more generally: in short, non-philosophy asks whether in trying so hard to categorize, classify, and circumscribe the attributes of the human being, we have consistently failed to embrace the full possibilities of human thought, inasmuch as they are irreducible to the adjectival idiom of philosophical communication. Although in this article we have focused chiefly upon his analysis within a single essay (“A Rigorous Science of Man”) from his Philosophy II period, we nonetheless believe that the tendencies identified manifest, in a roughly consistent manner, across his oeuvre. In Principles of Non-Philosophy, for instance, the key text of Philosophy III (the subsequent period in which he would self-consciously attempt to expunge non-philosophy of its more crudely scientistic impulses), Laruelle describes one of his objectives to be the “democratic humanization of thought,” placing “the Real at the heart of man or man at the heart of the Real rather than one at the periphery of the other as philosophy itself does.”

Across the variegations of Laruelle’s writings, what does remain stable is his commitment to this humanism or humanization, and the attendant desire to develop a true science of man: man as the Name-of-Man, a generic humanity; man as the Stranger-subject, gazing dispassionately toward the world; man as Man-in-person, the identity in the last instance of all religious experience; man as the Christ-
subject, the saviour of the world from the world; man as Man-without-Essence, foreclosed of alienation; man as Victim-in-person, the necessary but insufficient condition for any justice; even man as uni-sexual, irreducible in the last instance to all sexual differentiation. As he puts it in Anti-Badiou (from Philosophy V, the most recent period of his work), non-philosophy replaces all philosophical hierarchies “with a defense, in every case, of humans, and not of philosophy,” and complementarily, “the universal defense of humans qua generic subjects, a principle of minimizing the inevitable harm done to philosophy and to the modes of thought that are subordinate to it.” This is a celebration of humanity as always already given-in-Man.

At the same time though, further discussion is still needed, reflecting upon the occlusions that potentially exist within this project and might jeopardize its proposed (non-)humanism and its engagement with the broader debate surrounding humanism and the status of man. For Laruelle’s identification of the One—that within which all ontologies, discourses, knowledges, and practices find their identity in the last instance—with the human would seem to be in its own right a form of decision (even taking into account non-philosophy’s self-professed reliance on a contingent philosophical lexicon in order to support its own practice) that is in some sense fatally arbitrary in its investment of the Laruellian real “with a minimal degree of ontological consistency,” so compromising any subsequent championing of a truly generic Real, stripped of all philosophical attributes.

This constitutes the key dissatisfaction for Ray Brassier in his treatment of the Laruellian project (with which he sympathizes, but of which he is also highly critical). Brassier draws attention to a fundamental distinction, elsewhere upheld in Laruelle’s work, between claiming to be “identical-in-the-last-instance with,” “think[ing] in accordance with” or having “my thinking [...] determined-in-the-last instance by [the real],” and that of actually being “the real qua One.” For Brassier, “[t]o privilege, as Laruelle does, the irrecusability of the ‘name-of-man’ over and above the contingency of other occasional nominations of the last-instance, is effectively to confuse the real with its symbol,” and to do so in a manner, we might add, formally comparable to the aforementioned instance of “implicit normativity” to be seen in Foucault’s archaeological analysis, where the neutral presentation of the “surface effects” of a given epistemological configuration is abandoned for an explicit isolation of humanism as the most pernicious of such surface effects. Strictly speaking, “[w]hat I think I am can have no privilege vis-à-vis the identity of a real already given independently of anything I may hap-
pen to think about it,” if the identity of the real as entirely foreclosed to such a determination is to maintain this fundamental “characteristic” as such, just as the fall of a pernicious humanism cannot be isolated as the preeminent instance of a mutation at the archaeological level of epistemological configurations, if the level of apodictic neutrality aspired to in the archaeological approach, is to be upheld.

The descriptive power and broader cogency afforded their respective projects by Laruelle and Foucault’s approaches of ‘neutrality’ with respect to their respective ‘objects,’ is thus compromised in both instances upon attempting to enter into and, in doing so, actively resolve the debate surrounding humanism. The specificity of the normative claim upon which such an entry is rendered relevant simultaneously and immediately threatens to shatter the broader cogency of the archaeological and non-philosophical systems respectively, at the precise point they each attempt to become an active participant in the debate. The respectively apodictic and “scientific” aspirations of Foucault’s and Laruelle’s responses to the debate surrounding humanism thus seem to constitute the price of entry in the first instance, suggesting we must constantly take stock of the points at which such theories fall back into the philosophical tendencies that they each claim to suspend.

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NOTES

1. We’d both like to thank Justin Clemens for his assistance in the process of drafting this article, as well as for chairing and supporting the conference panel from which it originated.
5. Miller, Passion, 148.
7. Miller, Passion, 158.
9. Miller, Passion, 158.
11. Qtd. in Miller, Passion, 44. There was a balance to be struck in Foucault’s playing the role of anti-humanism’s most prominent representative against the established authority of Sartre for, as Miller continues: “Foucault later asked that these comments be edited out of the program before it was broadcast. When an unedited transcript of the interview was nevertheless published subsequently by mistake, he blew up. Addressing an angry letter to the offending magazine, Foucault was humility incarnate: ‘I think that the vast oeuvre of Sartre as well as his action, will mark an epoch. It is true that many today are working in another direction. I would not allow anyone to compare—particularly in order to oppose them—the minor historical and methodological spade work that I have undertaken with an oeuvre like his.’”
12. Han-Pile, “The ‘Death of Man’”, 123; 135.
14. “The interlocutor bore many of the characteristics of Sartre, as would have been evident to readers […]. A virtual Sartre and Foucault thus collided on terms dictated by Foucault. Their choreographed verbal confrontation over what had or had not been achieved in the preceding chapters gave Foucault the opportunity to move beyond reaction, and to take his attack directly to Sartre.” Eric Paras, Foucault 2.0: Beyond Power and Knowledge. New York: Other Press, 2006, 38. See Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language. Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972, 199-211.
24. Heidegger conceives of humanism as a particularly Roman formulation, which sought to distinguish homo humanus from homo barbarus by way of the cultivation of virtue through education, the mantle for which they had inherited from the Greeks. He notes that the form of humanism which is revived during the Renaissance is directly related to this earlier Roman humanism, insofar as it filters the works of Greek civilization through a specifically Roman lens, distinguishing the humanist scholar against the barbarity of medieval scholasticism.
32. Han-Pile, “The ‘Death of Man’”, 126. (Original emphasis.)
33. Han-Pile, “The ‘Death of Man’”, 126.
34. Foucault, “Who are you”, 93.
41. Han-Pile, “The ‘Death of Man’”, 126.
42. Foucault, The Order of Things, 348.
43. Foucault, “Who are you”, 93. OT, of course, exhibits a clearly Heideggerian tenor in this sense. The text as a whole could indeed, somewhat crudely, be seen to complement its “strong affinities with the unfolding of epochs in the history of Being” with the Bachelardian epistemological break, capitalising on the revolutionary capacities open to evocation through the former once coming to bear directly on the philosophical. On the relation between OT and

44. Foucault, “Who are you”, 93; qtd. in Han-Pile, “The ‘Death of Man’”, 128.
45. Han-Pile, “The ‘Death of Man’”, 129.
46. Han-Pile, “The ‘Death of Man’”, 135.
47. Paras, *Foucault 2.0*, 19.
49. Han-Pile, “The ‘Death of Man’”, 129.
50. Han-Pile, “The ‘Death of Man’”, 129.
53. This identification of Foucault as philosopher remains a point of contention in the literature. For an overview of what is at stake in this debate, see Gary Gutting’s review of Han’s *Foucault’s Critical Project*, Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews, https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/23402-foucaults-critical-project/ (accessed March 18, 2015); and her response: http://privateww.essex.ac.uk/~beatrice/Gutting%20_answer_%202003-05.pdf (accessed March 18, 2015). See too Marc Djaballah’s use of the distinction between the Kantian doctrine and the “idea of criticism” in his exploration of Foucault’s relation to Kant throughout the former’s career, in *Kant, Foucault, and Forms of Experience*, New York: Routledge, 2008, 1-22.
55. Han-Pile, “The ‘Death of Man’”, 133.
56. Foucault, “Who are you”, 93.
57. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xiii.
58. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 387. (Emphasis added.)
59. Han-Pile, “The ‘Death of Man’”, 134.
60. Han-Pile, “The ‘Death of Man’”, 134.
61. Han-Pile, “The ‘Death of Man’”, 135.
64. *Suffisance* in French meaning not only “adequacy,” but also “vanity” or “self-importance.”
69. Foucault, “Who are you”, 93.
70. Laruelle, “A Rigorous Science”, 64.
77. In Laruelle’s writings there is a sharp distinction between the transcendental and the a priori that we do not find in Kant or Husserl: whilst the transcendental founds the force-(of)-thought by which non-philosophy is able to suspend the auto-position of philosophical decision (in his later writings, this is effectuated via the process of cloning), the a priori is by contrast the state of said decision once this suspension has occurred, transformed into an inert material.
78. Laruelle, *Principles*, 47.
82. Laruelle, *Principles*, 56.
88. Laruelle, “A Rigorous Science”, 35. (Emphasis added.)
91. Han-Pile, “The ‘Death of Man’”, 132-3.
92. Laruelle opens “A Rigorous Science of Man” with the following: “There is every reason to revolt against philosophers. But to what end? Is revolt its own reason, one more reason? Isn’t it philosophers who, dispensing reason, and in particular the reasons for revolt, dispense revolt? Should we not finally cease to revolt, founding our existence on a firm yet tolerant indifference toward philosophy?” See Laruelle, “A Rigorous Science”, 33.
Bataille was a key figure in twentieth-century Paris, closely associated with initial French Nietzscheanism and connected to Lacan, the “French Freud.” Bataille’s work can be viewed as a synthesis of the Dionysian wisdom of Nietzsche and the mindfulness of the sexual real made possible by Freud.¹ This article considers how the ethics of desire and “the real” emerging from Lacan’s clinic is augmented by the erotics of the real in Bataille’s “taboo-transgression” relation definitively formulated across his 1957 *Eroticism*—following his earlier 1949 treatments in *The Accursed Share*,³ and 1930s encounter with the anthropology of Marcel Mauss.⁴ Assisting this is Lacan’s 1959-60 *Ethics* Seminar VII statement that an ethics must go “more deeply into the notion of the real”—rather than “the ideal,” as per the “superficial opinion” of Western moralism.⁵ Then there is Nietzsche’s 1886 *Beyond Good and Evil* declaration that with “intrepid Oedipus eyes” we ought to examine human nature as we have “the rest of nature,” “to translate man back into nature,” such that with “Odysseus ears” we are “deaf to the siren songs” of another world accessible as a puritan soul.⁶

Invoked between Lacan and Nietzsche is a real ethics, of the real—as opposed to an imaginary ethics, caught in the imaginary. What Bataille enables is focus on how taboo structures of morality can be transgressed in a complimentary erotic process that returns to the rest of nature—to the real of nature as jouissance⁷—and how pre-Platonic cultures developed sacred rituals for its structured affirmation.
I argue that an ethics of the real—of *drives* beyond usual pleasures—restores *openness* to the originary erotics observable in pre-Platonic Greeks. By tracing a *loss* of eroticism through the subsequent Platonic, Christian, and Modern Science epochs that Nietzsche’s revaluations of the Good centre on, emerging is an extended genealogical understanding of why the brothels of Paris, for instance, become for Bataille true churches again.\(^8\)

### 1. PRE-HISTORIC TRANSITION FROM ANIMAL TO HUMAN … TO TRAGIC

This section illuminates Bataille’s taboo-transgression relation in terms of Lacan’s *episteme* of the real, symbolic, and imaginary—clarifying the latter with the nature-to-culture, or *animal-to-human* and back-again dynamic that in Bataille entails transgression. Then Nietzsche is invoked for how the tragic-age of the Greeks masters this *correlative* process of taboo-**and**-transgression through a religious-erotic later lost with Plato and Christianity.

In *Eroticism* and *Accursed Share*, Bataille depicts our Palaeolithic “transition from animal to human” (E, 30) as occurring through *taboos* on aspects of nature pertaining to sex and death, equating these with “violence” (E, 40). He notes that by taboo we build “the rational world” but there remains “an undercurrent of violence”; for “Nature herself is violent”—especially for the “rational being” that “tries to obey” but “succumbs to stirrings within” insufficiently brought “to heel” (E, 40). For Bataille it is via “negation of nature” (AS, II:61), our “‘No’ to nature” (E, 61)—as “the animal that does not just accept the facts of nature” but “contradicts them” (E, 214)—that we first transition from animal to human, creating a culture *out* of nature. Bataille registers such negations not only on licentiousness and murder but on dejecta, nudity, corpses, and blood (E, 54)—humanising a world of work founded on respect for taboos, awareness of mortality, and concomitant developments of tools for controlling and understanding nature through a lengthening “chain of cause and effect” (E, 44).\(^9\)

This new world, said by Bataille to “cut” us “off from violence which tended in the opposite direction” (E, 45), is the *symbolic* register of Lacan. This is the register of *language* used to communicate law, morality, knowledge, and reason made possible by space created by taboo, to found an *order of things* that every newborn repeats our species entry into.\(^10\) “Besides,” Bataille remarks, “what are children if not animals becoming human” (AS, II:65)—where Freud also notes how “something quite similar occurred” in “the individual’s existence” and “the
prehistoric epoch of the species as a whole,” at “the beginnings of morality, religion and social order”—recapitulating how for Bataille “these interminable millennia correspond with man’s slow shaking-off of his original animal nature,” how “he emerged from it by working, by understanding his own mortality and by moving imperceptibly from unashamed sexuality to sexuality with shame, which gave birth to eroticism” (E, 31).

With this erotic we come to the brute fact of instinctual existence that “what comes under the effect of repression returns […] in symptoms and a host of other phenomena,” as Lacan put it—for “they are its expected complement,” Bataille adds, “just as explosion follows upon compression,” where “compression is not subservient to the explosion, far from it; it gives it increased force” (E, 65). Here we discover transgression, which, as complementarity with taboo, Bataille attributes to the “oral teaching” of Mauss, whose printed work bore it out “only in a small number of significant sentences” (E, 65). Bataille notes how impetus for transgression comes from the object of taboo gaining an erotic hue as desire dams up, making it the paradoxical object of anguish and awe that lifts primitive mind onto the religious plane.

This plane is the imaginary register, linked to the post-symbolic sense of the real in Lacan often contracted simply as “the real” given its strikingness, as indicated by his Seminar XVII remark on “shame”: “You know from me that this means the real.” This shame if not “anxiety, signal of the real,” suggests prior operation of taboo on the real, and with Bataille we can clarify that the real here, as object of anxious-erotic shame, is not just nature but us returning to it—or it returning to us—having been uprooted but remaining “still uprooted” as “the first uprooting is not obliterated” (AS, II:90), rendering the nature returning transfigured in the imaginary into something “poetic and divine though animal” (E, 153).

Bataille’s warning is to “not be misled by the appearance of a return by man to nature” (AS, II:90). He describes it as “the natural world mingled with the divine” through “the human world, shaped by a denial of animality or nature, denying itself, though not returning to what it had rejected in the first place” (E, 85). Later he adds: “the sacred world is nothing but the natural world persisting insofar as it cannot be entirely reduced to the order laid down by work”—“it transcends” (E, 114-5). And here we get another illumination of the post-symbolic sense of the real in Lacan, what Bataille calls “the concrete totality of the real” in his own search for “terminological exactness” (AS, II:117)—to include the real’s returning of the
metaphorising affects in the mind’s sacred-sublime imaginary, which is how for Bataille “our animal nature preserves the values of subjective experience” (E, 158).

Bataille articulates this in the context of the festival in *Accursed Share*. In a section headed “The Festival Is Not Just a Return to One’s Vomit,” returning nature is characterised in terms of the “meaning” it invokes when impulses we ordinarily “refuse” become sanctioned (AS, II:90). “In any case,” he writes, “these impulses cannot be mistaken for those of animals” (AS, II:90), given the complex of narratives unfolding. For making use of his striking heading he notes that what we return to has the “opposite meaning” to “a return by man to his vomit” (AS, II:90), to something expelled through nausea or disgust that remains as such thereafter.

Lacan and Nietzsche are relevant here—both of whom, in opposition to Plato, have praise for Greek tragedy because of the depths of its meaning-making wisdom which enables not just release but mindfulness, too. For “the hero trembles before nothing,” Lacan observes, “crossing not only all fear but all pity,” showing “where the pole of desire is” such that “the subject learns a little more about the deepest level” (SVII, 323). For Nietzsche it is thus an ecstatic victory, a “display of fearlessness in the face of the fearsome and questionable.” And Bataille concurs in noting that “classical tragedy” is “most engaging when the character of the hero leads” to “destruction,” looking at it “straight in the face,” where “here eroticism is analogous to a tragedy” as taboos are transgressed “at the price of a sacrifice” (AS, II:107, 109, 119). This recalls the “joy in destruction,” in “sacrifice of its highest types” (TI, X:5), that was for Nietzsche the Dionysian tragic-effect, but also Freud’s noting that “in tragedy” we “do not spare the spectators” “the most painful experiences” that “can yet be felt by them as highly enjoyable”—through “an instinct of mastery,” where repeating the real is to “master of the situation” (SE, 18:16-7). This drives beyond usual pleasures, limited by taboo, such that we are deepened, extended. And it is thus that Nietzsche concludes, when thinking of our pre-Platonic Greeks, that “Pleasure in tragedy characterises strong ages and natures.”

This strength pertains to the paradox where, Bataille observes, we negate our dependence on animality yet fail, “for this negation is fictitious” (AS, II:92). The fiction, however, cuts both ways, for although in transgression we seem then to be “renouncing independence,” we are in the sovereignty of the drives part of “the culmination of a movement toward autonomy which is,” for Bataille, “forevermore, the same thing as man himself” (AS, II:91). But this double-autonomy of taboo-
and-transgression was lost in the deference to Socrates of Plato, which set itself against the erotic-real and sought no truck with it—fixing the gaze on a Good made Sovereign such that we, beneath its awnings, would become reduced to slaves.

2. PLATONIC DUALISM AND THE DEATH OF TRAGEDY IN EURIPIDES

Lacan’s commentaries on Nietzsche’s texts are few—so it is imperative to register his Transference Seminar position that “undoubtedly Nietzsche put his finger on it” in pointing to a “profound incompetence of Socrates every time he touches on this subject of tragedy,” that “all Nietzsche’s subsequent work came from there” (SVIII, 6:5). This section explores Nietzsche’s critique of Euripides in The Birth of Tragedy for allowing Socrates’ influence to destroy tragedy’s Dionysian basis. This will capture the taboo-transgression relation shifting to its distorted Platonic form, where the imaginary of the Good seeks to buttress the symbolic over-against the real, as if to repress across all times.

In Bataillean terms, Nietzsche finds Euripides using tragedy not anymore to transgress taboos but to reinforce them, shifting from taboo-and-transgression to taboo-on-transgression by making tragedy self-conscious and moral-rational, requiring not brief suspension but continuing of taboo. This is such for Nietzsche that although Euripides’ final The Bacchae—written “in the evening of his life”19—has Dionysos, god of transgression, retuning to destroy those who denied him, it is more a return of the repressed as repressed than a sublimated outlet ennobled by the “shining one,” Apollo, to whom Nietzsche has Dionysos paired.20

To explain this pairing, Nietzsche notes that “the immense gap which separates the Dionysian Greek from the Dionysian barbarian”—with its “savage natural instincts unleashed,” “horrible witches brew of sensuality and cruelty” and “extravagant sexual licentiousness” (BT, 2)—is the moderation of Apollo to beautify, subject to measure, lucidity and “self-knowledge,” so there was “nothing in excess” (BT, 4).21 Alas for Euripides, “the deity that spoke through him was neither Dionysos nor Apollo, but an altogether newborn demon, called Socrates (BT, 12)”—who, for Nietzsche, was “that other spectator who did not comprehend tragedy and therefore did not esteem it” (BT, 11), whose “moralism” (TI, II:10) was thus other to any affirmation of the drives in their inscrutable realness. “And because you had abandoned Dionysos, Apollo had abandoned you” (BT, 10), Nietzsche calls to Euripides directly—for by The Bacchae, “when the poet recanted, his tendency had already triumphed. Dionysos had already been scared from the stage” (BT,
Nietzsche senses the symptom in Euripides’ depiction of the fury wrought by Dionysos on Thebes because it is “what we are told by a poet who opposed Dionysos with heroic valour throughout a long life—and who finally ended his career with a glorification of his adversary and with suicide, like a giddy man who, to escape the horrible vertigo he can no longer endure, casts himself from a tower” (BT, 12). Occurring here through Bataille’s optic is the denial of periodic rituals for transgression such that when normally refused animal needs do return, it is with an excess of violence beyond the pale of Apollonian control.

Something is lost in the structure of taboo-and-transgression, with, Nietzsche notes, “cool, paradoxical thoughts, replacing Apollonian contemplation— and fiery affects, replacing Dionysian ecstasies” (BT, 12). Lacan also noted the societies that previously “lived very well by reference to laws that are far from promoting their universal application,” but rather “prosper as a result of the transgression of these maxims” (SVII, 78). This is the “potlatch” of Mauss, where, Lacan observes, “open destruction” enables a “maintenance and discipline of desire” (SVII, 235). But with Socrates’ intervention on tragedy, thanks to Plato’s subsequent writings in philosophy, we enter what Lacan calls “the longest transference” “the history of thought has known” (SVIII, 1:4). Transference is a belief-state projected onto an analyst as the one “supposed to know.” And with Plato’s Socratic transference, the profound incompetence within was later adopted by Christendom such that when it came to tragedy, it “didn’t know” (SVII, 236), as neither do we, as this transference eventually becomes our own.

Bataille characterises this loss of sacred-erotic transgression as the “dualist evolution” in his 1948 Theory of Religion, published posthumously in 1973— also taking this up in his 1949 Accursed Share (AS, II:133) and 1957 Eroticism (E, 122) when critiquing Christianity. Now we can locate this binary dualist turn, where Dionysos is bad and Apollo good, such that transgression cannot allow proper return from the latter to the former, to the death of tragedy through Socrates— acting as both “agent” and “symptom,” Nietzsche observes, of “the dissolution of Greece” (TI, II:2), which was subsequently universalised in Plato.

In Birth of Tragedy Nietzsche senses what would irk a Euripides, Socrates, or Plato in Greek religion where it bore “accents of an exuberant, triumphant life in which all things, whether good or evil [böse], are deified”— such that “whoever
approaches these Olympians with another religion in his heart,” searching not for aesthetic beauty but only “moral elevation,” “disincarnate spirituality,” or “charity and benevolence, will soon be forced to turn his back on them, discouraged and disappointed, for there is nothing here that suggests asceticism” (BT, 3). The subsequent substitution of the ascetic for the aesthetic by Platonism is the “dual attitude” (E, 138) disclosed by Bataille, for “originally, in the divine world, the beneficent and pure elements opposed the malefic and impure elements, and both types appeared equally distinct from the profane,” only then, in “a dominant movement of reflective thought, the divine appears linked to purity, the profane to impurity” (TR, 69), as “the divine becomes rational and moral and relegates the malefic sacred to the sphere of the profane” (TR, 72).

Bataille calls this “dualism” of puritan-sacred and impure-profane “a shifting of boundaries and an overturning of values” as before, an “immanent sacred is predicated on the animal intimacy of man,” accessible in transgression, “whereas the profane world is predicated on the transcendence of the object, which has no intimacy,” relying on taboo for “manipulation of objects,” “relations with objects, or with subjects regarded as objects” through “reason and morality” (TR, 71). Then with Plato, although neither he nor Socrates is named here by Bataille, “the intellect or concept” is “situated outside time, is defined as a sovereign order, to which the world of things is subordinated, just as it subordinated the gods of mythology” so that only “the intelligible world has the appearance of the divine”—“forever separated from the world of the senses,” “outside” and “opposite the sensuous world” (TR, 73).

This dualism is deepened genealogically through critique of Socrates-Euripides: For this also “brought the masses onto the stage” (BT, 80), Nietzsche notes, with their “civic mediocrity, on which Euripides built all his political hopes,” so that gone were the “demigod,” the “drunken satyr,” the “formerly only grand and bold traits”—replaced with the herd that “philosophised, managed land and goods, and conducted lawsuits with unheard of circumspection” (BT, 11).

Life increasingly imitates this new art as new ideals buttress, from the Good beyond the sky, the symbolic over-against the real to repress at all times. For Bataille this is what “reintroduces evil as a major force,” when repressions fail and the repressed returns, as “the sleep of dualism is also a reduction to the order of things that leaves no opening except toward a return to violence” (TR, 79). Lacan’s Transference Seminar reading of Plato’s Symposium is also relevant, where
Socrates’ preaching of an Eros cleansed of flesh, that inflates Diotima’s ladder of love up towards the Good, is met with the return of a drunken Alcibiades, Socrates’ pupil and beloved, to raze this dualism to the ground. This is for Lacan the “irruption of the real” (SVIII, 5:2), which, despite the “fascinating mirage” and “beautiful stories” about a “world beyond,” “is enough to brings us back to it as it really is” (SVIII, 9:9).

How It really is was wonderfully metaphorised by the Olympian deities—and staged in the Apollo-Dionysos dynamic—prior to the Platonic whitewash that meant the real could only return of the banal dialectic between neurosis-and-perversion, like the Socrates-and-Alcibiades show of Symposium, akin to what Nietzsche at Athens’ decline called “two decadence movements running side by side.” Alcibiades becomes the barbarian Dionysos of Euripides, repressed by Socrates instead of moderated by Apollo so bent on destruction, which is why for Lacan Alcibiades is “the demon of Socrates” (SVIII, 11:13), embodying the artificially elided elements of “the real gods” that could appear “in the rock of scandal,” such as “stealing, cheating, adultery” (SVIII, 11:12-3). But without sufficient outlet for the drives, all of this would worsen in the Christendom to come, which Bataille will decry as the “sovereignty of taboos” at their most “clear cut” (E, 136), as “absolute” (E, 126), which only “deepened the degree of sensual disturbance by forbidding organised transgression” (E, 127).

3. CHRISTIANITY AND TABOO ON TRANSGRESSION ABSOLUTE

To understand Christianity Nietzsche’s genealogy traces to its Hebraic roots. Here I combine it with Lacan’s own analysis to explore Bataille’s apropos of taboo-transgression. The key for this is Lacan’s Seminar XVII invoking of “Yahweh’s ferocious ignorance” of “sexual knowledge,” and “religious practices” blending “supernatural agencies” with these aspects of “nature itself” (SXVII, 136). For although unlike his later Christian version Yahweh exhibits violence, this impure is already not libido. Lacan’s acumen in tracing this denaturalising path is to see in Freud’s thesis of a primal-father’s murder and repetition on Moses, then Jesus, a hysterics myth to “castrate” now our sexed and aggressive aspects via Oedipal imaginaries.

Bataille’s position on Freud here is similar to Lacan, but also to Lévi-Strauss. Bataille writes: “Really Freud’s myth brings in the most fantastic guess work yet it has the advantage over the sociologists of being an expression of living
compulsions. Lévi-Strauss expresses it neatly: ‘He gives a fair account not of the beginnings of civilisation, but of its present state’” (E, 200). That is, Freud’s myth retro-projects both the violent incestuous desire (transgression) and its violent rejection (taboo) constituting the unconscious structure of Christocentric nuclear families. Bataille’s complaint about Lévi-Strauss is only the tendency to found the whole transition from nature to culture on the incest taboo, “just one aspect of the general taboo” (E, 51), to the neglect of others coequal in value. By speaking of nature-to-culture, moreover—rather than animal-to-human—Bataille’s sense is that Lévi-Strauss is “setting one abstraction beside another,” omitting the “drama in which they oppose one another” as “a laceration which exposes the whole of divided being,” “if man and animal nature confront each other as the totality of being is rent asunder” (AS, II:52, E, 213-4).

Lacan’s aim in Seminar XVII to go beyond “everything in the same basket as Oedipus” and the “cock-and-bull story” of primal murder, to see in it Freud’s “strange Christocentrism” and “dream” that needs to be “interpreted” (SXVII, 114, 117, 137, 176), signals a similar intent to not reduce us to the incest taboo. Later Lacan is found to “metaphorise” as incest the relation “truth maintains with the real.” But one should also factor Nietzsche’s genealogy, for what is really murdered, sacrificed, “castrated,” with the Judeo-Christian unfolding is “the erudite culture” of Greek and Roman nobles, and the gods and goddesses of Hellenismos, by the slavish ressentiment and “petty envy” that continues to unduly press normativity today (AC, 59). Bataille’s acumen is to note that lost in the Christian universalisation of Yahweh’s ignorance—Eastwards also with the Islamic version—is the erotic rituals of transgression that were once the very domain of religion, according to the originary sacred that mixed pure with the sexed impure of repressed animality, returning then as “deified nature” (AS, II:131).

Bataille is keenest to mark that Christianity alters this by leaving “transgression condemned,” “condemned out of hand” as “sin,” “evil” (E, 127, 262), and in doing so conceals “that the sacred and the forbidden are one, that the sacred can be reached through the violence of a broken taboo” (E, 126). Previously in Accursed Share he noted that in forbidding transgression Christianity “took up in a renewed form the movement that set the first men against nature,” “revived within themselves the original drama that was the transition from animal to man,” but with no route back—rendering thus “repudiated the pagan world in which transgression counterbalances the prohibition to form the totality” (AS, II:135-6).
This is what Bataille means later in *Eroticism* when stating that “in the Christian world the taboo was absolute,” which nevertheless could never cease to eroticise precisely what it repressed as it dammed to bursting point, meaning “Christianity in its turn deepened the degree of sensual disturbance by forbidding organised transgression” (E, 126-7).

For Bataille, then, “misunderstanding the sanctity of transgression is one of the foundations of Christianity” (E, 90), but Lacan’s *Ethics Seminar* also marks the disturbance this creates in citing Paul’s as “the Law which causes sin” (SVII, 170), which “causes our desire to flare up” as “desire for death” as it “takes on an excessive, hyperbolic character” (SVII, 83-4). And so as not to “leave us clinging to that dialectic” for an “ethics of psychoanalysis,” Lacan is also found declaring that “we will have to explore that which, over the centuries, human beings have succeeded in elaborating that transgresses the Law, puts them in a relationship to desire that transgresses interdiction, and introduces an erotics that is above morality” (SVII, 84).

This is because with Christianity we forget that an ethics must preserve an erotics, which for Lacan is akin to how in “having lived for a long time under Christian law,” “we no longer have any idea what the gods are” (SVII, 259). The gods sanctioned transgression, rendering its erotics guided, but now they have taken-flight—which is what makes Christianity for Bataille “the least religious religion of them all,” which “sets its face against eroticism and thereby condemns most religions” (E, 32), sanctioning transgression only in the alleged “felix culpa” (E, 262) of “the ignominious death on the cross” (AS, II:136). This is the “central image” Lacan observes leaving desire “literally poisoned,” “pursued throughout the world by Christian missionaries,” “crucifying man in holiness for centuries” as it “absorbs all other images of desire in man with significant consequences” (SVII, 262).

Lacan refers to the “inner catastrophes” of “neurosis” stemming from always “doing things in the name of the good, and even more in the name of the good of the other,” as “desire keeps coming back, keeps returning, and situates us once again in a given track” (SVII, 319). Bataille also stresses a “contempt for animals,” forging a “perceptible link” with this “victory of morality and the sovereignty of taboos,” which is “this morality pushed to its logical conclusion,” as “the attributes of deity vanish from the animal kingdom” (E, 136-7). Even a saviour’s birth cannot directly involve what we share with other mammals: “private parts, the hairy ones
to be precise, the animal ones” (E, 143)—draped over by an ambiguous virginity.

We are a long way from Zeus’s divine rapes, where he would expressly take animal form: a swan for Leda, a serpent for Semele, a shimmering white bull for Europa. And in what echoes in Lacan’s later dictum of “no sexual relation” (SXVII, 116), Bataille chides Christian attempts to now deny fear of sex in a 1952 congress of Carmelites, who invited other orders, along with “religious historians and psycho-analysts” (E, 221). Bataille notes that in their concern “to prove that fear of sexuality was not the mainspring of the Christian practice of continence,” “everything was going along so nicely that Schopenhauer’s simplifications were readily accepted: the impulses of sexuality had one meaning only—Nature’s purpose working through them,” but “no one bothered to reflect that ‘Nature’ behaved in a ridiculous way” (E, 222, 232). This harks back to Bataille’s observing how “the sexual channels are also the body’s sewers,” how our vanity is offended when we “connect the anal orifice with them” and, like Augustine, recollect how “we are born between faeces and urine” (E, 56-7).

If the Carmelites insist on “harmony between sexuality and life” it is, for Bataille, only by narrowing to “certain limits” where “outside these it is forbidden” (E, 230), reduced to the procreative form, “limited to marriage” (E, 238), to give it transcendental significance. “Transcendental?” Bataille ripostes, “That means denying its horror, the horror connected with earthly reality” (E, 224). Lacan concurs in noting that “signifiers are not made for sexual relations,” that “once the human being is speaking, it’s stuffed, it’s the end of this perfection, this harmony, in copulation—which in any case is impossible to find anywhere in nature” (SXVII, 33). Perhaps it is no accident, then, that where Bataille in Eroticism chides this transcendentalism is a statuette of an Alexandrian “temple prostitute,” attributed to the “Jacques Lacan collection” (E, 224), whom he earlier thanks as among “a great many friends” for their “active support” in finding “relevant documents” (E, 9).

Regarding our own distinct hue of animal beauty, given divine affirmation in Greco-Roman contexts not just in prostitution but in homoerotics and the orgy, Bataille notes that for the Christian “there is a halo of death about it that makes its beauty hateful” (E, 237). It is the “snare of the devil,” “at once hateful and desirable” as the “lure of forbidden fruit,” which “stands out more sharply,” Bataille observes, with “harsher flavour,” because of strict taboo which left so much of sex “guilty and sin-laden” (E, 234, 237-8, 270). Hence “flesh is the born
enemy of people haunted by Christian taboos” while they live as if dead, waiting for death to give them life by “calculations” on after-worlds that for Bataille will “confer a miserliness, a poverty, a dismal discipline on the ascetic life of no matter what religion or sect” (E, 92, 251).

“Man must die to live eternally,” Bataille quotes a Father Tesson as “speaking for the whole Church,” with an “ambiguousness of vocabulary” (E, 235) that resonates with Lacan’s notion of “second death” if the soul were seduced by “the phenomenon of the beautiful” (SVII, 260). Hence Christians bank with their ultimately selfish calculation on the souls’ salvation as “forever divided, arbitrarily distinct from each other, arbitrarily detached from the totality of being with which they must nevertheless remain connected,” violating forever for Bataille in this “atomisation of totality” the return “from isolation to fusion, from the discontinuous to the continuous”—to the “totality of the real” and “continuity of being” implicit of the sacred-erotic Dionysian path “marked out by transgression” (AS, II:117; E, 13, 120).39

4. MODERN SCIENCE AND CAPITALISM: PSEUDO-SYMBOLIC GOODS

The atomistic soul of Christianity, like much in our subsequent modern era, now takes a secular form. The detached soul is the individual, and this an empirical matter. This section shows the transgressions of modern capitalism, fuelled by advances in science, have more in common with the disturbed transgressions of the Christian age than they do with those sacred of the Hellenic. Capitalist transgression is a secularised descendent of “sin” because of its still degraded nature. I begin with Bataille’s critique of sex-positivism in the chapter of Eroticism titled “Kinsey, the Underworld and Work” (E, 149-63). Then I broach Lacan’s split-subject, Nietzsche’s ascetic ideal, and a modern world where everything already is symbolic.

For Bataille the “originality” of the Kinsey Reports, published in the Human Male in 1948 and Human Female in 1953, is “to discuss sexual conduct as one discusses things” (E, 152). Here “sexual activity is treated statistically like external data,” and Bataille’s sense is that “the doubts” cast by some on the scientificity of “the results” are “technical and superficial,” commending the authors instead for their “precautions” (E, 151). Following the strictness of Christian taboo, the reductionism of the Kinsey team was key for recovering knowledge of the sexual domain and repairing damages done to reason—what Freud referred to as the
“intimidation of the intelligence” (SE, 21:84) wrought by the Church on all such matters. Bataille concludes, “The sexual behaviour of our fellows has ceased to be so completely hidden from us because of this gigantic enquiry” (E, 151).

Bataille’s complaint with this enquiry, with its “often senselessly clumsy business of bringing man’s sexual life down to the level of objective data” (E, 152), is with the assumption that now taboos can be dismissed as irrational altogether. He writes, “We are faced with a voluminous collection of facts remarkably well assembled,” by “methods” “brought to a high pitch of efficiency, though it is harder to admire the theories they spring from”—because “for the authors sexuality is a normal and acceptable biological function in whatever form it appears,” “but religious principles restrict this natural activity” (E, 156). This assumption will not do for Bataille because sexuality is not just transgressive relative to Christian taboo, but relative to the order of things in general.

What the authors miss regarding restrictions is “the factor of work,” and Bataille repeats his formulation that “by work man orders the world of things and brings himself down to the level of a thing among things,” as a “means to an end” in “opposition to animal nature” (E, 157). For without taboo, “animal darkness would still hold sway” (E, 161), but also without work, which is the very reason for taboo, as indicated for Bataille in Kinsey’s class results which show only “in the underworld alone, where no work is done and where behaviour in general adds up to a denial of humanity do we find 49.4%” for the seven orgasms per week thought to be “the normal frequency in nature—the animal nature of the anthropoids” (E, 158-9). Other classes interviewed had “16.1% to 8.9%” (E, 159). Regardless, Bataille will add, “we are animals anyway,” and “cannot help the animal in us persisting and often overwhelming us,” our “sexual exuberance demonstrating how animal life persists” (E, 150).

That the “facts of sex” are not just “things,” or reducible to an external aspect, is, for Bataille, also revealed in Kinsey’s observing that “beyond the desired result lie consequences” they “did not anticipate”—the “private feelings as opposed to things that the Reports suggest must exist beyond the graphs and curves,” implying “the memory of deep wounds, frustrating pain, unsatisfied desire, disappointments, tragic situations and utter catastrophe” (E, 152, 154). Bataille is suggesting that while Christian taboo makes problems more acute, it is not alone responsible for the traumas of the real inherent in nature itself, and soon enough “the authors themselves knew what abyss yawned beneath the facts they report”
Bataille’s aim is to broach the limits of science apropos of taboo-transgression. He reproaches scientism, positivism—and indeed sex-positivism—for neglecting the functions of religious eroticism, which “are closed books to us if we do not locate them firmly in the realm of inner experience,” for “we put them on the same level as things known from the outside if we yield albeit unwittingly to the taboo” (E, 37). This implies rejecting taboo is a consequence of the sustained functioning of taboo—shutting off inner-experience, making it unconscious. “The worst of it,” Bataille adds, “is that science whose procedures demand an objective approach to taboo owes its existence to them but at the same time disclaims them because taboos are not rational” (E, 37). This is from taboo continuing in secularised form, which, Bataille notes, “acted on behalf of science in the first place” by having “removed the object of taboo from our consciousness by forbidding it”—the “disturbing object”—attaining thus “that calm ordering of ideas without which human awareness is inconceivable,” such that “in science the scientist himself becomes an object exterior to the subject, able to think objectively,” where “he could not do this if he had not denied himself as a subject to begin with” (E, 37-8).

Bataille senses “professorial philosophy” (E, 260) to share this tendency, for “emotions put it out of joint,” and we find “superiority in one field bought at the expense of relative ignorance in other fields,” as “everyday philosophy becomes a little more of a specialised discipline like the others” (E, 253). Bataille suggests “reaction against this cold and rigid aspect of philosophy is characteristic of modern philosophy as a whole” from “Nietzsche to Heidegger,” caught “in an impasse” where the very discipline it requires leaves it unable to “embrace the extremes of its subject,” eliding “the outer most reaches of human life” such that “it is doomed to failure” (E, 259). Bataille asks: “Yet what significance can the reflections of mankind upon himself and on being in general have, if they take no account of the intense emotional states?”—discerning here “the specialist’s peculiar narrow-mindedness” even as it tries to be “the sum of knowledge,” for “it does not even aim at being the sum of experiences” (E, 254). So with “clear conscience, even with a feeling of getting rid of a foreign body, getting rid of some muck, or at least a source of error,” it “leaves out the intense emotion bound up with birth, with the creation of life as with death” (E, 259)—forgetting thus for Bataille how “the truth of taboos is the key to our human attitude” (E, 38).
Here we encounter the general critique where for Lacan, too, the discourse of science and the university produces “the Spaltung [splitting] of the subject,” “a divided subject” (SXVII, 104, 148), split from subjective truth and the drives in their “remembering, historicising,” which is irreducible to “need and reason” (SVII, 208-9)—for while “the discourse of science” has a place for everything it “leaves no place for man” (SXVII, 147). This invokes also Nietzsche’s critique of science’s “unselfing and depersonalisation” in pursuing “disinterested knowledge” (BGE, 207), “despiritualising” (TI, VIII:3) under the same “ascetic ideal” or nihilism of hitherto Christian-Platonism. Lacan depicts the shift to modernity as going from Sovereign Good to the “service of goods” for “satisfaction of all” (SVII, 292), which never can integrate the Freudian Thing, or fill the gap of this loss. “We don’t seem to have produced integral man yet” (SVII, 208), Lacan concludes, for when it comes to the “human sciences” as they condescend to “form a branch of the service of goods”—“implied here is a no less systematic misunderstanding of all the violent phenomena that reveal that the path of the triumph of goods in our world is unlikely to be a smooth one” (SVII, 324).

Lacan’s Seminar VII comments above are best understood with his Seminar XVII reference to “the capitalist's discourse, with its curious copulation with science” (SXVII, 110). This is where we can bring in Bataille’s critique of modernity for its inexorable capitalism, as discussed prior to Eroticism in Theory of Religion and Accursed Share.

Making use of Max Weber, Bataille traces capitalism to the Protestantism of Luther, who initially “formulated a naïve, half-peasant revolt,” and Calvin, whose “reactions were those of a jurist familiar with business matters,” who “expressed the aspirations of the middle class of the commercial cities” (AS, I:115). Here the lack of erotic transgression on the Christian ethical plane is transferred further into the political sphere such that earthly deeds are reduced to accumulation, governed by more work and respect for taboos, rather than any sacrificial, festive function given “to the use of excess resources, or rather to their destruction,” Bataille adds, “at least insofar as they are useful” (AS, I:120)—referring to the potlatch type expenditure, transgression or gift that retains a divine about it. Something of the latter had survived with “the Roman Church,” Bataille notes, in the “contemplative idleness,” “ostentatious luxury,” “splendour of ceremonies and churches” and “forms of charity” to make good the losses for the poor: “Shining through the world of pure utility that succeeded it, where wealth lost its immediate value, it still radiates in our eyes” (AS, I:122-3).
Luther denied “the idea of merits gained by these means,” Bataille explains, for basing himself on “the Gospel’s principle of hostility to wealth and luxury” he was incensed by “the possibility of gaining heaven by making extravagant use of individual wealth,” seeing the transgressive squandering of surplus as a profane self-aggrandisement deflating what to him was the “decisive separation between God and everything that was not the deep inner life of faith,” rendering “everything that we can do and really carry into effect” on this earth “futile” or “culpable” (AS, I:121). Calvin then extends what for Bataille is this “utter negation” by seeing the pursuit of profit, made possible by work, taboos, and thus some self-denial, as governed not by any greed but by “diligence and industry,” thereby asserting the “morality of commerce”—for even in Luther, Bataille notes, earthly activity “must still be subject to moral law” (AS, I:122). Consequently in the capitalism emerging, fuelled by advances in science and “the rise of industry” (TR, 87), the aim of accumulation was only more accumulation, shifting from what Bataille saw as the “former, static economy” which “made a non-productive consumption of excess wealth,” to one which only “accumulates and determines a dynamic growth of the productive apparatus” (AS, I:116).

For Bataille “Calvin rejects merit and works no less firmly than Luther,” but with principles “articulated a little differently” and “more consequences,” such that “the reformed Christian had to be humble, saving, hardworking” and “bring the greatest zeal to his profession, be it in commerce, industry or whatever”—as values were “overturning,” “withdrawn,” and only “given to the virtues that have their basis in utility” (AS, I:123). How better to show this than the size of one’s wallet?—not now as “a way of attaining salvation” but “as a proof salvation has been attained” (AS, I:123), Bataille notes, citing Tawney, as the God rewards the rich doctrine emerges. This is the “rich Calvinist” doctrine Lacan invoked in Seminar VIII, referring to “Calvinist theology” which “had the effect of making appear, as one of the elements of moral direction, that God fills with good things those he loves on this earth,” that “observation of laws and commandments has as fruit worldly success” (SVIII, 4:8). As long as wealth did not attract a “halo of splendour,” Bataille would add, and was limited to “useful works,” one could take pride in “attachment to a profession,” “the desacralisation of human life,” and “the glorifying of God” through negation of one’s “own-glory,” through the “relegation of mankind to gloryless activity” (AS, I:124).

With immediate spending now considered waste, one invested only in production, causing uncontrolled destructions as disavowed drive emerged without prior
knowledge, affirmation or consent. Here violence continues the ferocious ignorance of Yahweh, the superego as Sovereign Good, savaging within, projecting without, but now in the name of profit. Bataille concludes, “the revolution effected by the Reformation has, as Weber saw, a profound significance: It marked the passage to a new form of economy”—for “by accepting the extreme consequences of a demand for religious purity it destroyed the sacred world, the world of non-productive consumption, and handed the earth over to the men of production, to the bourgeois [...] whose accomplishment is economic mankind” (AS, I:127).

Here we are “reduced to the order of things,” Bataille laments, and “more estranged” “than ever before” in a world “that no longer knows what to do with its products,” surrendered to a movement “no longer controlled” (TR, 93-4). How could one in fact know, or control?—when “capitalist society reduces what is human to the condition of a thing (of a commodity)” (AS, I:129), such that everything already is symbolic, and the imaginary of this reduction veils the returning real in the guise of Law growing violent by the day.47 The physical destruction of the environment is the most dire effect—given, Lacan notes, that it “threatens” not just culture or civilisation but “the planet itself as a habitat for mankind” (SVII, 104).48 Bataille would only add that while this monstrous capitalism, which in its “pure form” expressed the austerity of “time is money,” was “implicit in the first formulation” of “self-denial, which in Calvinism is the affirmation of God,” at the time “what was needed was less to give complete freedom to the natural impulses of the merchants than to tie them to some dominant moral position”—for “it was only in England, in the second half of the seventeenth century, that Puritans linked the principle of the free pursuit of profit to the Calvinist tradition,” as the “independence of economic laws was posited,” and the “abdication of the moral sovereignty of the religious world on the plane of production came to pass” (AS, I:125-6, 136).49

CONCLUSION

This article considered how the different discourses of Lacan and Bataille—an ethics and erotics of the real respectively—extend on each other. I suggested focus on the real was necessitated by the distortions Nietzsche points to when Plato’s inflation of the Good was installed, exacerbated by Christendom, then “naturalised” without overcoming in Modernity today. Then there was Lacan’s Ethics Seminar call for an enquiry that goes more deeply into the real—a directive reissued in his Anxiety Seminar as “any morality is to be sought out, in its principle
and in its origin, on the side of the real,” despite the anxiety caused (SX:148).

Emerging from this analysis was that an erotics of the real prevents ethics from taking-flight into the moralising hustle that only re-finds its disavowed real through distorted projections onto an Other demonised in the process: The Christian Dark Ages, with its crusades and inquisitions, its neuroses and psychoses, is forever testament to that. I suggested restoring living-openness to the erotic means an ethics has no need to disavow what it can now enjoy—empowered within the structured other limits that pre-Platonic cultures help exemplify.

Here a genealogy of the sacred via Bataille’s taboo-transgression relation proved insightful. Traversing from the Palaeolithic animal-to-human transition to the Socratic incompetence on tragedy that protracted in the Platonism to follow, manifesting was the loss of the religious aspect of transgression. After Plato, transgression was a spitting on the dignity of the Good, rather than its complement through a periodic return to the real, which worsened when Christianity reduced transgression to sin. Modern attempts to reclaim positivity for taboo-objects then fell short because taboo remained insufficiently understood. After two-millennia of repression, blindness about desire still held sway, as inner-experience was relegated to a nightmarish past of morose naiveties in confessional praxis.

As Richardson put it, Judeo/Christian ideology “served to tear our inner experience from itself” by installing “work ethic to all areas of social life,” cutting “adrift” erotic transgression with a “puritan detachment” that even permissiveness cannot restore.50 This is where we saw foreclosure of transgression transferred further into the economic sphere, as the aim of accumulation became only accumulation and “profit” constitutes the Good. Anything heterogeneous becomes waste, reduced to a pseudo-symbolic service of goods through the violent commodification of the globe. For capitalist homogeneity overpowers “every aspect of life,” Richardson explains, so that “sacred forms like festival, play and sacrifice can no longer be integrated”—never adequately, anyway—due to what Bataille calls the “unreserved surrender to things, heedless of consequences and seeing nothing beyond them” (AS, I:136).51

The violence of the latter is no doubt real but always “rationalised,” and rarely understood: The consequence of our prior systemic flight from the real through two-thousand years of binary-dualism. Hence the moralists who hustle for ever more flight continue to feed the problem without realising. Here “a crook is
certainly worth a fool,” as Lacan quips on the political, noting that the “gathering of crooks into a herd” yields “collective foolery” which is what “makes the politics of right-wing ideology so depressing”; whereas by a “curious chiasma, the ‘foolery’ which constitutes the individual style of the left-wing intellectual gives rise to a collective ‘knavery’” (SVII, 183)—which is arguably more depressing still.\footnote{51}

To conclude, then, abreast of a genealogy that seeks to restore the erotic to its proper place—like in the early dawning of Hellenismos—I throw to the Bataille whose contribution apropos of the equiprimordiality of taboo-and-transgression, and its optimal functioning in days and nights, gods and plays gone by, should continue to resonate across the myriad discourses, and unconscious formations, until something better with it can be done.

The various forms of human life have superseded each other and we finally see how the last step must be taken. A gentle light, not the full glare of science, shows us a reality difficult to come to terms with compared to the reality of things; it makes possible a silent awakening.

Bataille, Eroticism (1957), 163

—Deakin University
NOTES

7. As Lacan’s term for maximal enjoyment beyond usual pleasures, jouissance requires transgression: “without a transgression there is no access to jouissance” (SVII, 177).


21. Rohde reports that Dionysos is introduced to Athens by the Delphic oracle already reconciled with Apollo, as “gentler and more civilised,” “pruned and moderated,” thereupon finding “wide-reaching influence” on all Greece. See Rohde, *Psyche*, II:288.


24. Richardson suggests one is “well-advised” to take *Eroticism* as the entry point into Bataille—a “clearly written” summation of his “overall themes.” See Richardson, *Georges Bataille*, 133.


27. This is Lacan’s “divided subject” (SXVII,148).

28. Richardson notes Bataille’s *Theory of Religion*, whence these citations come, is “important” but
initially “most difficult” to understand. See Richardson, Georges Bataille, 133.


30. Nietzsche also expresses admiration for Alcibiades’ seductive qualities (BGE, 200), while Lacan notes his remarkable “absence of castration fear” (SVIII, 11:8). See Nietzsche, Will to Power, 427.


35. For exploration of the amorousness of Hellenic deities involving “rapes, preceded by animal metamorphoses,” see Calasso, Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony, 3, 5, 47, 52-3, 126-7, 136, 152, 205.


37. For Bataille nature invites “horror” as it “brings together and even in part mingles the organs” of “sexuality and dejecta” (AS, II:62).

38. Lacan’s Ethics Seminar riposte to the Good in nature is, “consider how far that notion of nature is different to ours, since it involves the exclusion of all bestial desires from what is properly speaking human fulfilment” (SVII, 13). In Discourse to Catholics of the same period he similarly rebukes altruistic notions of genital-relation for repressing the “fundamental perverseness of human desire”; and later in Triumph of Religion he calls the speaking-being a “sick animal,” “ravaged by the Word,” which Christianity seeks to “cure” by “drowning the symptom in meaning,” “to repress it,” “so that they do not perceive what is not going well.” See Jacques Lacan, Triumph of Religion, Preceded by Discourse to Catholics. Trans. B. Fink. Cambridge: Polity, 2013, 44, 67, 71-2, 74, 77.

39. Bataille adds that the Christian-modern view of the orgy “must at all costs be rejected,” for it assumes lack of “modesty” instead of sacrifice that “demands equality among the participants,” despite “differences between individuals and the sexual attraction connected with those differences” (E, 117, 129). In his earlier Guilty he discloses both orgy and brothel as religious sites of erotic fusion, despite modern contexts maintaining a sordid aura: “I escape the illusion of any solid connection between me and the world.” Bataille, Guilty, 12-13.

40. James Shields notes that in reacting against Christianity Kinsey commits the naturalistic fallacy, that “whatever is, is right,” that “all sex is good.” See James Shields, “Eros and Transgression in an Age of Immanence: Georges Bataille’s (Religious) Critique of Kinsey” Journal of Religion and
41. Contrary to Kinsey’s “insistence,” Shields agrees that work, not religion, hinders the most sexual release, as evidenced in Kinsey’s own data. Shields, “Eros and Transgression in an Age of Immanence”, 180.
43. Lacan also notes “the subject who loses his meaning in the objectifications of discourse,” “the most profound alienation of the subject in our scientific civilisation,” that “we encounter first when the subject begins to talk to us about himself.” Lacan, “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis”, 233.
46. Jean Piel suggests Bataille’s “Copernican change” beyond restricted notions of scarcity, growth, and utility is from focus on the general economy of “the living masses in its entirety—where energy is always in excess and which must unceasingly destroy a surplus” because “the sun’s rays, which are the source of growth, are given without measure.” An epoch is thereby structured by its uptake of this surplus, excess, or “accursed share.” See Jean Piel, “Bataille and the World from ‘The Notion of Expenditure’ to the Accursed Share” On Bataille: Critical Essays. Ed. L. Boldt-Irons. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995, 102-3.
47. Slavoj Žižek suggests Bataille’s Law-transgression dialectic overlooks a “Kantian philosophical revolution” that makes Law itself transgressive. However, Nietzsche points to Kantianism as retrograde Christianity (AC, 10-12), Lacan notes its fixation on “pain” (SVII, 80), and Bataille here shows its disturbed violence preserved in capitalism as a symptom of a still degraded taboo-transgression relation and “Law” unworthy of the name—far from the more optimal form in Greece’s tragic age. Later Žižek seems to remove the Dionysian base of the real by seeing it only as “the monstrous aspect of the Apoliniac itself,” “gone awry, exploding in its autonomy,” again suggesting loss of the optimal taboo-transgression or Apollo-Dionysos dynamic when the profound incompetence of Socrates on tragedy was idealised by Plato and exacerbated by Christianity. See Slavoj Žižek, The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003, 56; The Parallax View. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006, 95; “Ideology III: To Read Too Many Books is Harmful” Lacan.com (2007, 4), accessed November 18, 2015, http://www.lacan.com/zizchemical-beats.html.
48. While capitalism for Richardson cannot escape wasteful-useless expenditure, its refusal to properly acknowledge this “turns it into an accursed form,” externalised in “imperialistic wars and destructive violence” assuming “uncontrollable and potentially catastrophic forms”—for missing is “sacred being devoted to life enhancement,” through “joyous surpassing of limits” serving “real needs of mankind,” rather than “the market” with its begrudging “eye upon an ultimate accumulation.” See Richardson, Georges Bataille, 94-5.
49. Jean-Joseph Goux suggests today’s consumerism is so wasteful it undermines Bataille’s critique. Noys responds that the “unproductive expenditure” of Bataille “cannot be reduced to the losses of capitalism” because it is not “how wasteful or destructive” a society is but “how it goes
about dealing with the accursed share,” which Goux acknowledges in saying “it is not the quantity of waste” but the “mode of waste” that is “the difference.” Noys suggests Goux was trying to extract a “purified” accursed share, failing which was its forced reduction back into the restricted economy of capitalism. See Jean-Joseph Goux, “General Economics and Postmodern Capitalism.” *Yale French Studies* 78 (1990, 210, 223); and Noys, *Georges Bataille*, 118-9.


51. The Christian-modern tendency to ban sex-work, which worsens its problems, or reduce it to degraded commercialism, illustrates the lack of heterogeneity that could instead return with Napoleon’s reaffirming-regulation of bordello (leading to their *Belle Époque* which Bataille saw the tail-end of), or Solon’s instating of them as Aphrodite *Pandemos* (for the people), with taxes generated for reciprocal gifts to the polis. It is in this sense that Bataille could hope to deepen his experience of brothels as true churches again—as temples of reciprocal gift-giving beyond the narrowed mores of profits, “sins,” and production. (He returns to this in *E*, 132-5). A recent philosophical defence of sex-work is in Raja Halwani, *Philosophy of Love, Sex, and Marriage*. New York: Routledge, 2010, 170-7, 210-24. See Richardson, *Georges Bataille*, 91.

52. Although Žižek suggests Bataille’s “passion for the real” is “obsessed with communism and fascism” and mistakenly opposes communism, Richardson notes that for Bataille the left must develop a sacred to “counter” that of fascism, rather than compete with capitalism on its strength, “economic utility,” and equate us in the process “with state domination and needs” and “onerous duties” neglecting “the importance of mankind’s drives.” For Richardson, Bataille is only misread as an “advocate for unlimited excess” and transgression “in isolation from a sense of order,” as if taboo were not equiprimordial. See Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 55; *The Parallax View*, 95; and Richardson, *Georges Bataille*, 92-3, 23.
Commentary on Spinoza’s *Ethics* has flourished in recent decades, bringing undeniable rigour to the investigation of a range of persistent interpretive difficulties. But not all areas of scholarship are equally well served. Looking at much of the available commentary, the reader might well forget that the original text was written in Latin and that translation into English, however accomplished, inevitably introduces, at best, instances of imprecision and, at worst, demonstrable inaccuracies. To be sure, there have been noteworthy attempts to bridge this gap, but, as I go on to demonstrate, explication of Spinoza’s Latin terminology tends, where it exists at all, to be at the level of semantics and, less often, of etymology. Entirely missing is the discussion of morphemic structure and its relation to the generation of meaning. It is my contention that the study of the *Ethics* would benefit significantly from the development of a guide that is focused specifically on Spinoza’s Latin, and in particular on those aspects that are neglected by other commentaries. There are excellent glossaries available which seek to clarify what is to be understood by key Latin terms and even from where they derive, but nowhere is it adequately explained how their meaning comes about.

The main purpose of this essay is to demonstrate the need for the kind of guide I have in mind. It begins with a survey of the critical literature, highlighting the latter’s paucity of reference to linguistic concerns, especially in texts where one might reasonably expect to find discussion of such matters. Of course, the absence
of a particular feature does not of itself justify a recommendation for its inclusion; its potential value first needs to be established. I do this in two ways. One is to indicate, if only briefly, instances where clearer linguistic analysis might shed light on current debates. The other is by responding to potential objections to a linguistically based critique, drawing on recent research to show that, contrary to some views, Spinoza's language is a fully rational and finely tuned instrument for the communication of philosophical propositions. Two articles in particular have proved invaluable for the development of my argument and receive close attention. They are “Spinoza's Latinity” by Iiro Kajanto and “Spinoza’s Language” by Mogens Lærke. One offers a detailed assessment of the structural and stylistic features of Spinoza’s Latin, the other a rigorous and compelling critique of the view that the “meaning” of the Ethics is not communicated via its language but, on the contrary, obscured by it. Having demonstrated that his Latin deserves to be taken seriously I look briefly at how Spinoza goes about modifying existing terminology to suit his purpose. I conclude with a few remarks about the content of the proposed glossary, its potential value and, importantly, the limitations of a purely linguistic approach.

GUIDES TO SPINOZA (1): OVERSIGHTS AND INACCURACIES

One could cite almost any recent study to verify the claim that Spinoza’s use of Latin has been seriously overlooked, at least by most Anglophone scholarship. Certainly, there is a small but important body of research that deals specifically with this question, but little of it has flowed through to commentary that is more pedagogically oriented. I’m thinking here particularly of what might be called the “companion” genre. Given that this category is likely to be the first “port of call” for many readers seeking guidance on how to understand the Ethics, one might well expect the relation of language to meaning to be more than an incidental concern. Yet this is far from the case.

Take the Cambridge Companion to Spinoza and the more recent Cambridge Companion to Spinoza’s Ethics. While several contributors note instances where Spinoza’s Latin presents interpretive difficulties, these references are relatively few. And while some are informative and well judged, too often they are inadequately developed or even misleading, and in one instance, quite simply wrong. Some examples will help clarify the nature and extent of these defects.

In “Spinoza’s Ethical Theory” by Don Garrett we read, as an explanation
of the paired terms “perfect” and “imperfect”: “The Latin meanings of ‘perfect’ (‘perfectus’) include ‘accomplished’ or ‘finished.’ Thus, [Spinoza] explains, something was said, in common usage, to be perfect when the speaker believed that the thing had been completed in accordance with the purpose of its creator.”

Now, there’s nothing wrong with translating perfectus as “accomplished” or “finished.” What is misleading, however, is the implication that this meaning is additional or supplementary to the “normal” understanding of perfect as “without fault or flaw.” In fact, it’s the other way around: the literal meaning of perfectus is “having been made through [to completion]”; if something is finished, it is, by extension, flawless.

Or again, consider this endnote from Alan Donagan’s essay, “Spinoza’s Theology”: Spinoza’s Latin name for God, ‘Deus,’ is masculine; and his name for an infinite being he held to be identical with God, ‘Natura,’ is feminine. He sometimes refers to this individual as ‘Deus sive Natura’—‘God or Nature.’ In the genders of the pronouns I use in place of these names, I follow Spinoza for the first two: ‘he’ for ‘God’ and ‘she’ for ‘nature.’ For ‘God or Nature’ I use ‘it.’

As a factual statement about the respective genders of the two Latin nouns Donagan is entirely correct; there’s nothing contentious here. But to use this distinction as justification for following suit in English overlooks an important difference between the two languages. While both Latin and English have three genders, masculine, feminine and neuter, the gender of a Latin noun is not automatically determined by the characteristics of its referent. Rather, it is the morphological structure that governs the distinction. For example, there are two Latin nouns for “river,” flumen and fluvius; the first is neuter, the second masculine. And while in English the nouns “fact” and “thing” are unequivocally neuter, there is no such consistency in Latin: factum is neuter while res (a thing) is feminine. Clearly, there is no linguistic reason why deus and natura should retain their gender specificity in English; claiming to follow Spinoza in this regard is also misleading, given that in the very use of the terms deus and natura he had no choice but to accept their pre-encoded gender. Of course, Donagan’s decision, at least as it applies to God, may be justified on other grounds; it could, for instance, be argued that Spinoza wants to lead the reader less abruptly from the familiar, anthropomorphic notion...
of God to his more radical concept of God as “substance.” My point is that the explanation needs to be couched in these or similar terms, and not be based on a flawed understanding of the way gender functions in Latin.

One further etymological reference, this time from The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza’s Ethics, cannot be allowed to pass without comment. It’s from Martin Lin’s contribution, “The Power of Reason in Spinoza”: “Inadequate ideas are those ideas that have inputs from the external environment. This definition resonates with the etymology of ‘passione,’ the Latin word for passion, which derives from the verb ‘passio,’ [sic] which means to suffer or to undergo. Suffering and undergoing suggest passivity.” Lin is quite right to emphasize the passivity inherent in the concept of passion, but seriously astray in his citation of Latin sources. To begin with, “passion” is not passione but passio; passione is an inflected form, technically the ablative case, which changes the meaning to “by, with, or from passion.” Further, there is no such verb as passio; the word for “suffer” or “undergo” is patior. Passio derives from the past participle, passus, which means “having suffered, undergone or endured.”

GUIDES TO SPINOZA (2): KEY METAPHYSICAL TERMS

More reflective of recent scholarly emphasis on the importance of Spinoza’s language, but still deficient in resources that might adequately serve the non-Latinist in linguistic matters, is the Bloomsbury Companion to Spinoza. Of particular interest in the present context is an extensive and detailed glossary of Latin terms. Each entry follows a similar format. Typically, this will consist of a brief note on the term’s derivation, comments on its use in scholastic, Cartesian or theological contexts, and explanations, with reference to specific instances, of the meaning or range of meanings it acquires in Spinoza’s philosophy. This usage will be illustrated by a selection of Latin (and, where relevant, Dutch) quotations, followed by a bibliography of primary sources and select secondary references. It all amounts to a valuable and much needed scholarly resource whose rigour I have no wish to question. It’s what is not included that I want to draw attention to: omitted across the board is the kind of etymological and morphemic analysis that might show the internal workings through which a given term generates its meaning, particularly where that meaning differs from scholastic and Cartesian precedents.
Take Henri Krop’s entries for *modus* and its associated term *modificatio*. In noting that Spinoza uses *modus* both as a “technical philosophical term” and also in the “non-technical sense of way or manner,” Krop barely touches on an etymological chain, reference to which might usefully have augmented his otherwise highly illuminating discussion. In classical Latin *modus* has several meanings, only the most evolved of which has the sense of “way” or “manner.” Its primary denotation is “a measure with which, or according to which, any thing is measured, its size, length, circumference, quantity.” From this it acquires the supplementary sense of “a measure which is not to be exceeded, a bound, limit, end, restriction.”

Just how these definitions apply to the Spinozan “mode” becomes clearer when we consider the relation of mode to substance. Two of the points emphasized by Krop are particularly relevant. The first is that, while every mode is dependent on substance, substance is only “indirectly” its cause; a mode is “caused by means of the divine attributes and it is the result of the power of God’s essence expressing his nature.” A body, for example, as defined in EIID1, is a “mode that in a certain and determinate way expresses the essence of God, in so far he is conceived as an extended thing.”

The second point draws on EIP25C to establish the *individuality* of a mode: all individual things are modes and, conversely, modes—excluding the problematic category of infinite modes to which Krop makes no reference—are necessarily individual things. Krop goes on to note how completely Spinoza has managed to invert the Aristotelian position: through their identity as modes, individual things have been transformed from “substances in a primary sense into their opposite.”

To return to the classical definition of *modus*, if a mode is both determinate and individual, is it not then subject to *measure*? Even more pertinently, doesn’t a mode constitute a *bound* or a *limit*, without which it could not be identified as such?

The value of consulting the Latin etymology is further demonstrated in the case of *modificatio*. Krop acknowledges this to some extent by pointing out its derivation from the verb *modificare*, a fact which leads him to draw a crucial distinction between “mode” and “modification.” Although from their Spinozan definitions the two terms can appear interchangeable, the latter more properly applies to the process of modification. It is for this reason, he suggests, that “Spinoza sometimes prefers to use the term ‘modification’ in the second part of EI which deals with the production of the finite things from the divine substance.” This is fine as far as it goes, in that it explains succinctly why Spinoza uses two different terms where one might be thought adequate. A closer look at the etymology of *modificare*, however,
would lead to a clearer sense of what “production” here actually entails. The term undergoes a subtle but important shift between its classical and later usage: it is the measure or limit governing the change that receives emphasis in the classical definition, whereas the postclassical focus is more on the change itself. This is carried into modern English usage where, according to the OED, a modification, among other things, is the “act of making changes to something without altering its essential nature or character.” Both aspects are equally indispensable for Spinoza: to modify, or to create a mode, is to impose a limit, while at the same time there is absolutely no change to the essential nature of substance.

The relation of mode to substance brings us to the heart of what is most vigorously disputed in Spinozan scholarship. That relation in turn hinges on the role ascribed to the attributes. It’s all very well to describe a mode as a modification. But a modification of what? Of substance? Or of an attribute? For an answer we might usefully start with EIIP7: “The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.” Just why this should be the case is clarified by a remark in EIIP2S where Spinoza insists that “the mind and the body are one and the same thing, which is conceived now under the attribute of thought, now under the attribute of extension.” The immediate consequences to be drawn are clear: it is substance, and substance alone, that is modified; the attributes simply determine how that modification is conceived. But, of course, Spinoza doesn’t leave it there. EIIP6 shatters the neatness of this formulation by introducing modes that are modifications not of substance but of individual attributes. Does this then mean that there are two kinds of finite modes? And if attributes can be modified, where does this leave their relation to substance?

These questions have generated a vast amount of commentary even the briefest outline of which would exceed the available space. In order to show as clearly as possible how the etymology of modus and modificatio might inform a philosophical as distinct from purely linguistic intervention, I’ll focus instead on just two aspects of Yitzhak Y. Melamed’s argument in a recent study of Spinoza’s metaphysics. The first is his disagreement with Edwin Curley over the relation of modes to substance; the second his distinction between a mode of an attribute and a mode of God.

Melamed’s critique of Curley revolves around the function he assigns to Spinoza’s God. Specifically, while Curley sees God as identical to his attributes and no more than “the most general principles of order” whose relation to the finite modes
is purely “causal,” Melamed wants, above all, to preserve God’s substantiality. If Curley’s claim provides an attractive solution to certain problems, it receives, Melamed suggests, little support from the text of the *Ethics*. In contrast, Melamed argues for the inherence of modes in God or substance. In this respect he follows previous commentators such as Don Garrett and Michael Della Rocca, though he rejects Della Rocca’s unconditional coupling of inherence and causation, claiming that it reduces his position to one not that dissimilar to Curley’s. While I agree with Melamed’s view of the *substantiality* of substance, I have some reservations about his approach. Quite rightly, he draws attention to Spinoza’s insistence that the correct way to philosophize is to begin with the infinite and work towards the finite. At the same time, he doesn’t altogether follow this principle which is arguably violated by the very term “inherence.” By conjuring an image of a particular mode being “in” substance as though substance were some kind of container, the logical sequence is effectively reversed. Significantly, too, Spinoza does not use the term “inhere” ([inhaereo]) anywhere in the *Ethics*. Returning to the etymology of *modificatio*, however, we find that its implications for the modification of substance correspond exactly to the “proper order of philosophizing” outlined in EIIP10S2. The process *begins* with substance and *ends* with finite modes which as noted earlier are bounded, subject to a limit and consequently measurable. Of course, this formulation doesn’t solve the many complex problems involved in the generation of the finite from the infinite; what it does, though, is to establish parameters within which solutions that remain true to Spinoza’s philosophy must be found.

The distinction between modes of substance and modes of attributes has been widely discussed in the scholarly literature, but satisfactory explanations of the basis of that distinction are hard to find. As we saw in EIIP6 Spinoza himself refers to modes that are attribute-specific, so whatever the difficulty of reconciling this with EIIP7 and EIIP2S the distinction can’t simply be brushed aside. The casualty seems more often to be the notion of a single mode conceived under different attributes. Melamed gives Napoleon’s body as an example of a mode of a single attribute, and his mind as an example of a mode of a different attribute. Yet, according to EIIP7, aren’t Napoleon’s mind and body one and the same thing? In seeking a solution to this apparent impasse resort to the etymology of the Latin is an obvious first step. What, for example, does it mean to modify an attribute as distinct from substance? And how, precisely, are we to understand an attribute that is subject to modification?
To return to the *Bloomsbury Companion*, a similar pattern of erudition and omission characterizes Krop’s entry for *essentia* for which no derivation is given, this being self-evident with *esse* as the preceding entry (also by Krop). What is of interest here, however, is not the derivation itself but the way an abstract noun has been formed from the present participle *essens* (genitive, *essentis*), to signify something like “beingness,” or “the being of what is.” My point is that spelling out the morphemic structure in this way provides a vital clue as to the logic behind the choice of terminology, a clue that is all but concealed by Krop’s otherwise wholly admirable exposition.

A closer look at the two entries will help to clarify this claim. After noting that, in all likelihood, Spinoza would have “accepted the traditional definition [of ‘being’] as ‘the act of existing,’” Krop draws attention to the important distinction, attributed to Adriaan Heereboord, between *ens* (“a being”) and *esse* “being.” *Ens*, he observes, is the “broader” concept, since it encompasses that which might exist but does not necessarily exist, whereas *esse* is exclusively the property of what actually exists.19 This distinction becomes crucial when we consider Spinoza’s concept of essence, distanced from its Cartesian meaning by its application not to a class but to an individual being, thus echoing the Scotian notion of *haecceitas* or “thisness.”20 As Spinoza puts it in EIID2, essence is that which if taken away, “the thing is necessarily taken away,” and “without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived.” Additionally, it can “neither be nor be conceived without the thing.” It will be seen that, given the earlier distinction between *ens* and *esse*, Spinoza’s use of a term derived from the latter to denote his understanding of this fundamental ontological category, whatever violence it does to accepted usage, shows commendable precision: actual rather than potential being is a co-condition of essence. Nor should the fact that *essentia* is formed from the present participle of *esse*—neglected, as I have indicated, by Krop—be overlooked here. Essence inseparable from, but certainly not reducible to, existence; it goes on being as long as the thing continues to exist, and vice-versa.

Of course, it might be objected that this explanation is overly reductive, and doesn’t illuminate *every* reference Spinoza makes to essence. And what about instances of apparent *internal* contradiction within Spinoza’s thought? How, for example, is the act of “taking away” essence to be reconciled with Spinoza’s insistence in the *Short Treatise* that essence is eternal and immutable?21 Rather than having to abandon the link to morphemic structure, I would argue that, on the contrary, the very attempt to maintain linguistic cohesion when faced with
apparent inconsistencies brings what is at stake philosophically into sharper focus. Just how the essence of a finite thing can be considered eternal is clarified by EIID1 where, as we saw earlier, a body is defined as a “mode that in a certain and determinate way expresses God’s essence insofar as he is considered as an extended thing.” The qualification “insofar as” \textit{quatenus ut} is crucial here. A finite thing has no independent existence; it exists only modally. Being a mode of God its essence therefore has no existence outside God’s essence. Its essence is finite, then, only to the extent that it \textit{expresses God’s infinite essence within its finitude}. Returning to EIID2, we can see that what is hypothetically taken away is precisely this modification of God’s essence.

Discussion of essence occupies an odd position in Spinozan scholarship. Even though it is one of the most frequently used terms, both by commentators and in the text of the \textit{Ethics}, it is rarely given explicit treatment. Its precise meaning is constantly elusive, largely because Spinoza himself doesn’t really tell us what it is, as distinct from what it does, what it involves and what pertains to it. With regard to commentary on the \textit{Ethics}, a comparable focus on matters extraneous to essence itself is widely evident. In \textit{Spinoza’s Metaphysics} Melamed makes numerous references to essence but it is always to the essence of, for example, God, substance or a thing; the concept itself remains unexamined.\textsuperscript{22} Another approach is taken by Aaron Garrett who on occasion equates the essence of a thing with its definition.\textsuperscript{23} This has some merit, but clearly comes unstuck as soon as one contemplates the wholesale substitution of one term for the other.\textsuperscript{24} One commentator who does attempt to deal directly, if only briefly, with essence as a concept in its own right is Jonathan Bennett. Taking Descartes’ observation that “Each substance has one principal property which constitutes its nature and essence, and to which all its other properties are referred,” he notes that this is “roughly” though “not everywhere in the \textit{Ethics}” the sense in which Spinoza uses the term.\textsuperscript{25} It seems that any attempt to capture the “essence” of essence will have its limitations and exclusions; At the same time, inconsistency with the etymology and morphemic structure of \textit{essentia} would leave any explanation on decidedly shaky ground.

**TRANSLATORS AND THEIR COMMENTARIES**

Turning now to Spinoza’s translators, we find, at least in one instance, nothing to force a revision of the observations already made regarding inadequate consideration of Latin accidence and etymology. I’ll deal first with the earlier of
the two standard modern translations of the *Ethics*, that of Samuel Shirley which was first published in 1982. Attention is drawn to the Latin text in several ways. Shirley follows the common scholarly convention of including parenthetically Latin words and phrases where added precision is seen to be needed (or more often, perhaps, to show that what may seem a fanciful rendition is, in fact, entirely faithful to the original). Notes are relatively infrequent and contain little in the way of etymological information. For this one needs to consult the translator’s preface which contains useful explanations of key concepts. Once again, though, linguistic analysis is not as thorough as one would want. To take just one example: while Shirley sensibly seeks to divest the reader of modern notions of substance, pointing instead to the term’s Cartesian and Aristotelian lineage, he stops short of commenting on its derivation, an inclusion which would have provided a clear, logical underpinning of the medieval meaning. At first sight the etymology seems straightforward: *substantia* or substance is that which stands beneath. Less evident is the role played by the tense of the verb. It is from a particular form, the present participle *substans*, that *substantia* derives. In a structure that echoes that of *essentia*, discussed earlier, this gives it the meaning “that which is standing under,” and by implication, “that which continues to stand under.” Both the relational position of substance (for example, to modes) and its indestructibility are thus clearly signified by the morphology of the Latin term.

Edwin Curley’s 1985 translation has appeared in several forms, making it the most widely available version. In its stand-alone form and as part of the Curley-edited *Spinoza Reader*, it has, apart from a list of abbreviations and typographical conventions, and a more-or-less biographical introduction, no critical apparatus whatever. For this, one must consult volume one of *The Collected Works of Spinoza* (the same translation), which has detailed notes. These contain a wealth of valuable information, ranging from textual variants and contested readings to summaries of scholarly disputes. Particularly apposite to the present discussion is Curley’s documentation of decisions regarding the choice of article. I should point out here that, unlike ancient Greek and modern European languages, Latin has neither a definite nor an indefinite article. The translator must decide whether *substantia*, for example, should be *a* substance, *the* substance or simply substance. Mostly, but not always, this will be evident from the context. Where it is not so clear, the translator’s decision may well reflect assumptions that don’t align with Spinoza’s thought.
Another feature of the Collected Works is its comprehensive two-part Glossary-Index. The first section lists English terms used in the translation, alongside the original Latin and in each case the Dutch equivalent. In some instances there are detailed notes. In the second part the order is Latin to Dutch to English. Where relevant, for example, where there are related verbal, adjectival and substantive forms, terms are grouped together. With each entry a full list of page references is included.

Of all the secondary material discussed to this point, it is Curley’s annotations in the first section of his glossary that come closest to the kind of attention to the Latin I have been arguing for. Not that this is exactly Curley’s purpose: as he explains in a preliminary note the index began as an “aid to translation,” specifically, to ensure consistency and accuracy in the choice of English terminology. His comments thus function primarily to justify particular decisions, and for the most part remarks about, say, verb forms or the views of earlier commentators are best read in this context. For example, he offers no morphemic analysis of *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, citing as his reason for leaving these terms untranslated the awkwardness of R.H.M. Elwes’ 1883 rendition (“nature viewed as active” and “nature viewed as passive”), along with the judgement that “any translation would involve more interpretation than I care to engage in.” And where Curley does discuss etymology the explanatory function is still dominant: while, following Hobbes, he is tempted at times to translate *factum* as “fact,” he consistently opts for the more orthodox “deed” on account of the “etymological connection with the past participle of *facere* (to do).”

COUNTER-ARGUMENTS

I have said enough to indicate the nature and scope of references to Spinoza’s Latin terminology in the critical literature, and to establish the overall paucity of linguistic as distinct from semantic elaboration. One might well ask why this is the case. Apart from the perception that modern translations have already taken care of linguistic matters, the simple answer, no doubt, is that readers and in many instances commentators are unlikely to have a grounding in Latin and are therefore inadequately equipped to engage in linguistic analysis. Whatever the merit of this explanation, it is at best incomplete; the actuality turns out to be considerably more complex.
It will be useful before proceeding to raise a potential criticism of both my argument and the way I have gone about defending it. While I may have succeeded in showing that close attention to morphemic structures leads to a more precise understanding of the way signification in Latin functions, there is an unquestioned assumption throughout as to the transparency of that signification, that it maps seamlessly onto Spinoza's thought. To put it another way, to know how the Latin works, I appear to be claiming, is to know, far more precisely than an English translation permits, what Spinoza is trying to say.

This objection, I'll readily concede, is far from frivolous, and might be defended by any of several respectable scholarly positions. While ultimately I go on to reject these counter-arguments, they deserve careful attention. I shall consider three:

1) Spinoza by his own admission was not a competent Latinist; if his command of the finer points of the language cannot be guaranteed, then these in turn remain questionable as a guide to his intentions.

2) There is nothing privileged about Latin in relation to Spinoza's thought; Spinoza was heir to a philosophical tradition built on concepts that were the same whether expressed in Latin, Arabic or Hebrew; it is the concepts, not the mechanics of language, that require explication.

3) Spinoza explicitly questioned the capacity of language to register philosophical truth; linguistic analysis may clarify the process of signification in Latin but has little bearing on what is being said philosophically.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SPINOZA'S LATIN

First, the competence or otherwise of Spinoza's Latin. Once again, the general literature provides little to go on; for the most part we have to be content with just a few scattered remarks. One of these occurs in the Translator's Preface to Spinoza's Complete Works. Against Spinoza's self-proclaimed lack of facility with the language (he tells Henry Oldenberg that he will only allow publication of his treatise on Descartes' Principles if one of his friends, in his presence, “should give it a more elegant style”), Shirley insists that he “nevertheless succeeded in forging for himself a powerful linguistic instrument, wonderfully lucid, devoid of all rhetoric, and with a peculiar charm of its own.” Clearly, Shirley both acknowledges the unusualness of Spinoza's Latin and is captivated by its particular qualities, but
his comments are rather too impressionistic to offer more than a snapshot of its characteristics. One wants to ask, for example: How, precisely, is it deficient? Is Spinoza’s self-deprecation justified? And if so, why does he lack full command of the language?

These questions are examined in some detail by Iiro Kajanto in his essay “Spinoza’s Latinity.” Particularly relevant to a proper critical assessment are the circumstances under which Spinoza came to acquire his knowledge of Latin, and the thoroughness of his grounding in linguistic principles per se, by virtue of the “philological methods” practised at the Jewish school he attended. Kajanto also insists that a valid judgement about Spinoza’s Latin can only be made against the “general characteristics” of the Latin of his time. I shall consider each of these points in turn.

Just when Spinoza began to study Latin is not entirely certain. According to an early biographer, Colerus, he took lessons for several hours a week from a fellow school student, but it is generally agreed that his serious and systematic study of the language only began when, in his early twenties, he attended classes given by ex-Jesuit priest, Franciscus van den Enden. This in itself would be enough to account for any lack of proficiency in Latin composition. Given its position as the lingua franca of seventeenth-century intellectual life, it was usual for an educated European to have studied Latin from an early age. As an outsider to this tradition, Spinoza’s situation was very different: his parents’ language was Portuguese, the language of instruction at the Jewish school he attended Spanish and the vernacular language of his non-Jewish associates Dutch. In addition, as a prerequisite for scriptural studies, he received a thorough grounding in Hebrew.

The importance of Spinoza’s Hebrew education should not be overlooked. Although Hebrew and Latin are quite unrelated—one is Indo-European, the other Afro-Asiatic—the two languages are nevertheless comparable in their dependence on inflected forms. Further, Spinoza’s interest in and grasp of linguistic structures is amply attested by his unfinished but meticulously detailed Hebrew Grammar. As his posthumous editors comment:

The Concise Grammar of the Hebrew Language which is here offered to you, kind reader, the author undertook to write at the request of certain of his friends who were diligently studying the Sacred Tongue, inasmuch as they recognized him rightly as one who had been steeped in it from
his earliest youth, was diligently devoted to it for many years afterward, and had achieved a complete understanding of the innermost essence of the language.\textsuperscript{36}

Such philological expertise could not fail to benefit Spinoza’s acquisition of Latin. At the same time, the very process of acquiring Latin seems to have sharpened and brought into focus his appreciation of the formal aspects of language in general, to the extent that the organizational structures of Hebrew now appeared in a new light. As Michael Morgan remarks, the \textit{Hebrew Grammar} is “rather distinctive” in that it “uses Latin as a model and so forces Hebrew into a Latinate pattern.”\textsuperscript{37}

The point to be emphasized, however, is not the legitimacy or otherwise of this approach to the explication of Hebrew grammar, but the extent to which it suggests that, whatever the infelicities of Spinoza’s Latin composition, they are likely to relate to stylistic polish rather than to grammatical imprecision.

It turns out that this is more or less what an examination of Spinoza’s Latin \textit{oeuvre} reveals. In a comprehensive survey, omitting only texts known to have been reworked by others, Kajanto locates a number of syntactic irregularities, most of which can be classed as minor violations of accepted usage. Only in a very few instances, none of those cited occurring in the \textit{Ethics}, is the meaning compromised to any degree. The rest are what a well trained seventeenth-century Latinist would refer to disparagingly as “medievalisms.”

To understand what a charge of medievalism meant and why as a stylistic tendency it was frowned upon it will be useful to sketch the evolution of Latin from the classical era to Spinoza’s time. Traditional classical scholarship identifies two “great” periods of Roman literature: the Golden Age of the first century BCE and the Silver Age of the first century CE. Already, as the labels imply, there is a perception of decline: the historian Tacitus may deservedly be admired as a prose stylist, but never again, we are to understand, will the classical purity of Caesar or the rhetorical flair and syntactic suppleness of Cicero be matched. This high-water mark will later become an important point of reference, but for the moment one particular feature of classical Latin should be emphasized. In addition to the courtroom speeches for which he is best known, Cicero wrote extensively on philosophy, one of his aims being to make Hellenistic thought accessible to a Roman readership. This required the inventive deployment of the resources of Latin to accommodate new concepts, to “teach philosophy to speak Latin” as he wrote of the legacy of Marcus Porcius Cato. As Phillip Mitsis observes, the
significance of this can “hardly be over-estimated,” given that “Cicero's coinages helped shape the philosophical vocabulary of the Latin-speaking West well into the early modern period.”

In its subsequent evolution literary Latin underwent several major transformations. The first postclassical phase, known as Late Latin, extended from the late second century CE to about 600 and came about primarily in response to the Christianization of the Roman world. Another factor was the spread of Neoplatonism. Augmentation of the language occurred not so much through the invention of new words as through the transliteration of New-Testament Greek, the addition of prefixes and suffixes, the creation of compound forms or simply by ascribing new meanings to existing words. The process began afresh in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries under the impact of scholasticism. Specifically, it was the attempt, most prominently by Aquinas, to reconcile the newly recovered Aristotelian corpus with the tenets of Christianity that spawned an extensive new vocabulary. Existing terms were modified to create elaborate abstractions, designed to register increasingly attenuated conceptual distinctions. This vastly extended vocabulary, however, often went hand in hand with simplified syntactic structures where the principles of periodic subordination were all but forgotten.

One final development brings us to the Latin of Spinoza’s time. Known as Neo-Latin, it was spawned by the convergence of two seemingly incompatible imperatives. One was stylistically driven, the other a purely practical necessity. As the Renaissance humanists became captivated by the splendours of the recently unearthed classical corpus, they turned disdainfully against their scholastic inheritance and embarked on a major clean-up job, purging the language of its inelegant neologisms and reforming its artless syntax in emulation of their freshly discovered models. At the same time scholarly discourse was under pressure to devise yet another set of new terminology, this time to accommodate advances in the physical sciences. The result was an expansion of the kinds of Latin being written. As Kajanto points out tolerance of non-classical elements varied between genres; in poetry and oratory the classical ideal was most strictly upheld, while philosophy and other forms of expository prose were permitted “greater latitude.”

Even by this measure, Spinoza’s Latin is generally considered to be heavily scholastic in comparison, say, with that of Descartes. Over and above the absence of Latin in his early schooling, Kajanto attributes this to the likelihood that Spinoza
was far more widely read in scholastic and scientific literature than in classical Latin. Yet it should not be thought that Spinoza was entirely immune to the influence of Neo-Latin; even though his writing contains a number of scholastic terms he eschewed, Kajanto notes, “the more manifestly scholastic words of the type of quidditas.”40 A valuable feature of Kajanto’s essay is his classification of Spinoza’s terminology according to its origin. Only a few words derive from Neo-Latin, substantially more are scholastic and far more again are Late Latin in origin. All those unlisted—and these constitute the vast majority—are classical.41

We can conclude, then, that apart from a very small number of minor grammatical infringements there is no purely linguistic reason to question the functionality of Spinoza’s Latin. Whether, like Shirley, we are taken with its “peculiar charm” or whether, as Michelle Beyssade characterizes the usual French response, we consider it “somewhat painful, impoverished and stiff,”42 what is at stake is its stylistic merit. If anything, its directness and relative lack of rhetorical embellishment enhance rather than impede its clarity.

WOLFSON AND THE MEDIEVAL HERITAGE

The second objection to the value of close morphological scrutiny of the Latin relates not so much to its alleged invalidity as to its alleged irrelevance. It is implicit in much recent scholarship which privileges conceptual critique over concern with the way Spinoza’s language constructs those concepts and is traceable, I’d suggest, to a claim made by Harry Austryn Wolfson in his influential 1934 study of Spinoza. Wolfson’s reference is to the various branches of medieval philosophy that constituted Spinoza’s sources:

They were all based upon Greek philosophy, at the centre of which stood Aristotle. The same Greek terminology lay behind the Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin terminology, and the same scientific and philosophic conceptions formed the intellectual background of all those who philosophized in Arabic, Hebrew, or Latin. The three philosophic literatures were in fact one philosophy expressed in different languages, translatable almost literally into one another.43

This observation allows Wolfson to draw extensively on Arabic, Hebrew and Latin writings to reconstruct the conceptual universe to which Spinoza is heir. In this he succeeds admirably. Questions arise, though, when we consider the extent to
which Spinoza remains within this universe. If the *Ethics* were little more than a novel presentation of traditional views, then Wolfson’s analysis would go a long way towards making its propositions fully intelligible. But more recent commentators tend to agree that Wolfson seriously misjudges the innovative character of Spinoza’s philosophy. There may well be shared concerns with Maimonides and Crescas but ultimately Spinoza’s importance hinges on the radicality of the break with his predecessors. Given that one of the ways in which the break manifests itself is, as we saw earlier, through the assignment of new meanings to inherited terms, investigation of the link between etymology, morphemic structure and signification once again promises to be of value.

**THE OBSCURANTIST ARGUMENT**

One last hurdle, however, remains. The view that Spinoza intentionally constructed a language that would obscure rather than communicate his meaning has a long history and commands the support of a respectable body of critical opinion. This final objection has all the more force in that its adherents are able to cite Spinoza’s own comments on the limitations of language as evidence. Whatever merit this position can claim—and I’m certainly not dismissing it out of hand—I’ll be arguing that, at the very least, it is subject to qualifications that not only salvage my case for closer scrutiny of Spinoza’s Latin but strengthen it. In this I am indebted to Mogens Lærke whose 2014 essay “Spinoza’s Language” presents a clear and succinct account of the obscurantist position along with a compelling critique of its various arguments. My summary of Lærke’s critique is admittedly selective, omitting some aspects and giving considerable emphasis to others so as to support my own position on the importance of Spinoza’s Latin. In one or two instances as well, I treat more expansively points that Lærke only touches on.

Lærke identifies two main approaches to the problem of the relation between language and meaning in Spinoza’s philosophy which he labels, respectively, “externalist” and “internalist.” As an example of an externalist approach he cites Stuart Hampshire’s view, derived from Leo Strauss’s critique of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, that in the *Ethics* Spinoza “wrote an absurdly crabbed and inelegant Latin, as much to conceal his meanings as to impart them.” Like Strauss before him, the motive he ascribes is fear of persecution. Interestingly, Lærke does not bother to refute this claim, but his detailed response to the internalist position implicitly takes stock of externalist arguments as well. Or more pertinently, perhaps, the alleged obscurities, whether or not their presence
is due to extrinsic factors, can be explicated rationally without recourse to any form of “secret” language or occultism.

An impressively detailed and not entirely unpersuasive internalist critique can be found in a 1958 essay by David Savan titled “Spinoza and Language.” Savan's view, Lærke observes, is that

Spinoza himself considered language constitutively incapable of communicating philosophical truth: “Spinoza's discussion is in terms of words which are abstract, general and confused,” and “contradictions and difficulties occur so frequently, and so clearly that it is probable that Spinoza was aware of them.” Nonetheless, Spinoza “allowed them to stand” because he believed that “no simple, direct, precise, and consistent verbal account of true philosophy was possible.”

Savan makes so much of the “contradictions and difficulties” he locates that one begins to wonder whether there is any point in reading the *Ethics* at all. But just as Savan, too, appears on the point of being forced to the same conclusion, he throws Spinoza a lifeline: the *Ethics*, he argues, is philosophically coherent provided the centrality of “entities of reason” [*entia rationis*] is acknowledged. Citing Spinoza’s own definition of an *ens rationis*, which he translates as “a mode of thought which serves to make what has been understood the more easily retained, explained, and imagined,” he goes on to emphasize that such entities have “no existence outside the intellect” and are “of use to us only if they function as tools or mental aids and are not treated as if they had some independent status.” In other words, it is a mistake to think of such notions as essence, attribute and mode as actually existing; they are “eyes, as it were, through which the intellect may see more clearly what is presented confusedly in the imagination.

It will be clear, as Savan readily admits, that *entia rationis* cannot entirely extricate themselves from language; words, after all, are the only means of identifying such *entia*, and of distinguishing one from another. At the same time, for Savan, these intellectual “eyes” occupy a vantage point outside language, from which they are able to perceive “true” ideas among the morass of linguistic confusion. More than this, *entia rationis* of, for example, order and relation facilitate the construction of valid generalizations while further philosophical consequences can be drawn from the application of negative categories such as “nonbeing, limit and falsehood.”

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At this point Savan’s critique raises more questions than it answers. How, one may well ask, can an entity that itself is identifiable only through language and which operates on linguistically defined concepts remain immune from the limitations of language? The immediate difficulty, I would stress, is not Savan’s reading of the *function* of entities of reason but, rather, the minimality of the role he assigns to linguistic signification. If Lærke’s critique appears to ignore a sizeable part of Savan’s argument—he makes no mention of *entia rationis*—it is not an oversight but due to a more radical intervention: there are no grounds for attributing to Spinoza a rejection of language *per se*; it is only a *certain type of language* that presents an obstacle to philosophical truth. Accordingly, there is no need to appeal to a putative extralinguistic dimension for Spinoza’s philosophy to be read coherently.

For Lærke, Savan’s argument unravels at two crucial points. The first is his “overly negative” view of the position the imagination occupies in Spinoza’s thought, the second his insistence that general terms *cannot do other* than signify “confused universal or transcendental notions.” Given Savan’s account of the imagination as “nothing but a source of falsity and error” and given too the unseverable link between imagination and language, it follows that for his reading of Spinoza there is no possible basis for a “philosophically apt” language. In the reading Lærke proposes, however, the imagination is not to be condemned as the enemy of true perception but, rather, as nothing but a receptor of external impressions, is entirely “indifferent to error and falsity.” The problem, then, is not how to banish the imagination but, on the contrary, “how to construct a language reflecting an imagination guided by the intellect as opposed to a language reflecting an intellect misguided by the imagination.”

Lærke’s second objection relates to the basis on which Savan finds Spinoza’s language contradictory (and hence a demonstration of its own philosophical inadequacy). The error, he suggests, stems from Savan’s failure to distinguish between confused transcendental and universal notions and what Spinoza calls *common notions*, which Lærke goes on to define as those that “express the order of things as represented adequately by the order of ideas in the human intellect.” The point, for Lærke, is that Spinoza himself draws this distinction and attributes inadequacy and confusion *only* to the former category. Further, in most instances, he provides the reader “with some explicit indication as to which sense of a word he addresses.”
ENLIGHTENMENT CRITIQUES OF LANGUAGE

How, then, does Spinoza go about constructing a language that is adequate to the task of philosophical explication? In short, Lærke argues, by disrupting and reconstituting the “chains of association” that are responsible for confused and inadequate understanding. As this is by no means a straightforward undertaking it will be useful to spell out the process in some detail. I’ll restrict myself to three key points. First, Spinoza’s project takes place against the background of a new, specifically Enlightenment understanding of language; second, this new understanding provides a tool, over and above the emulation of classical models, for redressing the “errors” of scholastic thought; and third, in the particular methods he adopts Spinoza consciously rejects the approaches of his predecessors.

In a decisive break with the “Adamicist” theories of language that characterize Renaissance thought, early Enlightenment philosophers, including Descartes, Hobbes and the Port Royal Logicians, insisted on the arbitrariness of linguistic signification. No longer were words considered to be divinely and immutably bound to the concepts and phenomena they named; rather, they acquire their meanings purely by a process of association. This has two important consequences. First, stability and precision of terminology are no longer guaranteed, as words will mean different things to different people. Second, there is nothing, in theory at least, to prevent meanings being consciously adapted for a particular purpose. An upshot of these discoveries was the impetus they gave to the investigation of natural language in relation to philosophical language. This in turn opened the language of the Schools to systematic scrutiny, paving the way for radical reform. One approach, exemplified by Leibniz in the preface to his 1670 edition of a text by Marius Nizolius, was to propose ways of replacing cumbersome scholastic terminology with words drawn from everyday language. For Leibniz, natural language is in principle always preferable: “[t]he greatest clarity,” he proclaims, “is found in commonplace terms with their popular usage retained. There is always a certain obscurity in technical terms.” But even though Leibniz goes so far as to suggest that “whatever cannot be explained in popular terms is nothing and should be exorcised from philosophy,” he concedes that technical terms cannot always be avoided. This is particularly the case where substitution would lead to an intolerable degree of “prolixity.”
Leibniz’s approach seems quite cautious and minimally interventionist compared to Descartes’ some decades earlier in “Rules for the Direction of the Mind.” In reference to his “novel” use of terminology, Descartes offers his readers the following explanation of his method:

I wish to point out here that I am paying no attention to the way in which these terms have been used in the Schools. For it would be very difficult for me to employ the same terminology, when my own views are profoundly different. I shall take account only of the meanings in Latin of individual words and, when appropriate words are lacking, I shall use what seem the most suitable words, adapting them to my own meaning.59

More decisively than Leibniz, Descartes pulls no punches in his rejection of scholastic terminology. At the same time his faith in the efficacy of natural language is not so evident. While clearly he has respect for the root meanings of Latin words, he sees nothing sacrosanct in acquired usage: where other avenues are exhausted, adaptation of “the most suitable words” is a perfectly legitimate solution to the problem of devising an adequate philosophical language.

More radical still is a proposal by Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole whose attack is directed squarely at the ordinary language that Leibniz champions. Thoroughly at ease with the arbitrariness of the link between signifier and signified, they proclaim with swashbuckling bravado that:

the best way to avoid the confusion of words that one finds in ordinary language is to make up a new language and new words that are attached only to the ideas that we wish that they represent. But, in order to do that, it is not necessary to make up new sounds, for one can employ those that are already in use, while considering them as if they had no signification, in order to give them the [signification] that we want them to have.60

Arnauld and Nicole’s hypothetical project brings us to the point where instructive parallels can be drawn with the Ethics. More than in the case of Descartes, there is, quite unambiguously, a shared suspicion of ordinary language. And if in their exploitation of the arbitrariness of signification Arnauld and Nicole go well beyond Spinoza, the latter’s great merit is to have devised a method of attaching new meanings to existing terms in a way that meets the highest standards of philosophical clarity and rigour. Each of these points will repay closer attention.
As Lærke observes, the privileging of natural language was not an option for Spinoza: it was not, as for Leibniz, the “abstruseness of earlier philosophical language use” that stood in the way; rather, the difficulty was that “earlier philosophy perpetuated and complicated certain problems already present at the level of the natural language it employed.” Simplification alone could not purge philosophical language of the contradictory associations generated by the imagination; a more ambitious form of intervention was called for, one that would disrupt the habitual functioning of the imagination by establishing new patterns of association.

Radical as Spinoza’s transformation of philosophical language was, his approach could by no means be described as wilfully idiosyncratic. If his definitions are novel, even to the point of inverting accepted usage, he operates like Descartes within the constraints of conventional etymology and accidence. In developing his analysis of Spinoza’s language, Lærke acknowledges the similarity of his view to that of Pierre-François Moreau who describes Spinoza’s “strategy of philosophical language” as one “where modifications in philosophical language are ‘consciously introduced, beginning from common usage and then by modifying just enough to make it capable of expressing what is adequate’.” There’s a clear echo of Descartes here, even if Spinoza’s reforms are more wide-ranging.

This brings us to a parting of ways. Lærke’s main concern is, as he puts it, “the role that the geometrical method has to play in relation to the systematic reconstitution of the peculiar use of philosophical language that Spinoza is engaged in.” The last part of his essay develops his argument for the centrality of the geometric method in some detail. While I thoroughly endorse Lærke’s insistence on the philosophical necessity of the geometric method over and against those who regard it purely as a mode of presentation, I want in the space that remains to take the inquiry in a rather different direction. Given that, far from being a veil concealing a meaning accessible only to the initiate, Spinoza’s language can now be seen as an entirely rational component of his philosophical project, the case I have outlined for close etymological and morphological scrutiny becomes incontrovertible. It remains to be observed how, precisely, Spinoza goes about modifying common usage as well as to suggest the potential benefits of such observations for Spinozan scholarship.
There is, I admit, a circularity to any empirical demonstration of Spinoza’s strategies for linguistic modification. One begins with the assumption that whatever the meaning Spinoza attaches to a particular term it will be consistent at some level with accepted structural and etymological principles. One then analyses the word according to those principles, applies the results to the context in which the word appears and, predictably, a meaning consistent with that context emerges. While it could be argued that such a method merely leads one to find what one expects to find and therefore proves nothing, I’d nevertheless suggest that the frequency with which the results clarify the link between structure and meaning is a more than adequate justification.

Before proceeding to particular examples, it will be useful to keep in mind several key points. First, whatever violence Spinoza does to traditional concepts, it relates to specific usage, that is, to meanings that have evolved over time, and not to primary signification or morphemic structure. Second, to re-emphasize what was noted earlier, the alleged shortcomings of Spinoza’s Latin are stylistic rather than substantive. And finally, it is to the language, first and foremost, that we must look for elucidation of Spinoza’s meaning. The geometric method serves to ensure that the way terminology is understood remains anchored to the relevant definitions and axioms, and that propositions can readily be linked to other propositions as needed for rigour and clarity; it is not the repository of some form of occult knowledge.

An instructive example occurs in EIID3 (“By idea I understand a concept of the mind which the mind forms because it is a thinking thing”), at the end of which Spinoza takes the unusual step of explaining his reason for a particular choice of Latin term: “I say concept [conceptum] rather than perception [perceptionem], because the word perception seems [videtur] to indicate that the mind is acted on by the object. But concept seems [videtur] to express an action of the mind.”

What is not immediately clear is whether Spinoza is appealing to etymology, morphemic structure or current usage, or to any combination of these. Both terms, along with the verbs from which they derive, had already in classical times acquired as one of a range of related meanings their specific philosophical denotation: a seizing by the mind or the formation of a mental concept. Notably, though, the distinction between perception and conception was less pronounced than it has become in more recent times. It is precisely the interchangeability of the two terms that precipitates Spinoza’s deliberation. And with more specific regard
to seventeenth-century usage, I’d suggest that Spinoza is pointedly distancing himself from Descartes’ terminology; as Theo Verbeek notes, “perception” is the latter’s preferred term for the result of cognitive activity. It is tempting to see Spinoza as creating a definitional distinction where none previously existed. But on what basis? In English “seems to indicate” conveys a certain imprecision, an impression that eludes concrete verification. The Latin *videtur* is also used in this sense, but with a caveat: it is the passive form of *videt* [sees] and thus carries the primary meaning of “is seen” or “is discerned,” a signification that is decidedly less vague.

Structurally, the distinction rests on the question of agency: one term, Spinoza suggests, indicates that the mind acts, the other that it is acted upon. What makes this less than clear-cut is that both *conceptus* and *perceptus* (from which *perceptio* derives) are participial forms (of *concipio* and *percipio* respectively) which have a passive meaning. Additionally, the prefixes are not as helpful as one would like: *con-* indicates “completeness,” *per-* “going through.” It is only when we turn to the primary meanings of the verbs that a ground for Spinoza’s distinction emerges. For *concipio* we have “to take in” or “receive,” for *percipio* “to take wholly” or “to occupy.” Thus a concept is formed when an external object is taken in and received by the mind, and a perception when an external object imposes itself on and occupies the mind. As Spinoza would put it, q.e.d.

One final example will suffice to prepare the way for some concluding remarks on the form a supplementary glossary of Latin terms might take and on its potential value to Spinozan scholarship. Consider the crucial distinction, introduced in the scholium to EIP29, between *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*. To be sure, one can gain a workable sense of the difference from Spinoza’s definition: the former expresses an “eternal and infinite essence,” the latter is a consequence of the “necessity of God’s nature.” But without a knowledge of Latin, signification will remain entirely arbitrary; with that knowledge a precise logic of differentiation becomes evident.

The first word of each term is *natura* or “nature,” in classical Latin more particularly the nature of something. This in turn derives from *natus*, the past participle of *nascor*, I am born. So the nature of something is its inborn or innate character. The second word in each case comes from the same postclassical verb *naturo*, “I give existence to,” but with a different suffix. It will be recalled that the -*ans* suffix creates the present participle, while -*atus*, or in this instance the feminine -*ata*, is
the form of the perfect or past participle which is passive. Thus *Natura naturans* is “Nature that goes on giving existence” while *Natura naturata* is “Nature that has been given existence.”

**FINAL REMARKS**

While these and the earlier examples drawn from the various commentaries point to some of the ways in which close attention to the Latin terminology can illuminate our understanding of the *Ethics*, they represent just a sample of the many words that might be similarly treated. As for Lærke’s critique and the examination of Spinoza’s use of language that it has prompted, it leaves, I’d contend, no doubt that the morphological examination of individual terms is crucial to the ongoing scholarly endeavour of explicating Spinoza’s text. Further, the contents of a glossary that might meet this need can now be more clearly discerned. We can readily identify several necessary components for each entry: first, a detailed etymology, covering classical, late Latin, and scholastic usage as applicable; second, a morphological analysis, that is, an account of the precise way in which a particular inflection or the addition of a prefix or suffix affects the meaning; and third, an indication of the most likely signification—or significations—in the context of the *Ethics*. Additionally, I would envisage a preface outlining the structural and grammatical principles governing the most frequently encountered inflected forms. It would need to be detailed enough to explain the finer points of individual entries, and at the same sufficiently non-technical to be accessible to a reader with little or no Latin.

One final point remains to be stressed. In no way am I advocating etymological and morphemic analysis as a substitute for the demanding task of sustained philosophical inquiry. If we accept, as I have proposed, that Spinoza is entirely serious about fashioning a language that is equal to the task of registering philosophical truth, and that even the most unorthodox appropriations of existing terminology are based firmly on accepted principles of accidence and etymology, then attention to the linguistic underpinnings of a given formulation must be seen as crucial to its adequate explication. To suggest otherwise is to accuse Spinoza of either linguistic incompetence or wilful obscurantism, both of which charges have been thoroughly discredited by recent scholarship. But if linguistic analysis has an undeniable place in any examination of the *Ethics*, it is no magic wand that will instantly banish all interpretive difficulties. Its role is not to explain the intricacies of essence, the nature of infinite modes or what is to be understood by
“God’s idea”; rather, it aims to bring the non-Latinist reader to the point where a properly philosophical investigation might begin. Or, to put it another way, an understanding of how signification is accomplished by the structures of the Latin text may not open the door to instant revelation, but it might well forestall speculation as to a meaning that the particular form of the Latin in question unequivocally precludes.

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NOTES

1. To limit this observation to the Ethics is not to suggest that closer linguistic analysis would not benefit the study of Spinoza’s other works. It is, though, particularly appropriate to the task of interpreting the Ethics, given Spinoza’s strategies of assigning non-traditional meanings to key terms and securing those meanings by means of the geometric method as discussed later in the paper. References to the Ethics are provided in abbreviated form. E.g., reference to Part 1 Definition 1 is “EID1” and reference to Part 2 Proposition 2 is “EIIP2.”

2. The claim to be able to “shed light” on questions that have been microscopically dissected by scholars too numerous to list might seem excessive. I’m not suggesting, however, that morphemic analysis is likely to lead directly to radical reinterpretation of Spinoza’s philosophy; rather, that there are instances where close attention to accidence and etymology will indicate more precisely than otherwise determinable the range and scope of possible significations, thus making a valuable contribution to the critique of particular positions.

3. While I can’t claim to have made an exhaustive survey of scholarship in other languages, some initial impressions may be worth noting. First, no systematic explication of Latin terminology at the level of morphemic structure appears to have been attempted in any language. Second, English-language commentary, even where the author shows evidence of a thorough understanding of Latin, tends to be written for a non-Latinist readership. In contrast, French commentary is far more likely to assume that the reader will have a grounding in Latin. The continuing emphasis on the teaching of Latin in France and other continental countries, in contrast to Anglophone educational practice, is a possible explanation of this difference.

4. As Yitzhak Y. Melamed notes in the entry on Spinoza in Oxford Bibliographies Online, the philosophical study of Spinoza has been largely the province of Dutch scholars, in particular Fokke Akkerman and Piet Steenbakkers. The fact that much of their work is not widely available is, perhaps, testimony in itself of the relative neglect of linguistic matters.


6. Don Garrett’s discussion of perfectus at least has the merit of distinguishing between its different meanings, and he rightly emphasizes the importance of the idea of completion if the term is to be understood adequately in its Spinozistic context. This is not always the case with other commentators. Aaron V. Garrett, for example, in Meaning in Spinoza’s Method makes frequent reference to “perfection” but seems to assume that its meaning is entirely transparent. To take just one instance he notes, in a discussion of the preface to Part IV of the Ethics, that Spinoza “considered the idea of perfection as particularly suspicious.” See Aaron V. Garrett, Meaning in Spinoza’s Method. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 35. A closer look at Spinoza’s text, however, shows that it is not the concept of completion that he is questioning but the subjective judgement of what constitutes perfection in the commonly understood sense.


8. While the explanation I have suggested avoids the “gender trap,” it is admittedly rather simplistic. Commenting on the same problem, Richard Mason, in The God of Spinoza, is careful to note that although Deus is “grammatically masculine” (emphasis added) it is “absolutely certain that ‘God’ cannot be read without serious reservation as ‘he’.” The point as such is not developed further, but the residual anthropomorphism that haunts Spinoza’s otherwise non-gendered God is accounted for by Mason’s broader thesis. By defining God as an “absolutely infinite being” (EID6), Spinoza introduces his God not “from a theological or moral direction” but “by using a
mathematical or physical notion.” Yet, for all the mathematical precision of Spinoza’s method, God’s relation to the world (EIP29S) is “given in language taken from medieval theology.” The masculinity of God, it would seem, is part and parcel of that language. See Richard Mason, *The God of Spinoza: A Philosophical Study*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 25, 27, 29.

An acknowledgement of God’s problematic gender can also be found in Genevieve Lloyd’s *Routledge Philosophy GuideBook to Spinoza and the Ethics*, with the addition of quotation marks to the subheading “God and ‘his’ attributes.” See Genevieve Lloyd, *The Routledge Philosophy GuideBook to Spinoza and the Ethics*. London: Routledge, 1996, 30. Lloyd makes no further comment and continues in the body of the text to refer to God as “he”; nevertheless, the point has been made, even if it’s not entirely clear whether its target is the misrepresentation of Spinoza’s theology or patriarchal language more generally.


10. While Lin’s overall account of the passions is lucid and informative, the way the Latin conveys the notion of passivity is, on account of these errors, anything but clear.


16. All direct quotations from the Ethics are taken from the Curley translation.

17. EIP6 reads: “The modes of each attribute have God for their cause only insofar as he is considered under the attribute of which they are modes, and not insofar as he is considered under any other attribute.” I have omitted reference to EIIA3 as “modes of thinking” (*modi cogitandi*) is clearly a case of “mode” used in what Krop describes as its “non-technical sense of way or manner.”


22. See Melamed, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*. To be fair, Melamed quotes extensively from Spinoza’s own explication of essence to provide a reasonably adequate sense of how the term is to be understood in relation to particular contexts. The point about the elusiveness of the concept per se, however, remains. Explicit clarification is either circular (“God’s essence or nature”) or tautological (the “essence [i.e., the essential attributes] of the mouse”). Definitional precision
is most closely approached with the distinction between essence and its *propria* or properties. Again, though, apart from the scholastic explanation of essence as “the qualities that make the thing what it is” these qualities are identifiable more through what is excluded than included. Melamed, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, 50, 39, 51
23. See, for example, Garrett, *Meaning in Spinoza’s Method*, 57, 62.
24. Interestingly, this apparent synonymity might seem to be sanctioned by Spinoza himself given that in EIIP33S1 he refers to the impossibility of a thing’s existence where “its essence, or definition, involves a contradiction.” The Latin conjunction is *seu*, an alternative form of the more usual *sive*, which certainly indicates some degree of interchangeability, but only in the immediate context to which it applies and not more generally. See *Oxford Latin Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968, s.v. “sive,” §9, 1776.
27. A particularly telling example occurs in EIIP10 and EIIP11D where both Shirley and Curley translate *essentia hominis* as “the essence of man.” Given that the discussion of essence is linked not to categories or classes but to the “idea of a singular thing which actually exists” (EIIP11), it arguably makes more sense to translate *essentia hominis* as “the essence of a man.”
29. *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, 647. A comparison of Curley’s treatment of these terms with Filippo Mignini’s in his Italian translation of the Ethics points to an important difference between the two languages. The Italian is so similar to the Latin (*natura naturans* becomes *natura naturante* and *natura naturata* remains unchanged) that the dilemma facing an English translator simply doesn’t arise. Not only is there no need to retain the Latin, but additionally the way the morphemic structure produces its meaning requires no explanation as it is essentially the same in both languages. The only annotation Mignini includes is a redirection to chapter 8 of the *Short Treatise* for an explanation of the distinction between the two terms. See *Spinoza Opere*. Trans. Filippo Mignini and Omero Proietti. Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 2007, 818, 1634n87.
44. Most notably, it is Wolfson’s failure to recognize the significance of the geometric method that comes under fire. Aaron Garrett sees him as an “extreme” representative of this view, on account of his observation that “there is no logical connection between the substance of Spinoza’s philosophy and the form in which it is written”. See Wolfson, The Philosophy of Spinoza I, 55; quoted in Garrett, Meaning in Spinoza’s Method, 17.
45. A key passage, quoted and discussed by Lærke at the start of his article, occurs in the Explanation following EIII Definitions of the Affects XX where Spinoza seeks to distinguish between “favor” [favor] and “indignation” [indignatio]. After acknowledging that “in their common usage these words mean something else,” he observes that his “purpose is to explain the nature of things, not the meaning of words.” He concludes by stating: “I intend to indicate these things by words whose meaning is not entirely opposed to the meaning with which I wish to use them. One warning of this should suffice.”
50. Savan, “Spinoza and Language,” 221. The notion of an ens rationis having “no existence outside the intellect” echoes the distinction Krop draws between ens and esse.
54. Lærke, “Spinoza’s Language,” 528. “Common notions” should not be confused with “what men commonly understand” (EI, Appendix) or “common usage” (EIII, Explanation of Definition of the Affects XX).
59. René Descartes, “Rules for the Direction of the Mind.” The Philosophical Writings of Decartes,


64. The view that the alleged impenetrability of the Ethics which derives from Neoplatonic or Kabbalistic mysticism has less currency than formerly, but nevertheless, as Steven Nadler points out, “continues, to some degree, in recent scholarship.” See Steven Nadler, “Introduction,” Spinoza and Medieval Jewish Philosophy. Ed. Steven Nadler. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 1, 1 n5. It is implicit in Savan’s presumption that Spinoza “did not intend the Ethics to be a simple exposition of truth,” a position whose lineage he suggests is traceable “at least to the Parmenides of Plato.” See Savan, “Spinoza and Language,” 216. Interestingly, while his own approach is uncompromisingly rationalistic, Alain Badiou is not entirely unsympathetic to mystical readings of the Ethics which he describes as “something that composes the strange unity of three different intellectual creations: conceptual, spiritual and artistic”. See Alain Badiou, “What is a Proof in Spinoza’s Ethics?” Spinoza Now. Ed. Dimitris Vardoulakis. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011, 40. For Badiou it is the proofs, in all their detail, that are most crucial to the logic of the geometric method. If one accepts this view then the importance of attending closely to Spinoza’s language can hardly be over-estimated.


69. There is some debate as to whether God equates to the whole of nature or only to natura naturans. Clearly, the view one takes will depend on one’s position on the relation of modes to substance. For Curley, God can only be natura naturans, the cause of modal change; as he puts it after considering passages from several of Spinoza’s texts, “substance” appears to denote “not the whole of Nature, but only its active part, its primary elements.” See Edwin Curley, Spinoza’s Metaphysics: An Essay in Interpretation. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969, 42. Not unexpectedly, given his wider critique of Curley’s view of causation, Melamed challenges this position. How, he asks, can it be reconciled with Spinoza’s repeated claim that “there is nothing outside God”? See Melamed, Spinoza’s Metaphysics, 17-20.