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## **RESEARCH ARTICLES**



# On the Argument for the Necessity of Identity

Alex Blum

**Abstract:** We show that the thesis that identity is necessary is equivalent to the thesis that everything is necessarily what it is. Hence the challenges facing either, faces them both.

**Keywords:** identity, necessity.

The classical argument for the necessity of identity,<sup>1</sup> namely:

T1:  $(x)(y) (x=y \supset \Box x=y)$

rests on the necessity of

T2:  $(x)(\Box x=x)$ .

The only other premise in the argument is the substitutivity of identity which is treated as a logical truth.

We show that T1 implies T2 as well. Hence the challenges facing each are shared by them both. A close look at what both mean makes their equivalence apparent.

T2 may be read, as:

T3: Everything is necessarily what it is.<sup>2</sup>

The classical argument for the necessity of identity proceeds as follows,<sup>3</sup> from premise

a:  $(x)(y) [x=y \supset (Fx \supset Fy)]$

to conclusion,

b:  $(x)(y)[(x=y \supset ((\Box x=x) \supset (\Box x=y)))]$

by substituting ' $\Box x=x$ ' for ' $F$ ' in a.<sup>4</sup> The necessity of ' $\Box x=x$ ' follows from the necessity of T2, hence the necessity of:

---

<sup>1</sup> Wiggins (1965, 41) and Kripke (1971, 136). The argument is generally attributed to Kripke. Wiggins dismissed the argument. See more in note 4.

<sup>2</sup> Our reading follows what would be Leibniz' reading of ' $(x)(x=x)$ ' as 'Everything is what it is'. Leibniz (1996, 362).

<sup>3</sup> See Kripke (1971, 136).

<sup>4</sup> Wiggins dismissed the argument on the ground that "... it is a mistake to count a thing's identity amongst the predicates true of it". Wiggins (1965, 42).

T1:  $(x)(y) (x=y \supset \Box x=y)$ .

We now show that T1 implies T2:

c: i: $(x)(y)(x=y \supset \Box x=y)$	T1
ii: $x=x \supset \Box x=x$	I,
iii: $(x)(x=x \supset \Box x=x)$	ii,
iv: $(x)(x=x) \supset (x)(\Box x=x)$	iii.
v: $(x)(x=x)$	identity
T2: $(x)(\Box x=x)$	iv, v.

We can see that T2 implies T1 informally as well. For If  $x$  is  $y$  then  $x=y$  and if everything is necessarily what it is, then  $x$  is necessarily  $y$ .<sup>5</sup> T1 implies T2, for T1 says that, for any  $x$  and  $y$ , if  $x$  is  $y$ , then necessarily  $x$  is  $y$ , so if  $x$  is  $x$  then necessarily  $x$  is  $x$ . And for all  $x$ ,  $x$  is  $x$ , thus for all  $x$ , necessarily  $x=x$ .

We know that T1 cannot be true if there is an  $a$  and  $b$  for which the following are true:<sup>6</sup>

S1: It is necessarily true that if  $a=b$  then the sentence which states that  $a=b$ , is true.

and

S2: The sentence which states that  $a=b$ , is contingent.

Hence if the following two apparently true statements are in fact true:

S1': Necessarily, if Socrates = the teacher of Plato then 'Socrates is the teacher of Plato' is true

and

S2': 'Socrates is the teacher of Plato' is contingent,

---

<sup>5</sup> Wiggins' objection is not relevant here. See note 4.

<sup>6</sup> This follows from Blum (2023). The argument depends crucially on the validity of Tarski's T-schema which may be stated informally: 'A statement is true if and only if what it states is the case'. See Tarski (1944, 54-55). Both Aristotle and Michael Dummett have objection against Tarski's T-schema if taken to be valid for every sentence. Aristotle would reject the T-schema for future tense sentences on the ground that they are neither "... actually true or actually false" (Aristotle, 19a30-40, 48). Dummett contends that sentences whose truth values are unknowable, indeterminate, difficult to establish, or one has no right to say that they are either true or false have no truth value. However, he should have no objection to assigning a truth value to the sentence 'Socrates=the teacher of Plato'. For it doesn't fall into any of those categories. And he writes: "... for most ordinary contexts the account of these words embodied in the laws 'It is true that  $p$  if and only if  $p$ ' and 'It is false that  $p$  if and only if not  $p$ ' is quite sufficient" (162). See (Dummett, 145, 157-62).



then T1 is not true. And thus, neither is T2/ T3.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> I am deeply grateful to Yehuda Gellman and Peter Genco for discussion and to Avrom Amnon, Max Cresswell and Richard Heck for their comments on T3.



# Prolegomena in Plato

Arnold Cusmariu

**Abstract:** The article demonstrates unity in Plato's thought to a degree not heretofore realized and suggests analytical links to developments in logic, metaphysics and epistemology millennia later, substantiating Whitehead's famous comment that 'the safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.'

**Keywords:** Plato, Aristotle, Kant, *Phaedo*, *Sophist*, *Theaetetus*, *Cratylus*, Forms, predication, naturalistic fallacy, the ethics of belief, relativism, counterfactuals, syllogistic logic.

## Overview

This article seeks to create a new philosophical discipline that might be called 'analytical history of ideas', similar in scope and intent to Danto 1968 and Danto 1973 and hinted at in Cusmariu 2022. Key passages in *Sophist*, *Theaetetus* and *Cratylus* are linked with the centerpiece, a famous passage in the *Phaedo*, showing that insights collectively represent a unity in Plato's thought not heretofore realized and foreshadow concepts and theories formulated millennia later in logic, metaphysics and epistemology.<sup>1</sup>

## Four Prescient Passages

### 1. *Phaedo* 100c-e, Grube Translation

The article discusses sentences 1-8, omitting italicized sentences for the reasons stated.

**Sentence 1:** If there is anything beautiful besides the Beautiful itself, it is beautiful for no other reason than that it shares in that Beautiful.

**Sentence 2:** I say so with everything.

**Sentence 3:** Do you agree to this sort of cause? -- I do.

*I no longer understand or recognize those other sophisticated causes.*

- This sentence seems to be a sarcastic preamble to Sentence 4.

---

<sup>1</sup> A follow-up article is planned that will cover prolegomena in ethics, politics and aesthetics as well as other issues in logic, metaphysics and epistemology.

**Sentence 4:** If someone tells me that a thing is beautiful because it has a bright color or shape or any such thing, I ignore these other reasons – for all these confuse me.

**Sentence 5:** I simply, naively and perhaps foolishly cling to this, that nothing else makes it beautiful other than the presence of, or the sharing in, or however you may describe its relationship to that Beautiful we mentioned.

**Sentence 6:** For I will not insist on the precise nature of the relationship.

*Only that all beautiful things are beautiful by the Beautiful.*

- Sentence 1 already captured the content of this sentence.

**Sentence 7:** That, I think, is the safest answer I can give myself or anyone else.

**Sentence 8:** And if I stick to this I think I shall never fall into error.

*This is the safe answer for me or anyone else to give, namely, that it is through Beauty that beautiful things are made beautiful.*<sup>2</sup>

- Previous sentences already captured the content of this sentence.

## 2. *Sophist* 259e, Akrill Translation

It is because of the interweaving of Forms with one another that we come to have discourse.<sup>3</sup>

## 3. *Cratylus* 402a, Reeve Translation

Heraclitus says somewhere that ‘everything gives way and nothing stands fast,’ and, likening the things that are to the flowing of a river, he says that ‘you cannot step into the same river twice.’<sup>4</sup>

## 4. *Theaetetus* 152a, Cornford Translation

He [Protagoras] puts it in this sort of way, doesn’t he, that any given thing ‘is to me such as it appears to me, and is to you such as it appears to you.’<sup>5</sup>

## ***Phaedo* Sentence 1**

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<sup>2</sup> G.M.A. Grube (1899-1982) was a major Plato scholar. He also published translations of *Republic*, *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Meno* and authored Grube 1935. I consulted eleven other translations of the *Phaedo* passage to make sure my analysis avoided translation bias: Jowett 2023 (1892), 92; Horan 2023, 44; Emlyn-Jones and Preddy 2017, 457-459; Long 2010, 95; Brann, Kalkavage and Salem 1998, 80; Gallop 1993, 56-7; Larson 1980: 96; Tredennick 1961, 81-82; Bluck 1955, 114-115; Fowler 1914, 345; and Church 1903 (1880), 182-183.

<sup>3</sup> I also consulted translations of this sentence in White 1997; Brann, Kalkavage & Salem 1996; Benardete 1984; Cornford 1961; and MacKay 1868.

<sup>4</sup> I also consulted translations of this sentence in Jowett 1961 and Fowler 1926.

<sup>5</sup> I also consulted translations of this sentence in Horan 2021 and Levett 1997.

If there is anything beautiful besides the Beautiful itself, it is beautiful for no other reason than that it shares in that Beautiful. [Grube 1997, 86]

- **Prolegomena**

1. Syllogistic Logic Challenges

*An Imaginary Dialogue*

SOCRATES: As we work our way through problems, I will be presenting arguments for or against various and sundry solutions. I will, of course, do my best to make sure those arguments are logically correct. I must admit, however, that I don't at the moment have a method, other than the one named after me, for evaluating the logical correctness of arguments. We have with us a new student who hails from up north in Stagira and has expressed a keen interest in this sort of problem.

ARISTOTLE: I'll look into it eventually. There is a lot to learn in the meantime.

SOCRATES: Of course, of course.

PHAEDO: Whatever you figure out, you better make sure it will help us geometers with our proofs. By the way, I understand you're not a geometer, is that right?

ARISTOTLE: I'm not a geometer.

PHAEDO: In that case, perhaps you can start with something simple. What is the logical form of 'Everybody loves somebody sometime'?

SOCRATES: Our colleague has a wicked sense of humor.

PHAEDO: I wasn't joking.

SOCRATES: Patience, Phaedo, patience; let's give our colleague the benefit of the doubt.

An adequate system of logic should be able to confirm the validity of arguments that seem intuitively to be valid, either in the semantic sense of showing that the conclusion cannot be false if the premises are true; or in the syntactic sense of showing that arguments instantiate an axiom or a valid rule of inference.

With that in mind, let us put to a test Kant's well-known comment (1929, 17 B viii) that syllogistic logic (SL) "... is thus to all appearance a closed and completed body of doctrine."<sup>6</sup> The tests I have in mind are much simpler than Phaedo's requirement that SL help geometry with its proofs.

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<sup>6</sup> Here is a key passage of the Deduction in *Critique of Pure Reason* (B 131-132): "It must be possible for the 'I think' to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me which could not be thought at all, and that is equivalent to saying that the representation would be impossible, or at least would be nothing to me." Trying to formulate the argument in this passage in SL should have persuaded Kant that SL was far from 'a completed body of doctrine'. I note with some amusement that SL was not one of the 'related systems' Gödel targeted in his 1931 paper "On Formally Undecidable Propositions of Principia Mathematica and Related Systems", from which we should not infer that SL is 'a completed body of doctrine'.

- First Test

*Logoi* being made possible by the 'interweaving of Forms with one another' according to *Sophist* (more on this later), we might well expect a property true of the Forms, self-participation, to have a counterpart true of *logoi*, self-entailment. Seems obvious, doesn't it? Well, Aristotle missed it.

We know that every proposition in the propositional calculus logically implies itself.<sup>7</sup> So, can SL confirm the validity of an argument from Sentence 1 to itself?

SL lacks the resources to confirm the semantic validity of this argument. Confirming syntactic validity in SL means showing that an argument from Sentence 1 to Sentence 1 is a substitution instance of a valid syllogism,<sup>8</sup> of which there are 15 in SL, consisting of propositions having a subject term S, a predicate term P and a middle term M, each occurring twice in four specified patterns called 'moods', prefixed by the quantifiers 'All', 'Some' or 'No'. Brackets enclosing each term type will facilitate subsequent analysis: <S>, {P} and [M].

**Sentence 1:** If there is anything <beautiful besides the Beautiful itself>, it is {beautiful for no other reason than that it shares in that Beautiful}.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore,

**Sentence 1:** If there is anything <beautiful besides the Beautiful itself>, it is {beautiful for no other reason than that it shares in that Beautiful}.

SL cannot show this inference to be syntactically valid as stated. The reason is simple: SL studies the validity of arguments consisting of two premises and a conclusion, for a total of three propositions. So, would adding a third premise solve this problem? The distribution of terms in the resulting argument structure would have to be this:

<S> {P}

[M] [M]

Therefore,

<S> {P}

[M] [M] must be the structure of the new premise because <S> and {P} have already occurred twice, so there is only 'room' for the middle term to occur twice in the minor premise. However, no categorical proposition in standard form contains the same term in subject as well as predicate position. Moreover, neither the rule of distribution nor a Venn diagram can confirm the validity of this

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<sup>7</sup> Whitehead and Russell 1910, 103, refers to  $\vdash p \supset p$  as the 'principle of identity', from which it follows that  $p \vdash p$ .

<sup>8</sup> Frege's substitution theorem provided for the first time a formally adequate explanation of the reason why an argument stated in words or symbols is valid by virtue of being a substitution instance of a valid rule of inference.

<sup>9</sup> I am deliberately oversimplifying, realizing that Sentence 1 is in conditional, not SL form.

argument structure. Thus, SL fails to confirm the validity of what is perhaps the most elementary of inferences of the propositional (*logoi*) calculus. Had Aristotle seen this, the propositional calculus would have been developed much earlier.<sup>10</sup> Explaining the difference between propositional and predicate logic proved to be a truly profound problem, only solved by Frege in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He also did away with SL and proved Kant wrong.

- Second Test

Another valid inference Phaedo would have recognized as such is from Sentence 1

**Sentence 1:** If there is anything beautiful besides the Beautiful itself, it is beautiful for no other reason than that it shares in that Beautiful.

to Sentence 1a

**Sentence 1a:** If there is anything beautiful, it is beautiful for no other reason than that it shares in that Beautiful.

Once again we only have a two component argument. SL cannot be applied to confirm the validity of the argument from Sentence 1 to Sentence 1a as written, so we must add a second premise, Sentence 1b below. The only valid syllogism that is applicable to the example under study is **AAA-1**, which has the following structure:

All [M] are {P}

All <S> are [M]

Therefore,

All <S> are {P}

Let us fill in this structure with categorical propositions in standard form, identifying recurring term types using the bracket method.

**Sentence 1:** All [things that are beautiful besides the beautiful itself] are {things that are beautiful only because they participate in that beautiful itself}.

**Sentence 1b:** All <things that are beautiful> are [things that are beautiful besides the beautiful itself].

Therefore,

**Sentence 1a:** All <things that are beautiful> are {things that are beautiful only because they participate in that beautiful itself}. We have been able to confirm the validity of the inference from Sentence 1 to Sentence 1a, but only by adding a near tautology, Sentence 1b, which says,

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<sup>10</sup> The Stoics started propositional logic in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC but original writings were lost and the subject languished for centuries. It was reinvented by Peter Abelard in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

**Sentence 1b\*:** All <things that are beautiful> are [things that are beautiful & things that are distinct from the beautiful itself], which implies a tautology,

**Sentence 1b\*\*:** All <things that are beautiful> are [things that are beautiful]!

Imagine Phaedo and his fellow geometers going through such contortions while trying to capture a proof from Euclid in SL!<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Noumenal Priority

The conditional structure of Sentence 1 is explicit in eleven translations and implicit in one, which brings up a question we need to ask right away: What was Plato getting at by using conditional form in Sentence 1? I will argue it was not a mere *façon de parler*.

Plato held that Forms – abstract, transcendent, entities that exist necessarily – had maximal reality and uniquely so. As he also tells us in Sentence 1, the Forms are their own perfect exemplars. Anything else, to the extent it is F, is F only conditionally, hence the conditional structure of Sentence 1. Conditionally on what? Everything else that is F is, is F conditionally on the Forms. Conditionally on the Forms how? Anything that is F, is only F by participating in F-ness, meaning that without the Forms, nothing is F. Without the Forms, we don't even know what it means to be F! (I will return to this point later.)

Millennia before Kant, Plato's Parable of the Cave told us that the Theory of Forms is the best we can do to 'save the phenomena'.<sup>12</sup>

As Plato might have put it, empirical reality is an approximation of mathematical reality. For example, physical laws give the equality symbol, =, the usual algebraic meaning for computational purposes, not always acknowledging that the approximate equality symbol,  $\approx$ , is, strictly speaking, what is empirically appropriate, as this would complicate computations significantly (try it). A good illustration of Plato's insight is the ideal gas law, usually stated as  $pV = nRT$ , whose actual physical meaning when applied in computations is  $pV \approx nRT$ . R, the Avogadro/Boltzmann constant, is one of many physical constants that have an exact mathematical value but in practice are approximated. The ideal gas law is an approximation of the behavior of gases under many conditions and has several limitations. For example, the higher the pressure, the more wrong it is. It would

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<sup>11</sup> Cusmariu 2016, 282-285, reconstructs Euclid's proof of Proposition III.6 using the powerful tools of modern logic. Doing so in SL, even if possible, would have been absurdly cumbersome.

<sup>12</sup> Compare Rovelli 2011, 81: "Plato is moving in the right direction: it is by means of mathematics that the physical world will be efficiently described"; and also (2011, 82) "... it was Plato who posed the question 'Can we account for the strange movements of the planets in the sky in terms of some simple and orderly motion?' This was the fateful question that would give rise to Greek mathematical astronomy and, eventually, Copernicus, Kepler, Newton, and all of modern science. It was Plato who insisted that astronomy could and must become an exact mathematical science."



have to be revised with each gas to remain even approximately accurate. If you can hear Plato saying, 'I told you so', you are right.

The 'One-Over-Many' model 'saves the phenomena' more efficiently than Kant's Thing-in-Itself because the Forms also solve the problem of universals, which Kant did not.<sup>13</sup> The first *Critique* doesn't even hint at one of the oldest problems in philosophy!<sup>14</sup> As to the relation between Forms<sup>15</sup> and empirical exemplars, about which Plato wavers later in our passage, I will construe participation (also) as a kind of substitution in the logical sense, so that Forms also have a logical function. All in due course.

### 3. Negative Existentials

What might be called 'the Riddle of Nonbeing' has been a poser since Plato, of which the *locus classicus* is perhaps *Sophist* 259A. Let us state the problem in argument form.<sup>16</sup>

(1) If  $x$  exemplifies property  $F$ , then  $x$  is  $F$ .

- This is a near tautology.

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<sup>13</sup> Kant's famous objection to the Ontological Argument is that existence is not a 'real predicate', by which he meant existence is not a 'real property', rather than not a linguistic item of the predicable kind. The larger problem is to explain what a property is, which means solving the problem of universals. Calling existence not a 'real property' simply dodges this problem. See Van Cleve 1999, 188.

<sup>14</sup> Referring to the Forms, Kant writes (1929, 310): "For Plato ideas are archetypes of the things themselves." This (a) is the sort of crude psychologism one might hear in a freshman philosophy class; (b) gets the relationship between Forms and empirical exemplars exactly backwards; (c) is refuted by the modern conception of properties as abstract 'One-in-Many' universals; (d) is refuted by a correct understanding of Plato's role in shaping the mathematical orientation of modern science as explained in Rovelli 2011.

<sup>15</sup> It's a good question whether ontology needs suprasensible objects categorically distinct from and fully independent of the world of appearances, Platonic Forms; as well as Kantian Things-in-Themselves, suprasensible objects that in some sense exist 'behind' and are also independent of 'the veil of appearances.' I don't think so but this is not the place to argue the matter. Kant's misunderstandings of Plato evidently prevented him from taking a hard look at this issue. Kant scholars such as Van Cleve 1999, Hartnack 1967, Strawson 1966, Bennett 1966, Bird 1961, Weldon 1958, and Körner 1955 do not address the issue. Walsh 1947 (36, 56, 101-103) notes key aspects of the Theory of Forms but not as an ontological alternative to Things-in-Themselves. None of the articles in Wolff 1967 address the issue. Of the articles in Guyer 1997, only O'Neill talks about Plato but all she does is tell us (285) that Kant rejected "the entire Platonic account of the metaphysical basis of unity", as well as "all thought that his Ideas of Reason correspond to any real archetypes, and adopts a position that is irreconcilable with any form of the Platonic vision of Ideas as patterns for knowledge and mathematics." O'Neill repeats Kant's canard about Forms being 'archetypes' and adds a new one, 'patterns', leaving both unexplained.

<sup>16</sup> See Cartwright 1960; Owen 1970; Wiggins 1970; Plantings 1974; Gale 1976; and Cusmariu 1978C.

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(2) If  $x$  exemplifies property  $F$ , then  $x$  exists.

- This is another near tautology.

(3) If  $x$  exemplifies *nonexistence*, then  $x$  exists.

- This follows from 2 by substitution.

(4) If  $x$  exemplifies *nonexistence*, then  $x$  does not exist.

- This follows from the meaning of the property *nonexistence*.

(5) If  $x$  exemplifies *nonexistence*, then  $x$  exists and does not exist.

- This follows from (3) and (4).

(6) *Nonexistence* is not a property.

- This allegedly follows from (5).

However, what follows from (5) is the tautology that everything exists,

(7) *Nonexistence* is unexemplified.

To derive (6), we would need

(8) There are only properties that are exemplified,

which Aristotle may have held (see Cresswell 1975 and my critique of this article in Cusmariu 1979A.)

What follows from the fact that *nonexistence* is not a property of anything is that negative existentials such as

(10) Santa Claus does not exist

and

(11) There are no roundsquares

cannot be analyzed via

(12) Santa Claus exemplifies *nonexistence*

and

(13) Roundsquares exemplify *nonexistence*.

This is not a problem for the Theory of Forms, which can analyze (10) and (11) as (12) and (13):

(12) The property *being Santa Claus* is unexemplified.

(13) The property *being a roundsquare* is unexemplified.

Unexemplified (and unexemplifiable) properties are included in the Theory of Forms. This paper can only indicate some of the reasons why such a rich ontology is necessary.

#### 4. Russell's Paradox

##### *An Imaginary Dialogue*

SOCRATES: So, there is a Form, Beauty, in which all and only beautiful things participate.

PHAEDO: There is.

SOCRATES: Is there also a Form in which all and only things that are not beautiful participate?

PHAEDO: No. All and only things that are not beautiful simply do not participate in Beauty.

SOCRATES: That is not true.

PHAEDO: Why not?

SOCRATES: If something does not participate in Beauty, it might be for reasons having nothing whatever to do with whether it is beautiful.

PHAEDO: I see. You're right.

SOCRATES: So, there is a Form in which things participate because and only because they are not beautiful. We can call it Unbeauty, I suppose.

PHAEDO: That's an odd sort of Form.

SOCRATES: I suppose. Now, every Form has a complement. Things participate in one or the other but not both. Do you agree?

PHAEDO: I do. I have a feeling you're leading up to something. I hope so.

SOCRATES: Patience, Phaedo, patience. I said earlier that Beauty itself is also beautiful, meaning that our Forms are their own perfect exemplars.

PHAEDO: Yes, that's true.

SOCRATES: Does that mean that there is a Form in which all and only Forms participate by virtue of participating in themselves? Call it Self-Participation.

PHAEDO: That's also an odd sort of Form, but I see now reason to think there is no such Form.

SOCRATES: We agreed that every Form has a complement, from which it follows that there is also such a Form as Non-Self-Predicability, right?

PHAEDO: You're inventing all kinds of odd Forms today. Well, I could see no way to stop you from saying there is such a Form as Self-Predicability. I see no way to stop you from saying there is such a Form as Non-Self-Predicability.

SOCRATES: I think you'll change your mind in a minute.

PHAEDO: Why is that?

SOCRATES: If there is such a Form as Non-Self-Predicability, then, it is either self-predicable or it is not. We agreed that was true in general: Something is either red or not-red; round or not-round; and so on.

PHAEDO: Yes.

SOCRATES: It is easy to see that Non-Self-Predicability participates in itself if and only if Non-Self-Predicability does not participate in itself, which is impossible. Therefore, there is no such Form as Non-Self-Predicability, even though it seemed that there might be.

PHAEDO: You are absolutely right. Now what?

SOCRATES: I hope someone will figure out this problem some day.<sup>17</sup>

## 5. Higher-Order Logic

The One-Over-Many model means that there is also a Form, a One, Over the Many Forms that participate in themselves, namely, Self-Participation. This is but a short step from what we now call properties of properties, which belong to higher-order logic. This consequence of the One-Over-Many model – that SL failed to explore – lay dormant literally for millennia and was only recognized at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Frege. However, neither he nor his followers seem to have realized that they were being original only in matters of technical detail. Plato got there first.

Now, consider Forms such as Being a Form, Being Abstract, Being Transcendental and Being a Necessary Existent, which are properties of properties. In formal logic, they are considered third-order properties and would be quantified over in third-order logic. Second-order properties quantified over in second-order logic are properties of mathematical objects (Shapiro 2000).

So, are there any properties at all that can legitimately be said to be self-exemplified? The answer is, yes. Thus, Being a Property, Being Abstract, Being Transcendental, Being a Necessary Existent, Existing Independently of Particulars and Existing Unexemplified are all evidently self-exemplified. However, we can only write

SE1. F exemplifies F if only if F is exemplified by all properties.

rather than

SE2. F exemplifies F if only if F is exemplified by all and only properties

because numbers and sets are also abstract and exist necessarily.<sup>18</sup> SE1 would ‘rescue’ Plato’s self-participation claim by answering familiar objections to the self-predicability of Forms, though evidently it is not the concept of self-predication Plato intended.<sup>19</sup> The Forms he usually mentions as self-exemplifying, Beauty, Justice and Goodness, are not so according to SE1. How replacing standard self-predication with SE1 would affect Plato’s metaphysics generally is beyond the scope of this paper. I bring it up to suggest a consequence of the Theory of Forms

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<sup>17</sup> This is the property (propositional function) version of Russell’s Paradox (Russell 1902), formulated as a refutation of Frege’s Law V, which assumed that any property determined a set. Russell’s 1902 letter to Frege stated both versions, though only the set version is formulated symbolically. Cusmariu 1979B discusses the set version.

<sup>18</sup> Unless, of course, numbers and sets reduce to properties.

<sup>19</sup> Malcolm 1991 is a book-length study of self-predication in Plato.

whose significance as an intuitive starting point of higher-order logic was realized only millennia later.<sup>20</sup>

## 6. Belief *De Dicto* and Belief *De Re*

One criticism that has been raised (including by Aristotle) is that the Theory of Forms is unnecessarily powerful; so powerful in fact that it is its own worst enemy, as the famous ‘Third Man’ Argument in *Parmenides* allegedly demonstrated (see Cusmariu 1985). However, the criticism proved shortsighted at several junctures in the history of philosophy. It happened again more recently when a property of the form *being believed to have a property* proved useful.

No one suspected that such an unusual property was a consequence of the Theory of Forms, certainly not in the version stated in Sentence 1 of *Phaedo*. We are very far from the simple structure of Sentence 1 to suppose that there could be a Form participated in by all and only those things that are believed to have a property. That, however, is what follows from the Theory of Forms once we grant that there is a Form of F-ness in which all and only things participate by virtue of being F – assuming we can solve the problem of Non-Self-Predicability.

Quine 1956 introduced an important distinction between ‘notional’ and ‘relational’ belief. Notional belief is propositional and referentially opaque, *de dicto*. Relational belief is non-propositional and referentially transparent, *de re*, which turned out to make use of a property of the form *being believed to have a property*. Quine did not explain relational belief that way because he thinks (186) properties (intensions) are ‘creatures of darkness’ that need to be ‘exorcised’. I propose to ignore what are essentially *ad hominem* comments.

Thus, in the notional sense, Smith can believe the proposition that the Morning Star is the planet Venus but reject the proposition that the Evening Star is the planet Venus, not realizing that they are identical. Accordingly, Smith would reject the inference of 3 from 1 and 2.

1. Smith believes that the Morning Star is the planet Venus.
2. The Morning Star is identical with the Evening Star.
3. Smith believes that the Evening Star is the planet Venus.

However, in the relational sense, Smith believes of the Morning Star that it is the planet Venus, in which case Smith ‘has his candidate’ (as Quine put it, 185), so that the Morning Star has the property *being believed by Smith to be the planet Venus*. Because the Morning Star is identical with the Evening Star, every property of one is a property of the other. Accordingly, it follows that the Evening Star has the property *being believed by Smith to be the planet Venus* and the inference from 4 and 2 to 5 goes through.

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<sup>20</sup> Aristotle spent some twenty years at Plato’s Academy and eventually produced his own solution to the problem of universals. Cusmariu 1979A takes a hard critical look at (and demolishes) a modern reconstruction of Aristotle’s theory of universals in Cresswell 1975.

4. The Morning Star is believed by Smith to be the planet Venus.
2. The Morning Star is identical with the Evening Star.
5. The Evening Star is believed by Smith to be the planet Venus.

By including a property of the form *being believed to have a property*, the Theory of Forms is able to incorporate a useful distinction in the philosophy of mind. It's a good question whether other solutions to the problem of universals can do that.

To forestall potential misunderstanding, we should add that whether or not Smith or the planet Venus exist has no bearing on whether the property *being believed by Smith to be the planet Venus* exists; only on whether this property is exemplified. The Theory of Forms distinguishes sharply between the existence of Forms and their exemplification, including their exemplifiability. Unexemplified as well as unexemplifiable Forms are admitted under the most powerful version of the Theory of Forms – though it is a matter of scholarly debate whether Plato held such a view.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Phaedo* Sentence 2**

And that is what I say about them all. [Long 2010, 95]<sup>22</sup>

#### **• Prolegomena**

##### **1. A Syllogistic Logic (SL) Challenge**

As the expressions 'everything', 'all the others', 'all things', 'all of them', 'every kind of thing', and 'all phenomena' make clear, Sentence 2 is a generalization. What is less clear is whether Plato intended to assert a logical relationship between Sentence 2 and Sentence 1; and if so, in which direction.

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<sup>21</sup> A reduction of belief *de re* to belief *de dicto* would need to preserve the inference from 4 and 2 to 5 and overcome Quine's objections to quantifying into opaque contexts. I attempted such a reduction in Cusmariu 1977. Alternatively, the constituent properties of a proposition could function as the objects of a belief *de re* in a reduction of belief *de dicto* to belief *de re*. Thus, "Smith believes with respect to *Socratic wisdom* that it is exemplified" could reduce 'Smith believes that Socrates is wise.' If Smith doesn't know that Socrates is the philosopher who drank hemlock, he would reject the proposition that the philosopher who drank hemlock was wise, which rejection would have to be preserved by a reduction of "Smith believes that the philosopher who drank hemlock is wise" in terms of belief with respect to the properties that are the constituents of this proposition. The ontological resources of the Theory of Forms are powerful enough to permit a reduction of belief *de dicto* to belief *de re* with respect to properties of any logical complexity. As to how abstract objects such as properties could be objects of belief or cognition generally, Russell (1912, Ch. X) saw no difficulty in the matter, nor did Church (1951, 104); though it would have to be explained how exactly a property could be a person's 'candidate' in Quine's sense.

<sup>22</sup> Translations in Tredennick 1961 and Tredennick & Tarrant 1954 omit this sentence.

Assuming a logical relationship was intended, there are two possibilities:

1. The inference is particular-to-general: From Sentence 1 to Sentence 2.
2. The inference is general-to-particular: From Sentence 2 to Sentence 1.

Both inferences are intuitively valid. There is only need to study one of them, however. Let us determine whether SL can confirm the intuitive validity of the argument from Sentence 2 to Sentence 1 – modern logic can do both.

Here are the two components of such an argument:

- I. Object X is F because and only because X participates in F-ness.

Therefore,

- II. Object X is beautiful because and only because X participates in Beauty.

First, we state I and II as **A** categorical propositions in standard form, replacing 'because and only because' with the copula. This yields the following argument:

- Ia. All things that are F are things that participate in F-ness.

Therefore,

- Iia. All things that are beautiful are things that participate in Beauty.

For reasons already indicated, SL cannot confirm that the inference from Ia to Iia is valid as written. What we must do, again, is add a second premise to complete the **AAA-1** structure. The new premise must conform to the constraints of **AAA-1**, which requires that subject and predicate terms of the conclusion occur one more time in the premises, with the remaining positions being occupied by the middle term. This means that subject and predicate terms are to be based on the terms of the conclusion, Iia. This leads to the following structure:

All M are P: All [M things] are {things that participate in beauty}.

All S are M: All <things that are beautiful> are [M things].

Therefore,

All S are P (Iia): All <things that are beautiful> are {things that participate in beauty}.

From Ia and Iia it follows that the middle term can be either [things that are F] or [things that participate in F-ness], resulting in two syllogisms with the same conclusion:

- Syllogism 1

(i) All [things that are F] are {things that participate in beauty}.

(ii) All <things that are beautiful> are [things that are F].

Therefore,

Arnold Cusmariu

(iii) (IIa) All <things that are beautiful> are {things that participate in beauty}.

- **Syllogism 2**

(iv) All [things that participate in F-ness] are {things that participate in beauty}.

(v) All <things that are beautiful> are [things that participate in F-ness].

Therefore,

(vi) (IIa) All <things that are beautiful> are {things that participate in beauty}.

Both syllogisms are valid but neither is sound.

- Premises (i) and (iv) are false or lack truth value.
- Premises (ii) and (v) lack truth value as written.
- The predicate F can assign a truth value to premise (ii) if F is defined as 'beautiful.' But then, (ii) becomes a tautology. Any other value would turn (ii) into a falsehood.
- The same thing happens in premise (v) if 'F-ness' is defined as 'Beauty.' So, (ii) and (v) either lack truth value, are tautologies, or are false.

In any case, this is all academic. Neither syllogism is able to capture the inference from Ia to IIa for the simple reason that Ia is nowhere in sight!<sup>23</sup>

We have here another example of elementary argumentation whose validity SL cannot confirm. Confirming the validity of the inference from Sentence 2 to Sentence 1 is especially critical because it goes to the heart of the Theory of Forms.<sup>24</sup> As it turned out, Socrates' confidence in Aristotle was misplaced.

### ***Phaedo Sentence 3***

Do you accept this kind of causality? Yes, I do. [Tredennick 1961, 81.]

- **Prolegomena**

#### **1. Causation**

In a paradigm case, causation holds between events (Kim 1993). Events imply change: something exemplifies a property at time t it did not exemplify prior to t; or, no longer exemplifies a property at t it exemplified prior to t. Here is a paradigm case of causation:

E1. A steel ball struck a window pane at t.

E2. The window pane shattered shortly after t.

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<sup>23</sup> SL cannot confirm the validity of the inference from Sentence 1 to Sentence 2 for the same reasons.

<sup>24</sup> The reader who carries out this argument with another valid syllogism, **AII-1**, will reach the same conclusion.



We describe the situation in a paradigm case by saying that E1 caused E2. In E1, the window pane exemplifies at *t* the (complex) property of being struck by a steel ball, a property (let us suppose) it did not exemplify prior to *t*. In E2, the window pane exemplifies shortly after *t* the (complex) property of being shattered, a property it also did not exemplify prior to *t*.<sup>25</sup>

So, Platonic Forms can be causes in a paradigm sense of causation provided we can construe Platonic Forms as (a) properties that (b) can be constituents of events in some sense of ‘constituent’. It is reasonable to give Plato credit for being farsighted enough to see that Forms could be causes in paradigm cases of causation. The technical details involved in spelling out (a) and (b) are for another time.<sup>26</sup>

## 2. Recurrence

Plato postulated Forms in part as a response to a doctrine of an illustrious predecessor, Heraclitus, namely, his ‘flux’ thesis.<sup>27</sup> Here are three translations of this thesis that Plato states in *Cratylus* at 402a:

- Heraclitus says somewhere that ‘everything gives way and nothing stands fast,’ and, likening the things that are to the flowing of a river, he says that ‘you cannot step into the same river twice.’ [Reeve 1997, 120]
- Heraclitus is supposed to say that all things are in motion and nothing at rest; he compares them to the stream of a river, and says that you cannot go into the same water twice. [Jowett 1961, 438]
- Heraclitus says, you know, that all things move and nothing remains still, and he likens the universe to the current of a river, saying that you cannot step twice into the same stream. [Fowler 1926, 67]

Because a river is a collection of stages defined by spatio-temporal properties, there is a sense in which Heraclitus’ famous claim is trivially false: It is indeed possible to step into the same river twice; just not the same river stage. We can take it for granted, however, that Plato understood as much and was not motivated to postulate eternal, unchanging Forms because he failed to see the obvious.

Heraclitus’s doctrine of world impermanence raises questions about identity through time that Plato can be understood as seeking to answer, using the resources of his Theory of Forms. It may appear as if nothing is the same from moment to moment but this is not literally true. Countless properties and relations are exemplified and co-exemplified again and again, and continuously so, and are

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<sup>25</sup> I will set aside (a) what events are; (b) identity conditions for events; (c) how properties can be constituents of events; (d) whether there are logically complex properties; and (e) the generic-specific distinction for events.

<sup>26</sup> See below for an imaginary dialogue that links Forms to counterfactuals.

<sup>27</sup> The rock band The Young Rascals echoed an epistemic version of Heraclitus in an oft-quoted 1967 lyric: “How can I be sure in a world that’s constantly changing?” How indeed.

the reason (*aitia*) why the world ‘hangs together.’ Properties play a key role in the identification and reidentification of ordinary objects such as tables and chairs from hour to hour and day to day. Moreover, as constituents of events, properties can explain what it means for events to be the same, or not; and how it can be that we can step into the same river twice but not the same river stage: The same properties are exemplified in one case but not the other because different spatio-temporal river stages are defined by different spatio-temporal properties. Recurrence, after all, is one of the three components of the problem universals; the other two are predication and classification (see Cusmariu 1979A).

### ***Phaedo* Sentence 4**

If someone tells me that a thing is beautiful because it has a bright color or shape or any such thing, I ignore these other reasons – for all these confuse me. [Grube 1997, 86]

Having stated in Sentence 1 his view that things are beautiful because they participate in Beauty and for no other reason, Plato would, of course, reject any alternative reason as a matter of elementary logic.<sup>28</sup>

However, that is not what Sentence 4 says.

Sentence 4 does not say or imply that:

- (a) ‘these other reasons’ are wrong;
- (b) ‘these other reasons’ cannot be true if his Theory of Forms is true; or
- (c) ‘these other reasons’ are unnecessary if the Theory of Forms is sufficient.

Rather, Plato’s Sentence 4 says that ‘these other reasons confuse me’. When a great philosopher, who could just as easily have asserted (a), (b) or (c), asserts instead that he finds a certain view confusing, we need to take him at his word and find out why. What confusion or confusions might Plato have been getting at?

A second issue concerns the specific examples of ‘those other reasons’ cited, namely, ‘having a bright color or shape.’ Is there a special significance to these examples? If so, what is that? I will start with this issue.

### **• Prolegomena**

#### **1. Primary and Secondary Qualities**

Plato sometimes makes philosophically important points in an off-handed, almost casual way, inviting the audience to puzzle them out rather than spoon-feed a

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<sup>28</sup> The argument from the proposition that the Theory of Forms is sufficient to account for X to the proposition that other theories are unnecessary to account for X is another intuitively valid inference that SL cannot confirm for reasons that are analogous to those already presented, as the reader can easily verify.

solution. As Wittgenstein put it (1953, x), “I should not like my writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking.”

So, what philosophically important point is being made by listing color and shape properties together as reasons why something is beautiful, which Plato rejects as confusing? After all, he could have listed only shape properties, or only color properties, or neither.

Plato would have associated shape properties with geometry, whose propositions he considered to be true irrespective of whether they have been proved, thought about and so on. Accordingly, he considered shape properties to hold true irrespective of a perceiver, as intrinsic to whatever object has them, to be give an *aitia* the way all of mathematics can.

On the other hand, there are properties that depend on the ability of the perceiver to be affected by them and as such are relational, extrinsic properties, requiring a different *aitia*.

I am suggesting that Sentence 4 anticipates a distinction drawn by Locke and others between primary and secondary qualities. Shape properties are primary, while color properties are secondary. Plato tells readers he finds the exemplification of such properties confusing as an *aitia* of what it is to be beautiful to warn that there is a difference in kind between shape and color properties and to invite inquiry into the difference.

Well-known articles and books on the *Phaedo* do not address the issue.<sup>29</sup>

- Burnet (1911, 111) limits his comments on Sentence 4 to color properties, evidently seeing no reason to remark on the fact that Sentence 4 mentions shape properties as well.
- Vlastos 1970 contains an extensive discussion of reasons and causes in the *Phaedo* but does not see that Sentence 4 implies a distinction between primary and secondary qualities.
- Irwin (1999, 166) muddies the waters by lumping shapes and colors together as ‘sensible’ properties.
- M-K Lee’s cites evidence (Nolan 2011, 28-31) that Plato distinguished primary from secondary qualities in a late-period dialogue, the *Timaeus* at 61c-d. She comments (28) that Plato would not have drawn this distinction in a middle-period dialogue such as the *Phaedo* because during that period “Plato notoriously holds that perception is systematically misleading about a systematically misleading part of reality”.
- Emlyn-Jones and Preddy (2017, 282) breeze past Sentence 4 entirely, limiting their comments to restating the Theory of Forms.

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<sup>29</sup>Book-length commentaries include Ritchie 1902, 95; Shorey 1933, 179; Crombie 1963, Ch. 2, Section II; Field 1969, 29, 30; White 1976, Ch. III; Grube 1980, 19; Hare 1982, 45; Dorter 1982, 128; Bostock 1986, Ch. VII; Stern 1993 and Ebrey 2023, 230. There is no discussion of the issues of interest here in Ahrens Dorf 1995.

## 2. Predication v. Predicates

Another distinction that should not be confused according to Sentence 4 is between

- An (a)-*aitia*, which explains what is for a term F to be predicated of an object X; that is, what it means of X to be F;

and

- A (b)-*aitia*, which unpacks the semantic content of F; that is, what it means for X to be F as opposed to G or H or ...

The Theory of Forms is an (a)-*aitia*, while definitions carry out (b)-*aitiai*. Of course, unpacking the semantic content of a term must necessarily involve predication with respect to each and every component of a (b)-*aitia*, so that Forms are exemplified in any case.

To put these points another way, consider an argument that has the logical form of an **AAA-1** syllogism:

1. If X is beautiful, then X is FGH associated with being beautiful.
2. If X participates in Beauty, then X is beautiful.

Therefore,

3. If X participates in Beauty, then X is FGH associated with being beautiful.

We must be careful not to confuse the (a) and (b)-*aitiai*. Thus, premise 1 is part of (b)-*aitiai*, while premise 2 is part of (a)-*aitiai*. We can avoid confusion by restating the argument using copulas linked to the appropriate *aitia*.

1. If X participates in Beauty, then X is-(a) beautiful.

- Plato would accept premise 1 because it is entailed by an (a)-*aitia*.

2. If X is-(a) beautiful, then X is-(b) FGH associated with being beautiful.

- Plato already rejected premise 2 as one of 'these other reasons' that he finds 'confusing'.
- Replacing the antecedent of premise 2 with 'If X is-(b) beautiful' results in a true premise but the argument is no longer valid because the consequent of premise 1 reads 'X is-(a) beautiful'.
- Replacing the consequent of premise 1 with 'X is-(b) beautiful' results in a false premise.

Therefore,

3. If X participates in Beauty, then X is-(b) FGH associated with being beautiful.

- Plato would have rejected 3 because an (a)-*aitia* does not entail a (b)-*aitia*.

## 3. Is the Copula Elimidable?

Perhaps a key component of the problem of universals, predication, is not a genuine problem because the copula is eliminable by paraphrase, or so it might be thought.

One way to try to eliminate the copula by paraphrase is to turn a copula-adjective phrase such as 'is beautiful' into the verb 'beautifies', so that "Bethany is beautiful" becomes "Bethany beautifies". Well and good except that we are now entitled to ask "what does she beautify?" After all, there is usually a value of G such that X FGs, as in "Bethany beautifies her room". So, turning a copula-adjective phrase into a verb merely gets rid of monadic predicates in favor relational ones, as Russell pointed out (1912, 97) in his critique of Berkeley and Hume. The paraphrase proponent can reply at this point that his use of 'beautifies' is non-standard and as such does not require an object. Without further elucidation, however, this reply is merely a dodge.

We can bring out the relationality of verbs further by noting that adverbs can modify verbs, as in "Smith ran quickly", making comparative sentences possible such as "Smith ran more quickly than Jones." Thus, "Bethany beautifies (a room?) more efficiently than Annette" also only eliminates monadic predicates and corresponding properties, leaving relational predicates and corresponding relations unaffected, and we are back to square one. The progress represented by paraphrasing sentences of the form "X is (predicatively) F" into sentences of the form 'X Fs' is an illusion.

#### 4. Realism v. Nominalism

Math and science books routinely write 'F(x),' spell out the details of the function being defined, i.e., (b)-*aitiai*, and then get on with the business of computing the value of the function as if the predication implicit in this notation, an (a)-*aitia*, need not be addressed and along with it the problem of ontological commitment to abstract entities. There is a sense in which this is true and a sense in which it isn't.

- Computing the value of a function by means of a calculator or similar device means entering numerical values, pressing a key and letting the calculator do the rest. Obviously, there is no way to enter into a calculator the details of an (a)-*aitia* or information about kinds of abstract entities! Even if there were, how would a calculator use such information to produce an answer?
- Claude Shannon, Alan Turing and John von Neumann – founders of computer science – evidently did not think they needed to solve the problem of universals and the problem of ontological commitment to get the job done. Solving these problems would not have helped them in the least to work out the many details of a digital computer.
- In the Preface to the first edition of *Critique of Pure Reason* (1797 [1781], Avii) Kant famously stated: "Human reason has this peculiar fate that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened by questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which, as

transcending all its powers, it is also not able to answer.” Evidently Kant was not ‘burdened’ by questions about the problem of universals and the problem of ontological commitment and was ‘able to ignore’ them.

What about this?

- Points 1 and 2: No philosopher would argue that practical applications of concept C are possible only if philosophical problems raised by C are addressed; so that 1 and 2 are not objections to the importance of those problems. However, Alonzo Church was a founder of computer science and took commitment to abstract entities seriously. See Church 1951.
- Point 3: Kant’s misunderstanding of the Theory of Forms may well have prevented him from looking into the reasons that motivated Plato’s solution to the problem of universals and the related problem of ontological commitment.<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, none of the references to Aristotle in the first *Critique* mention his solution to the problem of universals.

## 5. The Naturalistic Fallacy

We know that Plato rejects a definition of goodness in terms of properties of actions or their consequences; so that the point made in Sentence 4 about Beauty and not being analyzable in terms of shapes and colors should not come as a surprise. The fact that the context is aesthetics rather than ethics does not matter because the issue at bottom is whether normative concepts can be analyzed in non-normative terms. So, when Plato evinces confusion, he is warning that normative concepts are *sui generis* and cannot be analyzed ‘without remainder’ into non-normative concepts. This is a modern lesson found in G.E. Moore’s *Principia Ethica*.

As we would now put it, definitions are to provide logically necessary and sufficient conditions and not merely true material biconditionals; meaning that counterexamples, which Socrates is more than happy to provide time and again, are sufficient to refute definitions. Thus, a definition of Beauty in terms color and/or shape properties, no matter how well chosen, would at most be contingently true. Citing color and/or shape properties may help decide in a specific case whether an object is beautiful, but that does not entail an analytic connection between a normative concept and properties used to apply it to cases.

## 6. Relativism

The famous Protagorean thesis that ‘man is the measure of all things’ (MM) is stated in the *Theatetus* at 152a and is explained shortly thereafter. Here are three translations:

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<sup>30</sup> If I had to guess, I’d say Kant was some sort of conceptualist; but what kind would be pure speculation. The references to Hume in the first *Critique* do not mention Hume’s opposition to abstract entities.

- Does this not somehow mean that since you and I are men, such as any particulars appear to me, so they are for me, and such, in turn, as they appear to you, so they are for you? [Horan 2021, 11]
- Then you know that he [Protagoras] puts it something like this, that as each thing appears to me, so it is for me, and as it appears to you, so it is for you. [Levett 1997, 169]
- He [Protagoras] puts it in this sort of way, doesn't he, that any given thing 'is to me such as it appears to me, and is to you such as it appears to you.' [Cornford 1961, 856]

The ultimate refutation of MM is the Parable of the Cave. Dwellers are indeed such that 'whatever appears to them' as they look at the shadows dancing on the cave wall, 'is so to them'. The Forms are their only chance to break out of 'the circle of their own ideas' (Leibniz), which can only happen outside the Cave. The truth may be hard to believe even when it is staring them in the face, especially if an epistemic reorientation is necessary – which it is.

To connect MM to the problem at hand, here are our two competing *aitiai* of what it is to be beautiful.

(A) If X is beautiful, then X is beautiful if and only if X participates in Beauty.

(B) If X is beautiful, then X is beautiful if and only if X is FGH, 'these other reasons'.

There is no way for MM to sow confusion in *aitia* (A). There can at most be disagreement about whether or not something is beautiful and, in consequence, whether or not something participates in Beauty. There is nothing subjective about whether one and the same Form of Beauty is participated in. There is no 'Beauty for me' or 'Beauty for you'. There is only Beauty. The Form of Beauty, being a 'One-Over-Many', is the same Form in which it appears to both of us that X participates by being beautiful.

Applied to *aitia* (B), 'these other reasons', MM can easily sow confusion. On the right half of (B) we have a list of perceptible properties about shape and color and the like, regarding which confusing what it is for something to be FGH with what it is for something to appear to be FGH is not only possible but routine. Perceptible properties FGH thought to be associated with beauty can vary from person to person, from culture to culture – indeed, from era to era.

### **Phaedo Sentences 5 and 6**

I simply, naively and perhaps foolishly cling to this, that nothing else makes it beautiful other than the presence of, or the sharing in, or however you may describe its relationship to that Beautiful we mentioned. For I will not insist on the precise nature of the relationship. [Grube 1997, 86]

### **• Prolegomena**

## 1. Participation is Indefinable

In a well-known essay, Gregory Vlastos writes in reference to Sentences 5 and 6 (1970, 142):

Here is something Plato has not yet cleared up to his satisfaction, though he doubtless expects he will, remaining quite certain for the present that some such relation exists and that, were it not for this, the fact that things have characters, would be unintelligible. [Continues in footnote 31] Though the expectation was never adequately fulfilled, Plato retained the confidence that somehow or other things must 'participate' in the Forms. In the *Parmenides*, at the end of the second regress argument, Parmenides does not conclude that the notion of participation has been invalidated, but only that 'we must look for some other way [i.e., other than similitude] by which they participate' (133A5-6).

Rather than constituting evidence that 'Plato has not yet cleared up to his satisfaction' the relationship between Forms and their instances, the occurrence of several terms in our *Phaedo* passage that express this relationship seems to me anticipatory of a much later development due to Wittgenstein 1953: some terms may form collectively a kind of 'equivalence class,' bearing to each other what Wittgenstein called a 'family resemblance,' each term and its application offering unique intuitive perspectives on an important point about definitions.

Thus, it would clearly be circular to try to define any member of the equivalence class of terms Plato lists in our passage by means of another member of the class (the two starred items at the end are modern terminology.)

- partaking of Beauty
- sharing in Beauty
- participating in Beauty
- presence of Beauty
- association with Beauty
- partnership with Beauty
- communion with Beauty
- communication with Beauty
- exemplifying\* Beauty
- instantiating\* Beauty

The circularity point also applies to attempted definitions of the relation between Forms and their instances. Thus, suppose we tried to define participation by specifying properties alleged to be necessary and sufficient:

R is the participation relation =df R is F, G, H ...

Predication evidently occurs in the definiens and as such would require the sort of expansion entailed by the Theory of Forms:



R is the participation relation if and only if R participates in Forms F-ness, G-ness, H-ness...

It is, of course, impossible to define everything, meaning that some terms or concepts must be assumed as primitive. Why not participation, or its modern equivalent, exemplification? That said, the fact that circularity would plague any definition of participation does not mean we cannot say anything interesting about its logical properties *qua* relation. For example:

- Participation is not transitive. Thus, red roses participate in the property of being red and the property of being red participates in the property of being a property; but red roses do not participate in the property of being a property.
- Participation is not symmetric. Thus, red roses participate in the property of being red but the property of being red does not participate in red roses.
- Participation is not reflexive. Thus, participation relates forms to themselves according to Plato, but this is not true in general. Red roses do not participate in red roses.

Though Aristotle lists relations among his categories, the hard work required to spell out the logic of relations had to wait literally millennia (see McBride 2020.)

## 2. Participation as Substitution

In the *Phaedo* and elsewhere, Plato asserts the familiar conception of Forms as Ones in which Many participate as part of his solution to the problem of universals. However, in the *Sophist* at 259e, Plato can be interpreted as suggesting an altogether different conception of Forms that sheds new light on the concept of participation that Plato found difficult to define in the *Phaedo*. Here are five translations of the now-famous *Sophist* passage:<sup>31</sup>

- The weaving together of forms is what makes speech possible for us. [White 1997, 263]
- For speech has arisen for us through the interweaving of the forms. [Brann, Kalkavage & Salem 1996, 71]
- For it's on account of the weaving together of the species with one another that the speech has come to be for us. [Benardete 1984, II.57]
- Any discourse we can have owes its existence to the weaving together of forms. [Cornford 1961, 1007]

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<sup>31</sup> Immediately prior to the 'interweaving' metaphor, Plato writes [Akrill 1970, 201]: "the isolation of everything from everything else is the total annihilation of all statements." This can be seen as a precursor of Frege's influential Context Principle [1884/1980, x]: "Never ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context of a proposition."

- It is because of the interweaving of Forms with one another that we come to have discourse. [Akrill 1970, 201]
- It is through the mutual interlacement of ideas or forms that discourse becomes possible. [MacKay 1868, 165]

Here Forms are not invoked to explain the familiar components of the problem of universals, such as predication, recurrence and classification. Rather, a strong claim is made to the effect that *logos* – variously translated as ‘speech’ or ‘discourse’, though ‘sentence’ or ‘statement’ would also be appropriate – is impossible without ‘the interweaving of Forms with one another.’ This metaphor turns out to have been extraordinarily farsighted. Plato can be interpreted as suggesting that ‘the interweaving of Forms with one another’ is what make possible meaning, logical form and validity itself later spelled out in first-order logic.

### 3. Sentential Calculus Application

To illustrate, on left is the familiar rule of the sentential calculus, Hypothetical Syllogism (HS).<sup>32</sup> On right, is the result of replacing colors uniformly with *logoi*.<sup>33</sup>

$(\langle \dots \rangle) \rightarrow ([\dots])$	If $\langle X \text{ is a rose} \rangle$ then $[X \text{ is a flower}]$
$([\dots]) \rightarrow (\{\dots\})$	If $[X \text{ is a flower}]$ then $\{X \text{ is fragrant}\}$
-----	-----
$(\langle \dots \rangle) \rightarrow (\{\dots\})$	If $\langle X \text{ is a rose} \rangle$ then $\{X \text{ is fragrant}\}$

The ‘interweaving forms’ language can be interpreted as suggesting that Forms in *Sophist* are predicables in a different sense than in *Phaedo*.

This is the material conditional Form  $(\dots) \rightarrow (\dots)$ , instantiated in all three schematic sentence-forms on the left.

The three schematic sentences are substitution instances of the material conditional Form in the familiar sense.

Simple substitution instances of the material conditional Form include  $(\langle \dots \rangle) \rightarrow (\langle \dots \rangle)$  and  $(\langle \dots \rangle) \rightarrow (\{\dots\})$ .

The material conditional Form  $(\dots) \rightarrow (\dots)$  is a Form in Plato’s sense as a One-in-Many because it can have instances, even if in a technical sense because *logoi* are what belong inside the brackets rather than non-linguistic objects.<sup>34</sup>

- There are Forms corresponding other logical connectives as well:  $(\dots) \& (\dots)$ ,  $(\dots) \vee (\dots)$ , and  $\sim(\dots)$ .

<sup>32</sup> My book *Logic for Kids* (Cusmariu 2023) explains the concept of logical form using colors, making it easier for children to follow.

<sup>33</sup> Brackets here and below enclose sentences rather than the three types of terms of SL.

<sup>34</sup> I realize there is a token-type issue here, discussed below.

- Accordingly,  $(\langle \dots \rangle \rightarrow \{ \dots \})$  and  $(\langle \dots \rangle \rightarrow \{ \dots \})$  can be said to participate in the Material Conditionality Form  $(\dots) \rightarrow (\dots)$  by being proper substitution instances of it.
- The substitution instances of Material Conditionality Form are other Forms.
- In this extended sense,  $(\langle \dots \rangle \rightarrow \{ \dots \})$  and  $(\langle \dots \rangle \rightarrow \{ \dots \})$  are also Forms, though their instances are *logoi*.
- Instances of the Material Conditionality Form  $(\dots) \rightarrow (\dots)$  such as  $(\langle \dots \rangle \rightarrow \{ \dots \})$  and  $(\langle \dots \rangle \rightarrow \{ \dots \})$  can be understood as properties of a paradigmatic property.

### Writing HS as a sequence of forms yields

- $((\langle \dots \rangle \rightarrow \{ \dots \}) \& \{ \dots \} \rightarrow \{ \dots \}) \blacktriangleright (\langle \dots \rangle \rightarrow \{ \dots \})$ , where  $\blacktriangleright$  means 'logically implies.'
- A truth-table will show that the result of replacing this symbol with a material conditional symbol,  $\rightarrow$ , is a tautology, confirming that HS is a valid rule of inference.
- The sequence  $((\langle \dots \rangle \rightarrow \{ \dots \}) \& \{ \dots \} \rightarrow \{ \dots \}) \blacktriangleright (\langle \dots \rangle \rightarrow \{ \dots \})$  shows the sense in which the three material conditional forms of HS 'interweave with one another' truth-functionally.

'Interweave' in the HS sequence has two meanings we should distinguish carefully.

1. The two material conditional forms  $(\langle \dots \rangle \rightarrow \{ \dots \})$  &  $(\{ \dots \} \rightarrow \{ \dots \})$  interweave with one another as substitution-instances of the Conjunctivity Form  $(\dots) \& (\dots)$ .
2. The three material conditional forms of the HS sequence,  $(\langle \dots \rangle \rightarrow \{ \dots \})$ ,  $(\{ \dots \} \rightarrow \{ \dots \})$  and  $(\langle \dots \rangle \rightarrow \{ \dots \})$  interweave with one another as a substitution-instance of the Logical Implication Form  $(\dots) \blacktriangleright (\dots)$ .

The 'interweaving of forms with one another' is sufficient to yield *logoi* meaning as well as explain the logical form of sentences of which they are components. With the meaning of each argument component clear, the semantic validity of the *logoi* sequence can be defined as usual.

Syntactic validity is achieved once *logoi* result from uniform substitution, which they do:

$(\langle \dots \rangle \rightarrow \{ \dots \})$	If $\langle X \text{ is a rose} \rangle$ then $\{ X \text{ is a flower} \}$
$(\{ \dots \} \rightarrow \{ \dots \})$	If $\{ X \text{ is a flower} \}$ then $\{ X \text{ is fragrant} \}$
-----	-----
$(\langle \dots \rangle \rightarrow \{ \dots \})$	If $\langle X \text{ is a rose} \rangle$ then $\{ X \text{ is fragrant} \}$

#### 4. A Syllogistic Logic (SL) Challenge

Can applying Plato's metaphor of 'forms interweaving with one another' yield similar insights if applied to syllogistic logic (SL)? Let's have a look.

A syntactically valid **AAA-1** structure is on left, which is an SL equivalent of HS, and on right is the result of replacing colors with *logoi* resulting from replacing antecedents and consequents above with subject and predicate terms.<sup>35</sup>

All ( [...] ) are ( { ... } )    All [things that are flowers] are {things that are fragrant}

All ( <...> ) are ( [...] )    All <things that are roses> are [things that are flowers]

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All ( <...> ) are ( { ... } )    All <things that are roses> are {things that are fragrant}

Let us focus only meaning and validity as applied to *logoi*.

- The copula in subject position is the 'is' of identity, while the copula in predicate position is the 'is' of predication. We cannot write 'things that are identical with fragrant'.
- Forms (properties) are only expressed by terms in predicate position of a subject-predicate sentence.
- Terms in subject position do not designate Forms; they only designate objects satisfying the predicate and participate in the Form expressed by the predicate.
- In the example at hand, the Forms (properties) expressible by terms in predicate position are *being things that are fragrant* and *being things that are flowers*.
- There are no forms Forms corresponding to the two occurrences of 'being things that are (identical with) roses' occurring in subject position in the minor premise and in the conclusion; meaning that there are no Forms with which the Forms (properties) *being things that are flowers* and *being things that are fragrant*, respectively, can 'interweave.'
- As a result, the 'interweaving Forms' metaphor cannot fully account for the meaning of the *logoi* in the argument.
- As a result, the 'interweaving Forms' metaphor cannot explain the semantic validity of the *logoi* sequence.

Plato's beautiful metaphor of 'interweaving Forms' is a perfect fit with modern logic. The fact that it does not yield similar insights in SL should be considered a limitation in SL, not the metaphor. Indeed, we know from modern logic after Frege that SL is inadequate as a general theory of logic. The 15 valid syllogisms of SL, understood as rules of inference, are not adequate for the purpose of capturing the syntactic validity of mathematical proofs.

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<sup>35</sup> Brackets here enclose SL-type terms as previously described.

## 5. Types and Tokens

Platonic Forms are abstract objects, meaning (in part) that they lack spatio-temporal properties. They can be related to objects that do have such properties by being exemplified by them, taken singly or in pairs. With that in mind, the ‘interweaving Forms’ metaphor of *Sophist*, which Plato tells us is what makes language possible,<sup>36</sup> brings up an interesting distinction not fully realized until C.S. Peirce. The distinction can be explained in our context by considering two ways in which Forms ‘interweaving with one another’ might make language, *logoi*, possible:

- Forms ‘interweave with one another’ to make possible *logoi* understood as concrete linguistic objects that have spatio-temporal properties such as speech acts or inscriptions on a page or computer screen; in other words, *logoi* understood as belonging in the same ontological category as other concrete objects that participate in the Forms.
- Forms ‘interweave with one another’ to make possible *logoi* understood as abstract linguistic objects that lack spatio-temporal properties and as such belong in the same ontological category as the Forms themselves.

The interesting distinction I have in mind, first drawn by C.S. Peirce, is between tokens and types. The first *aitia* has Forms ‘interweaving with one another’ to make possible token *logoi*, while the second has Forms ‘interweaving with one another’ to make possible type *logoi*. Put another way, under the first *aitia*, the relationship under consideration is type-token, while under the second the relationship is type-type. It is beyond the scope of this article to spell out the implications of these *aitiai* and assess their merits.

## 6. Is Participation Paradoxical?

British philosopher Gilbert Ryle (1900-1976) caused a great deal of controversy with the 1949 publication of *The Concept of Mind*. No less controversial was his work on Plato, including his contribution to the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1967, Vol. V, 314-333) and his 1939 article on Plato’s *Parmenides*.

Ryle’s *Parmenides* article contains an argument claiming to show that the participation relation of Plato’s Theory of Forms leads to a vicious infinite regress. Here is the passage in which Ryle states his argument (Ryle 1965, 106-107).

Now what of the alleged relation itself, which we are calling ‘exemplification’? Is this a Form or an instance of a Form? Take the two propositions ‘this is square’ and ‘that is circular’. We have here two different cases of something exemplifying something else. We have two different instances of the relation being-an-instance-of. What is the relation between them and that of which they are instances? It will have to be exemplification Number 2. The exemplification of *P* by *S* will be an instance of exemplification, and its being in that relation to

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<sup>36</sup> Only White 1997 and MacKay 1868 use the term ‘possible’. I will be careful not to read too much into translation choices not exemplified by the other translations.

exemplification will be an instance of second-order exemplification, and that of a third, and so on *ad infinitum*. This conclusion is impossible. So there is no such relation as being-an-instance-of. 'This is green' is not a relational proposition, and 'this is bigger than that' only mentions one relation, that of being-bigger-than.

### *An Imaginary Dialogue*

SOCRATES: What say you to this, Phaedo and Theaetetus?

PHAEDO: Even if I grant that Ryle has proved the existence of an infinite regress of participation Forms, it does not follow that the regress is vicious. After all, orders of infinity are nothing new in mathematics. They would not be a problem for our Theory of Forms either, which is ontologically as rich as it needs to be. Ryle's argument is invalid.

SOCRATES: Excellent, Phaedo! Have you anything to add, Theaetetus?

THEAETETUS: Ryle's alleged orders of infinity collapse into one, because relational Forms such as Participation can also be One-in-Many, so that the same Participation Form can be participated in as often as needed just like any other Form. Rejecting this without argument – Ryle has none – amount to begging the question against our Theory of Forms.

SOCRATES: Bravo, Theaetetus!<sup>37</sup>

## 7. One Form or Two?

### *An Imaginary Dialogue Continued*

SOCRATES: You told Ryle, Theaetetus, that the same Participation Form can be participated in as often as needed just like any other Form.

THEAETETUS: Was I wrong about that?

SOCRATES: No, not at all. It's just that your comment brings up an important question we should talk about sooner rather than later. I'm sure it will come up eventually when philosophers question our theory, as they surely would.

THEAETETUS: What important question do you have in mind?

SOCRATES: Just this: What does it mean to say that a collection of things that have something in common participate in the same Form?

THEAETETUS: I don't see the problem. They just do, it's as simple as that.

SOCRATES: You're not seeing the point of the question, which is: What does it mean to say that we have one Form that's participate in, not two or three?

THEAETETUS: An example would help me understand what you're getting at.

SOCRATES: Consider two geometric Forms, *Equilaterality* and *Equiangularity*. A geometric figure is *equilateral* when all its sides are equal and *equiangular* when all its interior angles are equal. So, are *Equilaterality* and *Equiangularity* the same Form with different names or different Forms?

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<sup>37</sup> Compare Cusmariu 1980.

THEAETETUS: I think geometry can answer the question. All rectangles are equiangular but only squares are both equiangular and equilateral. Therefore, the Forms *Equilaterality* and *Equiangularity* are not the same Form because something is true of *Equiangularity* – true of all rectangles – that is not true of *Equilaterality* – true only of squares.

SOCRATES: Excellent! Forms are the same because and only because what is true of one is true of the other and vice versa. Come to think of it, that's what it means for things to be the same in general, not just Forms. I hope someone figures this out eventually.

THEAETETUS: The sooner the better.

SOCRATES: Here is a related problem. The *logoi* 'equilateral' and 'equiangular' that we use to name the Forms *Equilaterality* and *Equiangularity* do not mean the same thing.

THEAETETUS: Of course not. 'Equilateral' means having equal sides and 'equiangular' means having equal angles.

SOCRATES: So, should we infer that the Forms *Equilaterality* and *Equiangularity* are not the same Form because the *logoi* 'equilateral' and 'equiangular' that we use to name them do not mean the same thing?

THEAETETUS: I hope someone figures this out eventually too.

### ***Phaedo* Sentence 7**

That, I think, is the safest answer I can give myself or anyone else. [Grube 1997, 86]

#### **• Prolegomena**

##### **1. Safe = Tautological?**

Two major Plato scholars, G.M.A Grube and Paul Shorey, sought to interpret Plato's 'safe' comment using a concept of modern logic. I agree, of course, as did Whitehead, that Plato anticipated concepts and theories developed millennia later. Though Grube and Shorey were mistaken, their proposal is an instructive failure, as we shall see.

- Grube 1980, 19: "This would seem to be a safe answer indeed because completely tautological."
- Shorey 1933, 179: "The cause of any state or quality, as beauty, is the presence of or participation in – it makes no difference which – the idea of that state or quality. Plato is apparently aware that this in modern terms is only a tautological logic, or, as I have repeatedly put it, a consistent and systematic substitution of the logical reason for all other forms of cause. That is the primary meaning, whatever the metaphysical implications."

In short, the statement that something is beautiful if and only if it participates in Beauty is safe because it is a tautology. Well, is it?

In the dictionary sense, a tautology is a statement that ‘states the same thing twice’ explicitly such as ‘a rose is a rose’; or implicitly such as ‘flammable liquids catch fire,’ which becomes an explicit tautology by replacing the phrase ‘flammable liquids’ with the phrase ‘liquids that catch fire’ according to the definition of ‘flammable liquids’, resulting in ‘liquids that catch fire catch fire.’

Now, the statement that something is beautiful if and only if it participates in Beauty is obviously not an explicit tautology; nor is it an implicit tautology. We cannot replace ‘is beautiful’ with ‘participates in Beauty’ and vice versa using the definition of ‘is beautiful’ and ‘participates in Beauty’, respectively, as we could with ‘flammable liquids.’ After all, the statement that something is beautiful if and only if it participates in Beauty is entailed by a substantive philosophical theory. So, the statement that something is beautiful if and only if it participates in Beauty is not a tautology in the dictionary sense.

In logic, a statement is a tautology if and only if it is true for all possible truth-value assignments to its components. The statement

(S) X is beautiful if and only if X participates in Beauty,

is a tautology in this technical sense if and only if it is true for all possible truth-value assignments to its components,

(S1) X is beautiful

and

(S2) X participates in Beauty.

So, is S a tautology in a technical sense?

A truth table will display possible truth-value assignments to S1 and S2 and possible truth-values of their conjunction, which is what the biconditional S says.

	S1	S2	$S1 \rightarrow S2$	$S2 \rightarrow S1$	$(S1 \rightarrow S2) \& (S2 \rightarrow S1)$
Row 1	T	T	T	T	T
Row 2	F	T	T	F	F
Row 3	T	F	F	T	F
Row 4	F	F	T	T	T

- Row 1: So far, so good.
- Row 4: It is possible that nothing is beautiful, so that a truth-value False is a possible assignment to S1. It is also possible that nothing participates in Beauty. After all, Platonic Forms do not need to be exemplified to exist, so that a truth-value False is a possible assignment to S2 as well. Thus, Row 4 is true. So far, so good here as well.
- Row 2: How is it possible for something participate in Beauty, if nothing is beautiful? We don’t have a possible combination of truth values in this row, so we can rule it out.



- Row 3: Plato holds that if there are Forms, then they exist necessarily—not that they exist necessarily. From this it does not follow, however, that it is necessarily true that there are Forms, nor that there are Forms. Accordingly, Row 3 represents possible truth-value assignments to S1 and S2 because it is logically possible for something to be beautiful in the absence of Forms—ask Aristotle or any nominalist! It's just that, according to Plato, we would not have an *aitia* of what it is to be F in the absence of F-ness. So, Row 3 means that S is not a tautology in the logical sense of the term.

In conclusion, here is another intuitively valid argument whose validity SL cannot confirm:

1. A statement is a tautology either in the dictionary sense or the logical sense.
2. The statement that something is beautiful if and only if it participates in Beauty is not a tautology in the dictionary sense or the logical sense.

Therefore,

3. The statement that something is beautiful if and only if it participates in Beauty is not a tautology.

Now what?

## 2. Safe = Analytic?

Perhaps the statement S that something is beautiful if and only if it participates in Beauty is 'safe' can be interpreted using another modern concept, this time from Kant: S is analytic, meaning that a statement is analytic provided its negation is an inconsistent statement either explicitly or implicitly.<sup>38</sup>

### • Explicit Inconsistency

Assuming uniform substitution for sentence letters and standard interpretation of the symbols & and  $\equiv$ , an explicit inconsistency is a statement of the form  $p \& \sim p$  or  $p \equiv \sim p$ . The statement S that something is beautiful if and only if it participates in Beauty is analytic if and only if its negation,  $\sim S$ , the statement that it is not the case that something is beautiful if and only if it participates in Beauty, is a substitution instance of  $p \& \sim p$  or of  $p \equiv \sim p$ . The statement S is evidently not a substitution instance of either form of inconsistency, from which it follows (not according to SL!) that S is not explicitly analytic.

### • Implicit Inconsistency

The statement S that something is beautiful if and only if it participates in Beauty is implicitly analytic if and only if an explicit inconsistency of the form  $p \& \sim p$  or of the form  $p \equiv \sim p$  results from its negation,  $\sim S$ , the statement that it is not the

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<sup>38</sup> As Van Cleve 1999 pointed out (18-20), Kant gives two different versions of the analytic/synthetic distinction. I will be making explicit the second version.

case that something is beautiful if and only if it participates in Beauty, by applying standard rules of logic and/or substitutions allowed by standard definitions.<sup>39</sup>

To decide this issue, we note first that S is a biconditional and has two components, whose negations are listed under them:

- (1) If something is beautiful, then it participates in Beauty.
- (1a) Something is beautiful and does not participate in Beauty.
- (2) If something participates in Beauty, then it is beautiful.
- (2a) Something participates in Beauty and is not beautiful.

- Case 1

To derive an explicit inconsistency of the form  $p \ \& \ \sim p$  from (1a), we must replace its first conjunct, the statement that something is beautiful, with the statement that something participates in Beauty. Such replacement, however, is not sanctioned by any definition of the statement that something is beautiful because (1) is part of a substantive philosophical theory, not a mere definition. It follows (though not according to SL!) that (1) is not analytic.

- Case 2

To derive an explicit inconsistency of the form  $p \ \& \ \sim p$  from (2a), we must replace its first conjunct, the statement that something participates in Beauty, with the statement that something is beautiful. Such replacement, however, is not sanctioned by any definition of the statement that something participates in Beauty because (2) is also part of a substantive philosophical theory, not a mere definition.

It follows that (2) is also not analytic. It follows finally that statement S that something is beautiful if and only if it participates in Beauty is neither explicitly nor implicitly analytic. Assuming that statements are either analytic or synthetic, it follows that statement S is synthetic.

### 3. Safe = A Priori?

Though Plato considers S

(S) X is beautiful if and only if X participates in Beauty

'safe', this is not true in the sense of 'tautology' or 'analytic'. On the other hand, he thinks B

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<sup>39</sup> For example, a standard definition of 'is a rose' would include 'is a flower,' so that "a rose is a flower" is analytic because an explicit inconsistency is derived by replacing 'a rose' with 'is a flower' in the negation of 'if X is a rose, then X is a flower,' yielding 'it is not the case that if X is a flower, then X is a flower,' which has the form ' $\sim(\text{if } p, \text{ then } p)$ ', which logically implies ' $p \ \& \ \sim p$ '.

(B) X is beautiful if and only if X is FGH ('these other reasons')

is 'confusing' and, if asked, would have considered it also 'unsafe'. Of course, B is also not a tautology, nor is it analytic. If possible, then, we must find a way to characterize the evident difference between them according to which S is 'safe', while B is 'unsafe'.

Stated in modern terms, a key difference between S and B is between *a priori* and *a posteriori* justifiability.<sup>40</sup> Is S 'safe' because it is *a priori*; while B is 'unsafe' because it is *a posteriori*? What is 'safe' about being *a priori* such that being *a posteriori* is 'unsafe'?

First, we need clarity about each type of justifiability.<sup>41</sup>

- *A Priori* Justifiability

Proposition P is justifiable *a priori* for person X =df Thinking about or understanding the meaning of P is sufficient for justifiability; empirical facts are unnecessary.

- *A Posteriori* Justifiability

Proposition P can be justified *a posteriori* for person X =df Thinking about or understanding the meaning of P is not sufficient for justifiability; empirical facts are necessary.

So, is statement S that something is beautiful if and only if it participates in Beauty, justifiable *a priori* or *a posteriori*?

Applying the definition, statement S that X is beautiful if and only if X participates in Beauty is justifiable *a posteriori* for X only if empirical facts are necessary for justifiability. So, what empirical facts are necessary for the two components of S to be justifiable for X?

(S1) If something is beautiful, it participates in Beauty?

(S2) If something participates in Beauty, it is beautiful.

There aren't any. It follows that S is not justifiable *a posteriori* for X. S is either justifiable *a priori* or justifiable *a posteriori*. On the other hand, because empirical facts are unnecessary for S1 and S2 to be justifiable for X and so is thinking about or understanding the meaning of S1 and S2, it follows that S is justifiable *a priori* for X.

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<sup>40</sup> Moravchik writes (1970, 56): "... distinctions like that between the *a priori* and the empirical are often drawn by Plato (though never exactly in such terms or terms coextensive with these)."

<sup>41</sup> For present purpose we only need clarity about justifiability *a priori* and *a posteriori* rather than justification as such, so that epistemologically complex issues about these concepts can be sidestepped.

Empirical facts are clearly necessary for the statement B that something is beautiful in terms of 'these other reasons' to be justifiable for X. This is true of both halves of B:

(B1) If something is beautiful, then 'it has a bright color or shape or any other such attribute.'

(B2) If something 'has a bright color or shape or any other such attribute', then it is beautiful.

Merely thinking about or understanding the meaning of B1 or B2 is clearly not sufficient for justifiability. So, B is only *a posteriori* justifiable.

The remaining issue is to understand why being *a priori* justifiable is 'safe', while being a *posteriori* justifiable is 'unsafe'. The issue is of fundamental significance.

### **Phaedo Sentence 8**

To that I cling, in the persuasion that I shall never be overthrown. [Jowett 2023 (1892), 92]

And if I stick to this I think I shall never fall into error. [Grube 1997, 86]

#### **• Prolegomena**

##### **1. Geometric Safety**

It was geometric reasoning that provided Plato the confidence that it was 'safe' for him to 'cling to' the statement S that X is beautiful because and only because X participates in Beauty. He realized that he would 'never be overthrown' or 'fall into error' if he applied geometric reasoning to derive S as a theorem from his Theory of Forms; just as he knew he would 'never be overthrown' or 'fall into error' if he applied geometric reasoning to derive theorems from the axioms and definitions in geometry. Knowledge of geometry was required for admission to Plato's Academy.

In fact, the reasoning required to derive S from the Theory of Forms is much, much simpler than any reasoning exemplified in Euclid. To derive S from TF, all we would need to do is replace the predicate letter 'F' in 'X is F' with the predicate 'beautiful' and the predicate expression 'F-ness' with the predicate 'Beauty'.

(TF) X is F because and only because X participates in F-ness.

(S) X is beautiful because and only because X participates in Beauty.

However, it took millennia to devise a logic that could confirm the validity of the inference from TF to S, finally satisfying Phaedo's requirement.

## 2. Counterfactual Safety

### *An Imaginary Dialogue*

SOCRATES: Consider next another kind of reason why it is safe for us to say that something is beautiful because and only because it participates in Beauty.

PHAEDO: What reason would that be?

SOCRATES: Patience, my young friend, patience. Suppose nothing was beautiful.

PHAEDO: You mean, except Beauty itself.

SOCRATES: Yes, of course, I see you've been paying attention. Now, listen, if it were to be the case that nothing was beautiful, how would anything participate in Beauty? It wouldn't.

PHAEDO: Obviously not.

SOCRATES: On the other hand, if nothing participated in Beauty, how would anything come to be beautiful? It wouldn't either.

PHAEDO: Again, obviously not.

SOCRATES: But wait, there's more.

PHAEDO: There is?

SOCRATES: If something were to be beautiful, it would participate in Beauty, right?

PHAEDO: Obviously.

SOCRATES: And if something were to participate in Beauty, it would be beautiful, right?

PHAEDO: Of course it would.

SOCRATES: Well, then, no matter how you look at it, it's safe for us to say that something is beautiful because and only because it participates in Beauty. This is true of all things of this kind.

PHAEDO: How, exactly?

SOCRATES: The Form F-ness is the cause of a thing X being F in two more senses: (a) if X wasn't F, it would not participate in F-ness and vice-versa; and (b) if X were to be F, it would participate in F-ness and vice versa. The Forms can explain what happens in actual as well as hypothetical circumstances. That's what makes them safe.

PHAEDO: What about 'those other reasons' why something is beautiful because it has a bright color or shape or some other such attribute, isn't that explanation safe too?

SOCRATES: Let's work it out together. If it were to be the case that nothing was beautiful, would it be the case that nothing had a bright color or shape or some other such attribute?

PHAEDO: Of course not! Things might well have a bright color or shape or some other such attribute even if they weren't beautiful.

SOCRATES: What if things happened to have a bright color or shape or some other such attribute, would it be the case that they were beautiful?

PHAEDO: Not necessarily.

SOCRATES: So, those other reasons are not safe because they cannot explain what happens either in actual or in hypothetical circumstances.

PHAEDO: Apparently not.<sup>42</sup>

### 3. The Ethics of Belief

Though the title of this section comes from W.K. Clifford (1877 [1999]), the idea is much, much older and in fact comes, not surprisingly, from Plato.<sup>43</sup> It was Plato who first pointed out, via Socrates, that in addition to moral duties, there were also (equally?) compelling what we now call doxastic duties imposed by rationality. The two main doxastic duties are

(a) to seek the truth (which Clifford does not mention)

and

(b) to avoid error (which Clifford sort of implies).<sup>44</sup>

Socrates carried out both duties as he applied the method named after him to a broad range of philosophically important questions.

### Summing Up

This article has sought to create a new philosophical discipline, analytical history of ideas, exemplifying by linking a famous passage in the *Phaedo* with key passages in *Sophist*, *Theaetetus* and *Cratylus* to show that collectively they anticipate a significant number of important modern developments in logic, metaphysics and epistemology; and represent unity in Plato's thought at a level not heretofore realized, not even by Shorey (e.g., Shorey 1903).

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<sup>42</sup> Commentators on causation in *Phaedo* have missed these points.

<sup>43</sup> A lengthy survey article on the ethics of belief, Chignell 2018, makes no mention of Plato.

<sup>44</sup> Here is Clifford's second principle: "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to ignore evidence that is relevant to his beliefs, or to dismiss relevant evidence in a facile way". (Van Inwagen 1996, 145) Presumably ignoring or dismissing relevant evidence is a bad thing because it can lead to error in the form of false belief.

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# The Progress of a Plague Species, A Theory of History<sup>1</sup>

Michael F. Duggan

Done because we are too menny. (Hardy 1895, 420)

**Abstract:** This article examines overpopulation as a basis for historical interpretation. Drawing on the ideas of T.R. Malthus, Elizabeth Kolbert, John Lovelock, Lynn Margulis, and Edward O. Wilson, I make the case that the only concept of 'progress' that accurately describes the human enterprise is the uncontrolled growth of population. I explain why a Malthusian/Gaia interpretation is not a historicist or eschatological narrative, like Hegelian idealism, Marxism, fundamentalist religion, or 'end of history' neoliberalism. My article also includes a discussion of the ideas and prescriptions of contemporary commentators like physicist, Adam Frank, and the philosophers, John Gray, and Roy Scranton. What makes my article distinctive is bringing together ideas of population theory through a lens of sociobiology and post-humanist philosophy. Through this interpretive synthesis, I form a basis for recasting history as the record of the growing imbalance of our species in light of the unprecedented crises of the environment that are its byproduct. I conclude with the idea that regardless of whether the world is dying or simply going through a fundamental chaotic transformation, the role of the critical-rational historian remains the same: to tell the truth as best as she or he can know it.

**Keywords:** Gaia, historical narrative, Malthus, population, plague species, progress.

## Introduction: The Road Behind and the Road Ahead

The advantage of the study of history in our time is that of a superior vantage point: we see the big picture more clearly and fully than at any previous, more optimistic time in a similar way that an older person has a better idea about the meaning of

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<sup>1</sup> I feel that I should explain the term 'plague species' as I intend it. I regard a plague, whether it is of insects, rodents, or pathogens, to be a value-neutral designation of a biological fact signifying an imbalance or visitation. Regarding humans as a plague species, there is no moral judgment intended other than the harm we feel we are doing as thinking manifestations of population imbalance (in the same way that a natural disaster like an earthquake or storm may cause death, pain, and suffering but is not 'evil'). As Bertrand Russell notes, "Good and evil are alike human: the outer world is neither." (1992, 386) In his book, *Light of the Stars*, physicist Adam Frank writes, "We are not a plague upon the planet. Instead, we *are* the planet" and observes "It's time to leave the tired question, 'Did we create climate change?' behind. In its place we must take up our brave new astrobiological truth: 'Of course we changed the climate.' We built a planet-spanning civilization. What else would we expect would happen?" (2018, 9, 225) He is certainly correct that we are just another of Earth's living experiments and that we should get away from an interpretive narrative of 'we suck.' But we are a *thinking* experiment, and to the degree that which we can see the harm we are doing, and act to mitigate this – or not – *is* a moral issue.

his or her own life than does a young person.<sup>2</sup> We know the story better at its end. This broader vista is not an attractive one and leads to questions about the role of the historian in a dying world.

The ultimate meaning of the human story will not be the triumph of Enlightenment reason or a traditional liberal belief in social progress.<sup>3</sup> It will not be the measured, gradual progress of Burke or Viereck, the universalist humanism of the New Left. Nor will it be the unfolding of Hegelian vitalism, the moral rationalism of Marxist-Leninist dialectical materialism, or the pseudo-scientific monstrosity of National Socialism. In spite of their rise in recent years, it will not be authoritarian state capitalism or right-wing populist nationalism, although they may assert themselves increasingly over the interim. It will not be the neoliberal 'end of history' or globalization beyond its biological manifestation as the uncontrolled spread of our species across the planet. For some people, the significance of life will be found in the self-created meaning of the existentialists or a Jungian inner world of myths. But this is little comfort and even less of a solution.

No, the conservatives, fascist, Hegelians, liberals, Marxists/Marxians, and theistic eschatologists have all missed the larger point. The overarching backdrop to all of history is biological imbalance, and an extrapolation of the ideas of Malthus and their biological implications must figure prominently into our interpretations of Big History. It is humbling to think that while Thucydides, Tacitus, Bede, Gibbon, Smith, Hegel, Marx, von Ranke, and Henry Adams all caught glimpses of the human enterprise, their interpretations all miss the bigger picture and what was really at work; Malthus provides a framework.

Human history has increasingly revealed itself to be a catastrophic prong of natural history, a runaway project of nature and our own nature. With a population now more than eight billion – and with a biomass more than 130 times greater than that of any other large land animal that has ever lived on the planet – we have taken on the character of a natural-historical plague species and are responsible for the unfolding ecological catastrophe, the Earth's sixth mass extinction.<sup>4</sup> The mild eleven-thousand year summer – the *Holocene* (alternatively, *Ereozoic*) – that permitted and nurtured human civilization and allowed our numbers to grow will likely be done-in by our species in the not-too-distant future

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<sup>2</sup> The idea of comparing history in our time to the end of a story was suggested to me by David Isenbergh.

<sup>3</sup> By 'meaning' I do not mean an intrinsic, preordained, or intended purpose, but rather the real world impact and significance of human beings on the planet.

<sup>4</sup> The human biomass surpassed that of any large land animal by about 100 times when it exceeded approximately 6 billion individuals. See Wilson (2002, 29). Another way of saying this is "Humans co-opt over 40 percent of the Earth's living tissue." See Gray (2002 [2003], 149). On human beings as the primary agent for the Earth's most recent mass extinction event, see Elizabeth Kolbert's *The Sixth Extinction* (2016), as well as her *Field Notes From a Catastrophe* (2015 [2006]).

(Wilson 2016, 9, 20).<sup>5</sup> Human civilization is among the most startling developments in all of natural history, and in terms of years, it is only a small part of the human story. Its demise is well under way.

There is no narrative to history, no deterministic plot or *Zeitgeist*, no eschatological endgame to be understood within the correct ideological framework, no deciphering of the course of a preordained record. There is something like a narrative, only more general and open, a macro current or outline that, left unchecked, is coming to resemble a predetermined plot; history makes no ideological assumptions, but biological currents may assume a course that unaltered will lead to an inevitable conclusion.<sup>6</sup> Social progress may be temporary or illusory, but the 'progress' of uncontrolled population growth is real and observable. The reason why this thesis is not a historicist narrative is because it is not based on ideological assumptions like Hegelianism, Marxism, or the free trade theories of economic globalization, but rather on a real biological trend.

The details of how civilization emerged are largely speculative, but one thing is certain: *Homo sapiens sapiens* is a global plague species and has been since well before recorded history. An adaptive, aggressive African primate, over the past 70,000-100,000 years, we have become the most universal – the ultimate – invasive species.

The view that I outline below is allied to a number of perspectives and how they apply to our historical understanding. It accepts the thesis of Malthus in modified form and his projection of the numbers of population growth toward catastrophe. It accepts the idea that unchecked Darwinian success thus leads to Malthusian disaster (and that a human Apocalypse might mean salvation for the biosphere) (Malthus, 1798).<sup>7</sup> It acknowledges the Gaia hypothesis of James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis and embraces the sociobiology of Edward O. Wilson (Lovelock 2000 [1979], Margulis 1998, 113-128, Wilson 1978). It also has an affinity with the powerful critique of un-self-critical humanism by John Gray in *Straw Dogs*, although I reject his prescriptions there and in his later book, *The Silence of Animals* (Gray 2002/2003 and 2013).<sup>8</sup> My epistemological and methodological outlook is founded on the critical rationalism of Karl Popper (1934/1959 and 1963). My conclusions and errors are my own.

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<sup>5</sup> For *Eremocene* or 'Age of Loneliness,' see Wilson (2016, 20). Regarding the term *Anthropocene*, or 'Epoch of Man,' see Wilson (2016, 9).

<sup>6</sup> It is an open question about whether or not a rational animal might rise above its biology, but I suspect that this query is more closely tied to issues of biological and physical determinism than to ideological models of historical determinism. On the other hand, if the universe is deterministic, then the particulars of its closed nature may be irrelevant (i.e. that determinism is determinism).

<sup>7</sup> Commentators who believe that the planet might be saved by human extinction and that the biosphere would quickly rebound without us include Frank Fenner and Alan Weisman.

<sup>8</sup> I discuss my disagreements with Gray in the final section.

As a historian of ideas and a human being, it is hard to concede that the larger 'meaning' of our species is a byproduct of unreasoning biology, the inexorable numbers of population growth, and an inability or unwillingness to rise above our animal nature. And yet here we are, like the popular conception of lemmings at the edge.

Aggravating all of this is the fact that many of us are operating under three mistaken assumptions that distort our understanding of history, things that we have backward or inverted in our understanding. The first is that because we see ourselves as good, overpopulation is therefore either not a problem or just another issue among the many that we can live with, work around, or manage. We see a world vastly overpopulated with humans as normal.

The second is the optimistic Enlightenment article of faith that history is a 'rising road' of social progress, that because science is progressive, then so must be other areas of human endeavor and social life. Adherents to more extreme outlooks along these lines may even believe that human beings and their society are perfectible.

The third, closely related to the second, is the belief that because technology makes our lives easier, longer, and more enjoyable, and because it rids us of natural enemies, it must therefore be categorically good, even if it is a population accelerant, the enabler of a plague species.

In the first part of this paper, I proffer a simple experiment to corroborate the claim that humans are a plague species. In the second part, I address inaccurate views of history and of human nature and provide the basis for a realistic one founded on sociobiology. In the third part, I briefly describe the three concepts of progress relevant to this discussion: the progress of formal truth (logic, math, science, and technology), social progress, and the 'progress' (i.e. growth in numbers) of our species, a process aided by technology. In the fourth part, I address the question of whether a model of history premised on a population theory is a narrative or historicist model.

Having thus presented a realistic understanding of the human condition as illustrative of a global plague species with little chance of reversing or remitting the problem, I look at the prescriptions of two of the more well-known writers on topics related to the unfolding Anthropocene and conclude with some observations on the role and obligations of the historian in a dying world.

## **I. An Experiment: On Human Goodness and Overpopulation**

Man is the measure of all things. – Protagoras (Plato (1926), 481-577)

We are feeling, thinking beings and we think of ourselves as good or mostly good, a creature set apart (Nietzsche 1874 [1983], 127-194). Indeed, we are set apart in our superior cognitive abilities (a difference of degree rather than of kind), and possibly a unique capacity for syntactical language (Chomsky 2003, 59-61).



Some of us are realists or Manachiests and are quick to note the dominant non-rational and irrational side of human nature, but even these commentators have historically regarded the moderate mean of human civilization to be a good thing (Weiner 1949, 27; James, 1892 [1992]; Wilson 1978, 112, 186-7; Wilson 2014, 23-4, 29-30; Popper 1994, 181).<sup>9</sup>

In biological terms, humans are neither good nor bad. Nature does not make moral distinctions (although it shaped our notions of good and bad as the adaptive characteristics of a social animal). As a species we are amoral and can be judged in empirical terms of balance and imbalance. Objectively speaking, human overpopulation is an imbalance that nature will either correct or destroy one way or another, or else will be transformed by it. Overpopulation has damaged and continues to damage the Earth's biosphere. We are both the asteroid and its victims.

An informal experiment: over the course of your day, keep a record of all the evidence of human life and activity you see. You will quickly be overwhelmed. Just looking out the window of a commuter train heading toward Washington D.C. for a minute or two, I see roads including an Interstate beltway with hundreds of cars and trucks, aircraft in the sky, microwave towers, power lines, transformers, endless rows of houses, low, mid, and high-rise buildings, and a superabundance of discarded plastic.

Now imagine this built environment and its diverse residue to be the product of another single species whether it be cockroaches, flies, rats, starlings (an invasive species in North America), or worms. Extrapolate this evidence so that it covers much of the world. Consider the evidence not for its aesthetic or practical attributes and ingenuity, but for its magnitude and scale and ubiquity – its predominance over that of all other large animals (especially our closest living relatives, the great simians). Based on what you see, how would you describe the species that created it? Also take notice of every animal and bird killed by the

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<sup>9</sup> Although they are useful concepts, *irrational* and *rational* are ideas that deserve revisiting in terms of modern evolutionary psychology, as opposed to a continued reliance on their traditional definitions in rationalist and empirical philosophy. Philip P. Weiner gives an early evolutionary characterization of reason embraced by the Metaphysical Club of the 1870s: "Reason was not Hume's slave of the passions nor Hegel's absolute lord of creation; it was an instrument which had evolved from animal cunning to become the sole means of attaining the free use of one's natural powers. In social matters it was the only workable means of achieving a cooperative model of living with others who has competing desires." See Weiner (1949, 27). See also chapter XXII, 'Reasoning,' in James (1992 [1892]). If human morality and self-sacrificing altruism are in part the products of group selection, then perhaps so are elements of reason. On group selection, see Edward O. Wilson (1978, 112, 186-187) and (2014, 23-24, 29-30). One of the more useful definitions of 'soft' rationality is given by Karl Popper: "Rationality as a personal attitude is the attitude to correct one's beliefs. In its intellectually most highly developed form it is the readiness to discuss to discuss one's beliefs critically, and to correct them in light of critical discussions with other people." (1994, 181)

activities and byproducts of this creature over the period of a few months, as well as habitat destroyed by the creature for its own homogenized use.

Imagine also that you can actually see the creatures of this profuse monoculture in the same proportion to the people you see over the course of a day, including yourself in the mirror. Imagine them to be the size of people (and put aside the reflexive revulsion you might feel at seeing a world populated by giant Kafkaesque insects, for instance). Does your assessment of the human global preponderance – and even of individual people as manifestations of that surfeit – shift? How would you describe this creature relative to its environment and other species? Try to put aside your moral prejudices and bromides about people being the children of God, ‘a god in ruins,’ ‘the paragon of animals,’ or as otherwise exceptional, and take a cold, hard look at what we are, what we have done, and what we continue to do (Emerson 1844 [1940] 39, Shakespeare 1623 [1974], 1156).

In order to live with the findings of our experiment, we must rationalize our cognitive dissonance or else dismiss it. We live in the world of human beings, after all, and there is no realistic way to live outside of the hive. Even if we accept the better examples of our kind and their products in the arts, sciences, and service as superlative (to say nothing of our loved ones) and continue to assert our intrinsic goodness, we must admit that there is such a thing as imbalance and too much of a good thing and that we are a perfect illustration of it. This is not to say that human accomplishments and what makes us distinctive and interesting are not real or impressive. Rather, it is an attempt to place these things in a broader biological context without our prejudices about them.

From this casual experiment, it is clear – at least it is to me – that human beings are a global plague species, and therefore, the record of its development and activities is history writ large.

## **II. The Basis for Understanding: A Disillusioned View of History and Human Nature**

Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them. (Hume 1740 [1888], 415)

If we learned nothing else from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we should have learned that the more perfect the answer, the more terrifying the consequences. (Judt 2010, 224)

I hope that nobody reading this will mistake my view for one of fatalism, or worse, misanthropy. To the contrary, all of my favorite people are human beings, and our best examples – the greatest minds, whether they be artists, humanitarians, musicians, philosophers, scientists, or writers – are what I admire most in the world. My purpose is not to inspire hatred or self-hatred, but to make the point that, special or not, there are far too many of us and that we must interpret history as the record of the trend of human population growth, domination, and collapse.

In order to have a more accurate understanding of what we are, we must approach the topic with detachment. As a historian of ideas, I am well aware of the godlike attributes of our kind. But having some grounding in sociobiology, evolutionary psychology, and military history, I have no illusions about human nature. We are animals and are subject to our animal nature. As Edward O. Wilson observes, "History makes no sense without prehistory and prehistory makes no sense without biology." (2012, 287)

Progressives are constantly disappointed by the course of events past and present because they labor under illusions about what people are and because they hope for the best based on the highest examples of human thought and behavior. Thinking, feeling Americans, for example, come to powerful disillusionment when they realize that much of the mythological national history we are taught or absorb via cultural osmosis is just that. The truth is always more complex and a lot messier.

These optimists view people as being essentially good and rational or at least capable of having these qualities predominate in our nature which we can then generalize into an interpretation of history as a rising road. They see the unfulfilled promise of the Enlightenment in terms of reachable goals and a foundation for even greater freedom, equality, and rights.<sup>10</sup> And yet how are we to bring forth and sustain these positive human characteristics that are often so much at odds with so much of our nature for so much of the time? Proffering a historical model based on an assumption of the dominance of the better qualities of our nature is like trying to build a school of clinical psychology based on the assumption that people are predominantly happy.<sup>11</sup> It also means ignoring much of the historical record or else providing tortured ideological explanations to account for it. It requires one to ignore significant aspects of our nature.

Modern conservatives, by contrasts, tend to cling to national myths and rationalize or shrug off the facts of past atrocities as justifiable or at least understandable operating costs, the rounding errors of 'freedom' and the foibles of an essentially good system. Rationalization and denial are the twin pillars of human psychology, and we should never underestimate another person's capacity for self-delusion, and never underestimate our own.

These liberal and conservative misunderstandings of national history find seamless analog in their misinterpretations of human beings and world history.

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<sup>10</sup> See Purdy (2019). Even though Purdy has a firm grasp of history and its darkness, his concept of a *commonwealth* reflects an overly optimistic view of human potential, in my opinion.

<sup>11</sup> People are not predominantly happy creatures and questions about how to be always happy are misconceived. In *The Silence of Animals*, John Gray observes that "For Freud... it is the hope of a life without conflict that ails us. Along with every serious philosophy and religion, Freud accepts that humans are sickly animals. Where he is original was in also accepting that the human sickness has no cure." (2013, 108-109) As animals torn by evolutionary pressures driving considerations of self-orientation and group interests, non-diseased human beings are by their nature off-balanced creatures.

Much of the conservative and progressive outlooks grow out of these respective mistaken assumptions (and both are based on an assumption of the eventual triumph of the good, even though they might disagree on what the good is). Ironically, both outlooks draw from the ideals of the Enlightenment.<sup>12</sup> One of the limitations of liberalism and conservatism is that they emerged from a kind of moral rationalism that predates a modern sociobiological understanding of humans. Thus the way these people see history, relative to a modern realist understanding, is analogous to an optimistic Enlightenment biological or a Romantic pantheist view of nature relative to that of a modern biologist.

By contrast I regard people to be a mixed bag. Rifting off of William James, I see history as a bloody mess (underscore *bloody*, underscore *mess*), a dark record brightened haphazardly by noble people, their efforts, ideas, and periods of relative enlightenment.<sup>13</sup> If we assume that humans are aggressive creatures capable of genocide, torture, total warfare, the conventional and nuclear bombing of civilians, chattel slavery, and the destruction of the world environment, but who are also capable of altruism, generosity, kindness, love, moral and physical courage and self-sacrifice, classical music, hot and cool jazz, impressionistic painting, the works of Shakespeare, the Sistine Chapel, the New Deal, the Marshall Plan, the Peace Corps, and the Voting Rights Act, history and the world around us make a lot more sense.

Such an outlook on our divided nature is also more accurate – *truer* – than the ones we create in our minds based on binary categories of good/evil and rational/irrational and a fatuous assumption of the ultimate triumph of the former in both dichotomies. In spite of our revulsion at these things, genocide, slavery, and war, have been ubiquitous parts of the human condition, and admitting this and incorporating such understanding into a disillusioned view of history is an important first step in coming to terms of what we are and to realistically address

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<sup>12</sup> There is a widely-embraced misconception that the great thinkers of the Enlightenment were all liberals – optimists – about human nature and reason. But there were also tough-minded realists who believed that human nature was multifaceted, passionate, and problematic. In addition to Enlightenment optimists like Bentham, Condorcet, Jefferson, Locke, Madison, Moisioudax, and Rousseau, are realists and skeptics like Burke, Franklin, Hamilton, Hume, Montesquieu, and Malthus himself. Even on the optimistic side there were ideas that are now considered to be illiberal. On modern misperceptions of the Enlightenment, see John Gray, “Steven Pinker is Wrong about Violence and War.” *The Guardian*. March 13, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> “History is a bath of blood.” See William James, “The Moral Equivalent of War,” 1906. Some of James’s contemporaries express similar points of view. Mark Twain writes “Human history in all ages is red with blood, and biter with hate, and stained with cruelties.” See Twain (1938/1991, 53, letter number XI). Henry Adams writes “The war alone did not greatly distress him; already in his short life he was used to seeing people wade in blood, and he could plainly discern in history, that man from the beginning had found his chief amusement in bloodshed.” (1918, 128) A century before, Edward Gibbons characterized history as “the register of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind.” (MacMillan 2009, 141) As Karl Popper observes, “For the history of power politics is nothing but the history of international crime and mass murder” (Popper’s italics). See Popper (1945/2013, 475).

these behaviors (Gray 2002/2003, 91-96).<sup>14</sup> Such an understanding gives us a fighting chance by knowing what we are up against and how to teach against such things. We must realize that they arise from the aggression that is a significant part of our nature. The best way to know people in these terms is a combination of a broad and deep understanding of history and sociobiology as parts of a general liberal arts education (Viereck 1949 [1962], 34-35).

Humans are intrinsically conflicted, off-balance creatures divided between primary impulses of self-orientation driven by pressures of individual selection, and less dominant motivations of altruism driven by group selection and the resulting eusociality (Wilson 2012 109-130, 133-157, 162-65, 170-88, Wilson 2014, 21-24). Our inborn repertoire of behavior therefore includes aggression and competition between individual groups as well as the qualities of cooperation, empathy, symbiosis, and loving-kindness. The tension between individuals, the individual and the group, and between groups is the No Man's Land of ever-evolving, never-ending discussions, of ethics. When they become broadly accepted, the details surrounding these often conflicting impulses become framed – codified – into moral systems.

A realistic view of humans is a necessary base for historical interpretation and for understanding events, and both the conservative and liberal interpretations require greater nuance and subtlety. With such an understanding, we arrive at the conclusion that, although we may and should take moral lessons from the past, no nation or people are an unswerving paragon of virtue; they are aggregates of human beings and are subject to our complex nature as shaped by particularities of individual circumstances and local culture as well as broader principles. And while we should never abandon efforts to make the world a better place, we cannot ignore what people are capable of doing, what we have done and will continue to do. Insofar as possible, we must approach the study and record of ourselves without illusion. As Mark Twain reminds us, "When we remember we are all mad, the mysteries disappear and life stands explained." (Twain 1987, 159)

### III. Kinds of Progress

History may be a succession of absurdities, tragedies and crimes; but – everyone insists – the future can still be better than anything in the past. (Gray 2013, 4)

Does progress exist and can it be inferred from the historical record? The answer to this question depends on the kind of progress implied in our inquiry. There are at least three kinds of human progress relevant to this discussion: progress in areas of formal truth, social progress, and the progress in the growth of our species.

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<sup>14</sup> Realistically speaking, we might effectively minimize these things overall or prevent them on a piecemeal basis, but they will always exist as possibilities of the human behavioral menu.

1. *Progress in Areas of Formal Truth* (logic, mathematics, theoretical science, and technology/applied science): Knowledge may be forgotten, ignored, and lost, but progress in areas of formal truth is real, objective, and demonstrable. The growth and advancement of knowledge has been so overwhelming over the past 600 years that it has given rise to an assumption of parallel progress in other areas of human endeavor. Whether or not other forms of knowledge and activities are progressive – historical knowledge, for example – is an open question.
2. *Social Progress*. Progress in society and politics may be an illusion, or, if real, temporary. Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment ideas of moral rationalism (feminism, modern humanism, social and economic liberalism, Marxism, etc.) and their real world applications are too new and tenuous for us to determine if they are permanent and progressive. Over historical time, the underlying bases for human behavior do not appear to have progressed significantly. John Gray believes that the idea of moral or social progress grows out of early Christianity. He also observes that “Things are learned in ethics and politics, but they don’t stay learned.” (John Gray lecture “On Progress,” April 4, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmRBHCclzZk&t=426s>) As Tony Judt observes, the Victorian confidence that underlies the modern idea of progress “was hard-pressed to survive the 20<sup>th</sup> century.” (2010, 140)<sup>15</sup> If anything, at this writing, it appears that in many republics, illiberal demagogues have gamed democratic procedures and institutions and are poised to turn the forces of extremism against these systems. This would be the opposite of progress, but it may also be temporary. It also suggests that if the potential for progress exists, it is vulnerable to changing historical currents.
3. *The Growth or ‘Progress’ of the Population of an Unchecked Plague Species*. I discussed this idea in Section 2 and stand by my conclusions there: it is real, observable, and if left unchecked, catastrophic. A corollary of this idea is that progress in science and technology enables and drives uncontrolled population growth, although social innovations, improvements in standards of living, and women’s rights, may slow or lower the growth of population (Wilson 2002, 30, and Wilson 2016, 190-191). Even if true, it would be too little, too late.

More broadly speaking, through a combination of aggressiveness, endurance, abstract and social intelligence, and an unmatched ability to adapt, we have fatally rigged the game in our own favor. Those things that help our fellow

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<sup>15</sup> Tony Judt writes, “By the 1950s, [the belief in progress] was already shaken by the crimes committed on History’s behalf by Lenin and his successors: according to Ralf Dahrendorf, Richard Tawney (the British social historian who died in 1962) was ‘...the last person whom I heard speak about progress without an apparent sense of embarrassment.’” (Judt 2010, 140) Although such serious men as Franklin Roosevelt and Martin Luther King, Jr. both reference history as a rising road, an ‘upward trend,’ they were popular leaders, and both of these endorsements were made in public utterances. King also notes in his *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, that “time is neutral. It can be used either constructively or destructively.” Thus, social progress requires positive effort and will not occur merely with the passing of time. King would appear to be right: to the extent that social progress exists, it is the result of constant endeavor.

humans enable us as a plague. In this sense, even things that we regard to be good or socially progressive contribute to imbalance.

#### A. The Technology-Population Dynamic

When a viable species is unchecked, and in favorable circumstances, its population will explode. Why would anyone suppose that human beings – a naturally-evolved species – would be exempt from this fact? If a species can kill off its natural enemies and competitors and is able to drastically lower deaths rates from disease – decreasing premature deaths from illness and increasing longevity – it is inevitable that it will come to grief with nature. History is in part the record of humans killing off our natural enemies and reaping the benefits and increasing our numbers.

The progress of formal truth therefore enables population growth, a phenomenon that might be called the Technology-Population Dynamic. It goes like this: science and technology help us eliminate, neutralize, or minimize our natural enemies (predatory and competitor species, pathogens, harsh climates), while bolstering our capacity to produce food, thus driving population growth. The progress that helps the species adapt and thrive increasingly drives the progress of imbalance.

By contrast, the means by which to address imbalance involves politics and policy based on the social sciences and at best offers progress that is local, haphazard, and short term (humans tend not to address crises until they are perceived as immediate threats). Such means are weak and ineffective relative to the combined momentum of technology and population growth. Even if social progress is real or potentially real, it will eventually be undermined by overpopulation. All of these observations suggest provocative questions about whether intelligence, reason, and planning are ultimately bad in that they push negative trends. At the very least, these things have given humans an exponential advantage over much of the living the world, thus leading to our present imbalance.

Technology continues to drive population growth, even when it does not improve living standards. The transition of human society from foraging to agricultural life, for example, was a mixed blessing, and perhaps the opposite of progress in terms of the quality of life. As John Gray observes, "In fact the move from hunter-gathering to farming brought no overall gain in human well-being or freedom. It enabled larger numbers to live poorer lives. Almost certainly, Paleolithic humanity was better off." (2002, 156) More recently, longer lives and falling infant mortality rates in parts of the developing world have increased population without raising the standard of living for most people. In a world of scarcity, living well comes at a cost – acquiring the things that make life enjoyable and rich necessarily degrade the lives of others. To live and live well, means that other people and organisms will live impoverished lives or not at all. There is no way around this.

Of course biology – ‘nature’ – is on both ‘sides’ of the human-Gaia conflict in the same way that it is represented by both pathogens and immune systems, the disease and its host. Biology drives human population – we are as ‘natural’ as any other organism – but, past a certain point, it is likely to work to limit that population growth like an immune system killing cancer cells. Perhaps the history of human epidemiology is the record of reason versus the immune response of the biosphere.

The COVID-19 virus might serve as an illustration of this. We know that subsequent forms of the virus such as the Delta and Omicron variants are the products of mutations, vectors, and numbers. But it *seems* as if the virus is trying to outwit or outmaneuver the vaccines. This leads to a rather obvious observation that we might call the COVID-19-Gaia Inversion, a dark thought: what if we have it all backward? What if the biosphere is the fevered patient struggling to breathe, that we are the pathogen, and COVID-19 is the immune response? This view does not sit well with our humanitarian impulses and progress-based assumptions about history, but that does not mean that it is not true.

#### **IV. Is the Characterization of History as Unchecked Population Growth a Historical Narrative?**

The short answer to this question is ‘no,’ neo-Malthusian theories of overpopulation do not constitute a historicist narrative; they are a theory-laden description of a biological trend that, left unaltered, will reach certain, seemingly-inevitable results, the specifics of which cannot be foretold. History may not be the result of an eschatological narrative, but it might as well be. The question of whether or not the Malthus-Lovelock-Margulis paradigm is or will become a *de facto* biologically-deterministic narrative depends on the answers to two other questions:

1. Can humans rise above our biology, and through moderation, reason, and cooperation, successfully address the problem of overpopulation and problems incumbent on it (the excess of carbon in the atmosphere and therefore global climate change, deforestation and loss of habitat, the plastics crises, etc.)? After all, humans are problem solvers as well as problem makers.
2. Will we?

As regards the first question, I venture a cautious ‘yes.’ The answer to the second question will likely render the answer to the first an academic point. I would like to believe that humans can rise above their biology via our better qualities, but I doubt that we will in time.

Open-ended social progress might not be real, but standalone economic and social projects like the New Deal, the Marshall Plan, the New Frontier, and the Great Society, are. And such programs may produce impressive results, endure, and may be improved upon for a while. The idea of an inevitable general advance everywhere at all times however is too much to expect.



If solutions to the world environmental crises are forthcoming, they will have to be large examples of what Karl Popper calls *piecemeal social engineering* based on trial and error rather than on rigid utopian schemes based on holistic ideology. If there are workable solutions, they will be products of a shotgun marriage of global cooperation forced by increasingly harsh realities. History has a will of its own – a course with inert heft – that cannot be managed or put into a rational order by holistic programs, and if there are solutions, I doubt they will come in time. If they do come, they will have to be based in large measure on historical understanding of what is possible. Regardless of what comes, we are audacious monkeys and must at least try (and if successful, then the question will be our responsibility in sustaining the Holocene indefinitely) (Frank 2018, 12).

The other reason why I do not believe the Malthus-Lovelock-Margulis interpretation of history is a historicist narrative is because we cannot know the future. I subscribe to a view of history as disorderly. Whether the world is characterized by chaos (deterministic disorder) or randomness (objective disorder), is irrelevant in practical terms (Popper 1934 [1959], 359-362). Either way, the future is unknowable. History is what cull from the cacophony of human interaction. Individual people in a nation are like the Brownian motion of atoms aggregated into a somewhat knowable macro order. But nations acting with other nations may become like multiple bodies acting upon each other. As such what appears to be a simple Newtonian interaction of bodies is actually an unpredictable, chaotic process (Newton 1687, 138-151; Penrose 2002, 688-689).

## V. Prescriptions: The Role of the Historian in a Dying World

Well, when the fall is all that is left, it matters a great deal.  
James Goldman, *The Lion in Winter*

The prospect of a world on the precipice pulls in different directions given how little we know about the future. Are we to assume that something of civilization will survive the crises of the environment and that our role is to preserve what is known for an aftertime? Let us assume the worst, that the world – the world as we have known it – is dying. What is the role of the historian under this assumption? More generally, what is the role of the thinking person, and why does it matter? We must address these questions because, no matter what the future brings, we cannot avoid or escape ethics. As my friend, David Isenbergh observes, claims that there are no ethics or meaning, or that ethics have no future, are still ethical statements.

Before providing my own prescription, let us examine those of two of today's more thoughtful commentators, John Gray and Roy Scranton.

### A. John Gray

A post-humanist realist, Gray believes that we should give up the quest for meaning altogether. Nietzsche-like in tone and format but Schopenhauer-like in

his pessimism, he ends his 2002 book, *Straw Dogs*, with the observation, "Contemplation is not the willed stillness of the mystics, but a willing surrender to never-returning moments... Other animals do not need a purpose in life. A contradiction in terms, the human animal cannot do without one. Can we not think of the aim of life as beginning simply to see?" (Gray 2002 [2003], 199) Seeing in silence, in forgetfulness, and without purpose? Hmm.

In *The Silence of Animals*, Gray concludes by continuing his argument to abandon quests for meaning, salvation, and myth: "If the human mind can ever be released from myth, it is not through science, still less through philosophy, but in moments of contemplation." (2013, 206)

Leaving aside the fact that a call to abandon philosophy is itself a philosophical plea, Gray diagnoses the human condition well. He appears to be saying that life provides its own meanings once we stop searching for them (and happiness) and just get on with living. But his solutions fail; for a human being it is impossible to live fully in forgetfulness, and it is undesirable to try (and Gray always remembers enough to put into his next book or lecture). He offers a lot of words about silence.

We have seen this before from philosophers. Wittgenstein writes that "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence," but then kept arguing for another three decades (1922, [1961], 74). Camus believed the world to be absurd, yet showed up in person to receive his Nobel Prize, dressed appropriately for the occasion, and gave a perfectly coherent speech. Postmodernists deny rationality and even the possibility of meaning in language, yet continue to write articles and books that present their positions in the form of reasoned, grammatical arguments. Only Hume (eventually) quit philosophy when he could go no farther. In 1739 he wrote "The *intense* view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as ore probable or likely than another." (Hume 1739-40 (1888), 268-269) In the early 1750s, he retired from philosophical writing to work in several governmental posts, write history, dine, play backgammon, converse and make merry with his friends until he died in 1776. In Hume's time and in our own, irrationalist skeptics and cognitive nihilists who keep talking or writing are frauds, even in their own terms (Hume 1739-40 (1888), 180-185, Hume 1745 (1993), 115-124). I do not put Gray into this category, but it is odd that he keeps writing after embracing silent contemplation.

Fish gotta swim, birds gotta fly, and people gotta think. We think on all manner of topics toward all ends. We cannot be silent observers shorn of intellectual quests any more than we can turn off our inner voice short of falling into dreamless sleep, suicide, or the allegedly 'pure experience' of Buddhist self-negation (although if identity is an illusion, then how did it ever occur to us and why do we experience it; and – given that an illusion must have an observer – does the idea of an illusion being an illusion to itself make any sense?). We cannot be

silent and therefore cannot live in Gray's (or Nietzsche's) animal-like forgetfulness (Nietzsche, 1874 [1980], 62). For as Nietzsche also writes "Man... would will *nothingness* rather than *not* will at all." (1887 [1996], 77) It would be pointless and, given our circumstances, immoral to try; we are blessed or condemned to be curious, thoughtful, remembering, story-telling animals and we must embrace our true nature.

We may not avoid assertions of meaning and myth even if we would. We cannot live without purpose and not choosing is not a possibility for us; to be human is to choose our meanings, or rather, to let them choose us. We are fundamentally ethical and linguistic mythmakers, and we could not avoid these things if we would. As Edward O. Wilson observes, human beings are natural-born – 'hardwired' – mythmakers: "...the mental processes of religious belief – consecration of personal and group identity, attention to charismatic leaders, mythopoeism, and others – represent programmed dispositions whose self-sufficient components were incorporated into the neural apparatus of the brain by thousands of generations of genetic evolution. As such they are the powerful, ineradicable, and at the center of human social existence." (1978, 206)

Humans are therefore perhaps the only animal that lies to itself in order to access a kind of non-literal truth about itself and to explain the world in the absence of more accurate structural explanations. Although Wilson acknowledges the centrality of myths and mythmaking, he holds that science is "the more powerful mythology" and that "man's destiny is to know." Science "is the only mythology that can manufacture greater goals from the sustained pursuit of pure knowledge." <sup>16</sup> (Wilson 1978, 207)

Gray's ultimate prescription in *The Silence of Animals*, of 'Godless contemplation,' is fine as far as it goes, but what else does it exclude from our thought? I suspect it is hardly a solution that a majority of people are likely to take up (Gray 2013, 194-209). As much as I like Gray as a thinker and a writer, his advocacy of silence and meditation leave me a little cold, beyond a temporary personal prescription.

## B. Roy Scranton

Another of the more eloquent voices on the dark side of the Anthropocene perspective is Roy Scranton. A literal warrior scholar who has glimpsed the ruined

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<sup>16</sup> To the degree that scientific hypotheses are myths, they are distinct from other myths. Scientific conjectures are progressive myths in that they may be improved upon or replaced by more accurate – more truthful – ones. As Karl Popper observes, "In both [science and non-science] we start from myths – from traditional prejudices, beset with error – and from these we proceed by criticism: by the critical elimination of errors." (1994, 14) Edward O. Wilson, like physicist Adam Frank, believes that we will need new myths, a new 'Big Story' if humans are to save themselves (Frank 2018, 8-10).

future of humankind in the rubble and misery of Iraq, Scranton believes that it is simply too late to save the environment. The time for redemption has passed. Full stop.

His response therefore, is one of acceptance and adaptation, that as members of a myth-making species, people should acknowledge that the world that we knew is finished and we should let it die with courage and dignity in the unfolding Anthropocene. In this prescription he combines Nietzsche's premise of living on one's own terms with a Jungian preoccupation with myths. In some respects, he is the opposite of Gray in that he embraces humanism and mythmaking and places much of the blame of the global environmental crises on capitalism rather than our animal nature (Scranton 2015, 23-24, Gray 2013, 112-118). I found that his two most revealing pieces on this topic are his hard-hitting article "We're Doomed. Now What?" and his book *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene*, both from 2015.

In some respects, Scranton goes beyond Gray by asserting that things are already too far gone as a matter of fact, and that all that remains is to learn to let civilization die. Scranton is a noble, disillusioned *bon vivant* of the mind forced by circumstances and his own clear and unflinching perception into fatalistic stoicism.

In *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene*, a grimly elegant little book in which he builds his case, Scranton acknowledges the existence of the neoliberal Anthropocene and recognizes its necessarily terminal nature. But he is speaking about the death of the human world as we know it with a general idea about how to adapt, learn, survive, and pass on wisdom in the world after.

Scranton is not as elemental as Gray and his claim is not necessarily deterministic in character (i.e. that the looming end is the result of cosmic or genetic destiny or the natural balancing of the biosphere). He simply observes that things are too far gone to be reversed. Where Gray places blame squarely on the animal nature of *homo rapinus* – "an exceptionally rapacious primate" – and not on capitalism or Western civilization – Scranton puts much of the blame, both practical and moral, at the feet of carbon-fueled capitalism, "a zombie system, voracious and sterile" an "aggressive human monoculture [that has] proven astoundingly virulent but also toxic, cannibalistic and self-destructive." (Gray 2002 (2003), 7, 151, 184; Scranton 2015, 23). As with Edward O. Wilson before him, he calls for a "New Enlightenment." (Scranton, 2015, 89-109; Wilson 2012, 287-297)

For all of his insight, Scranton does not advance grandiose theories about human nature (most of his condemnation is of economics/consumerism and the realities of power although he does believe that "The long record of human brutality seems to offer conclusive evidence that both individually and socially organized violence as biologically a part of human life as are sex, language, and eating.)" (2015, 75) He just looks at the world around him – peers Nietzsche-like into the unfolding abyss – and does not blink. Honest, sensitive, and intelligent he

simply tells the truth as he sees it. He accepts the inevitable and without delusion. The time for redemption has passed, and we must learn to let our world die with whatever gives us meaning.

As with Gray, Scranton may prove to be right as a practical matter and believes the end to be a matter of empirical fact rather than the unfolding of biological, historical, or metaphysical necessity. He speaks about learning to die, but his book is only palliative in tone as regards capitalistic civilization. He states that:

The argument of this book is not that we have failed to prevent unmanageable global warming and that the global capitalist civilization as we know it is already over, but that humanity can survive and adapt to the new world of the Anthropocene if we accept human limits and transience as fundamental truths, and work to nurture the variety and richness of our collective cultural heritage. Learning to die as individuals means letting go of our predispositions and fear. Learning to die as a civilization means letting go of this particular way of life and its ideas of identity, freedom, success, and progress. These two ways of learning to die come together in the role of the humanist thinker: the one who is willing to stop and ask troublesome questions, the one who is willing to interrupt, the one who resonates on other channels and with slower, deeper rhythms. (Scranton 2015, 24)

He is speaking of the death of the world as we knew it and the individual lives we knew. But he is also speaking of adapting and emerging in a time after with a universal humanism shorn of the assumptions of a failed world. In this sense, he is telling us what to pack for after the storm, both for its own sake, and perhaps to learn from it and do better next time. He writes:

If being human is to mean anything at all in the Anthropocene, if we are going to refuse to let ourselves sink into the futility of life without memory, then we must not lose our few thousand years of hard-won knowledge accumulated at great cost and against great odds. We must not abandon the memory of the dead. (Scranton 2015, 109)

In this sense Scranton is advocating a role not unlike that of a fifth century Irish monk carefully preserving civilization at the edge of the world, on the precipice of what might be the end of civilization, as well as an Old Testament prophet speaking of an eventual dawn after the dark of night, the calm or chaotic altered world after the tempest. As with the early Irish monks and similar clerical scribes writing at the height of the Black Death of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, we do not know whether or not we face the end of the world (Tuchman 1978, 92-125).

Although I do not agree with the Anthropocene perspective of surrender and adaptation as long as there is a chance to avoid or mitigate a global disaster, there is much to like about Scranton's perspective here.

In *We're Doomed. Now What?* he goes even farther than the idea of the heroic humanist thinker and becomes something like Emerson's all-perceiving eyeball, or a kind of pure empathetic consciousness. Relying heavily on the perspectivism of Nietzsche, Scranton says that human meaning is a construct. But

meaning must be tied to – exist in – proximity to perceived reality, and beyond meaning is truth (Tarski 1956 (1983), 155). Perspectivism is a kind of relativistic but intersubjective triangulation for a more complete understanding. From the accessing of truth from multiple perspectives, we may devise a fuller, more informed, and less delusional kind of meaning.

He writes that rather than die with our provincial illusions intact,

We need to learn to see with not just our Western eyes but with Islamic eyes and Inuit eyes, not just human eyes but with golden-cheeked warbler eyes, Coho salmon eyes, and polar bear eyes and not even with just eyes but with the wild, barely articulate being of clouds and seas and rocks and trees and stars. (Scranton 2018, 8)

In other words, this is a kind of reverse-phenomenology: rather than attempting to approach the world without assumptions, we should begin with many, perhaps *all* perspectives. As sympathetic as I am with all of the living things he mentions, beyond a general sense of empathy and stewardship, to see things through their eyes is impossible. We should realize and fight for the interests of the creatures of the living world, but beyond the generalities of conscious awareness, we cannot experience it the same way they do. I too feel a kind of pan-empathy, only without the illusion – a Western illusion – that I can truly *see* things as they do. And besides, Scranton does not mention what good it would do even if it were possible. This idea is reminiscent of Edward O. Wilson's notion of biophilia, only more all-encompassing (Wilson 1984).

It seems odd that Scranton believes that technology cannot save us from the climate crisis, and yet empathy and philosophy will save us in a time after, in a sense. They may work for individuals – and certainly for thinking people, like historians – but this is not a realistic prescription for an overpopulated world in crisis. Perhaps he would benefit from a measure of Gray's realism about human nature.

### C. My View

Rather than try to detach from myth as Gray would have us do, or to embrace myths that either arise in us or to which we have been acculturated, we must continue to grow without illusion; if we are not growing – learning – we are dying, and dying will come soon enough. Certainly we will have illusions, but these must be minimized in pursuit of truth. Who we are is given, to include our archetypal myths.

Human psychology is founded on rationalization and denial, but we must rid ourselves of mistaken ideas and understanding or else improve upon them to make them truer and relevant. And we must do so with the understanding that all knowledge is fallible and that there are limits to what we can know – that all learning is flawed, incomplete/limited, and selective.

The capacity for mythmaking is innate, and some of our myths emerge from the mists of time. Whether archetypal stories or new variations of old themes, they

are a key part of what makes us human. They are the bases for art and entertainment. We may still tell and adapt age-old stories, but we must also unburden ourselves from delusion and grow, because learning and seeking truer understanding are not only useful, but are noble and worthwhile ends in themselves. We may be destroying the planet, but truth-seeking is still something to which we may aspire.

From a body of disillusioned knowledge, we may come to better know our world and the human story; such understanding is both inherently good and a practical basis for how to act. As regards history, there is great merit just in knowing the story better, even (and especially) if the end is near. Knowing is an end in itself and a realistic basis for policy, and to die wiser and with fuller and more accurate knowledge is an element of the good life; all else being equal, a person who dies knowing that  $1 + 1 = 2$  is superior to someone without that knowledge, simply because it is *true*. This prescription is not a means toward salvation in any greater sense. If a new and more accurate narrative is to be defined broadly as a 'myth' by some, then so be it. Its correspondence to reality will also make it a truer empirical statement.

I would therefore expand Wilson's prescription to embrace science to include all of epistemology, which, when it is done well, would include the practice of history as a part of the greater rational-empirical enterprise. It too is a part of the 'sustained pursuit of knowledge' of which Wilson writes (1978, 207).

As with science, in history we start with myths. And like science, we might improve on this, thus making history a progressive enterprise. As Popper writes,

In both [science and non-science] we start from myths – from traditional prejudices, beset with error – and from these we proceed by criticism: by the critical elimination of errors. In both the role of evidence is, in the main, to correct our mistakes, our prejudices, our tentative theories – that is, to play a part in the critical discussion in the elimination of error. By correcting our mistakes, we raise new problems, we invent conjectures, that is, tentative theories, which we submit to critical discussion directed to the elimination of error. (1994, 140; see also note 16)

Traditional myths are archetypal, and although they may take on the trappings of the times as cinema, literature and painting, their general outlines, if merely restated, are non-progressive, although, in a new time, we may find new insights in them. Epistemological interpretations of the world around us in science and history, when done well, are progressive. Thus, as a critical thinker, Anaximander, is superior to Thales because he criticized myths in order to improve them. (Popper 1998, 9-10) As a historian, Thucydides is preferable to Herodotus, because he relies less on myths. Therein lies our duty as historians regardless of what comes. Just as  $1 + 1 = 2$  is true in every possible universe, truth is truth, even in a dying world.

If we are not growing, we are dying. But what does it mean to grow? What does growing mean in a dying world? Ostensibly, writers, to include historians,

write to get published, to get the ideas out as gifts to humankind. But more fundamentally, writers write *because they are writers*. They write because they have to write. Historians study history to know the story better. If honest they seek the truth no matter where it leads and no matter how dark that truth may be. To live is to grow, and regardless of our fate, we must continue to grow until we die. It is what we do.

To illustrate this point, I will close with what I call The Parable of the Dying Beetle, a personal myth of sort based on a real event. When I was a child, I came across a beetle on the sidewalk that had been partially crushed when someone stepped on it. It was still alive but dying. I found a berry on a nearby bush and put it in front of the beetle's mandibles and it began to eat the fruit. There may have been no decision – eating something sweet and at hand was presumably something the beetle would do as a matter of course. It made no difference that there was no point in a dying beetle nourishing itself any more than did my offering the berry to it (perhaps like the last meal of a condemned person). It was simply something that I did and which the beetle did. Maybe it is the same with humans and myth-making: *it is what we do*, living or dying. Writers write because they are writers; artists (to include writers), historians, and journalists tell the truth. At least they are supposed to.

The dying beetle likely ate unthinkingly out of instinct whereas humans should act out of reflection. But we may look more broadly at the beetle as acting out of its nature, its will as given. Let us act out of our nature as thinking beings, interpreters of the past, and truth-tellers, come what may. We should write for a purpose beyond our own gratification, to get to truer answers and more accurate interpretations, if only for the sake of knowing.

## Conclusion

Where does all of this leave us? What is the role of the historian in a dying world? More broadly, what are ambition and hope and love in a dying world and what is the morality of a thinking agent that is a part of the cause of the world's end? I have stated my opinion. In discussions related to this topic, I have sometimes been told that we should take a more neutral view of the situation and treat human overpopulation with a detached attitude as just another natural phenomenon.

Should we adopt an amoral 'big picture' stance of fatalism and recognize that the evolution, propagation, and the technologies of human beings are all parts of natural processes – that the human-caused destruction of much of the natural world is itself a 'natural' process, an experiment doomed by its own success – and leave it at that?<sup>17</sup> By the same logic, we could decide not to treat cancer because it

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<sup>17</sup> Lynn Margulis writes, "To me, the human move to take responsibility for the living Earth is laughable – the rhetoric of the powerless. The planet takes care of us, not we of it. Our self-inflated moral imperative to guide a wayward Earth or heal our sick planet is evidence of our immense capacity for self-delusion. Rather, we need to protect us from ourselves." (1998, 115)



is a 'natural process,' or shrug off the extermination of the Armenians, the Cambodian killing fields, the Holocaust, and World War II in general as unfortunate but inevitable manifestations of human nature? Perhaps the human-altered world is just the next phase of life on the planet just like "the microbes that reworked the world by creating the oxygen-rich atmosphere." (Frank 2018, 10, see also Popper 1972, 285) I acknowledge that human overpopulation is the result of the Earth's biology. But we are also so fundamentally and intimately a part of it, that we cannot escape judgment about it as well. Again, we could not escape morality if we tried.

Of course, all of the prescriptions presented here are based mostly on the assumption that the world (or *our* world) is actually dying. If there is hope for the survival of some kind of a world in which humans are a part, then the role of the historian is to interpret the past in order to apply its lessons to the present and future. If this is the case, then getting the facts and the interpretations right will be more important than ever before.<sup>18</sup> If the world is not dying, getting the story right will be of great practical benefit. It will allow those who follow to learn from the mistakes of the past and to anticipate what might be coming.<sup>19</sup>

If not – if the world is dying – then the role of the historian will still be to get things as right as possible for its own sake. Like the beetle, we must act based on our nature regardless of what comes. If global ecological disaster is our fate – if it is predetermined or if the world is merely too far gone to save – then we must be conscientious locusts or cancer cells and bear faithful witness and admit openly what our kind has wrought as a matter of fact.

Regardless of whether or not the world is dying, the historian must inform the reader what we have done and continue to do, and to confront the powers that be with this truth and urge them to do better.

One of the most constructive uses of history is to learn from the past in order to apply lessons about how to act in the present. And yet what is a person of

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For the purpose of comparison, it would be interesting to see side-by-side structural diagrams of the various systems and functions of an individual organism relative to those of the world biosphere. Like an organism, the biosphere is self-regulating and 'alive,' but as Margulis observes, there are some important differences that make the analogy an imperfect one.

<sup>18</sup> Ideas matter and history, when gotten wrong, is worse than useless, it is harmful and potentially catastrophic. Getting history as right as possible therefore matters. Some interpretations are truer, more accurate, complete, and insightful than others. In order to have meaningful discussion and policy toward a goal of effective problem solving, we must first have a realist understanding of what is happening today by knowing how we got to where we are. The less people know about history, the less they know of the world and their place in it, they less they know who they are. Such people have an impoverished understanding of themselves. Historians who deny the practical importance of the study of history – like A.P.J. Taylor – err badly (MacMillan 2009, 141). For a discussion of the importance of getting history as right as possible, see my article "Looking for Black Swans: Critical Elimination and History" (2021, note 6).

<sup>19</sup> In the words of Lord Byron, "The best of prophets of the future is the past." (1982, 248)

our time to take from a realistic understanding of the human past? A sensitive person today *is* like a thinking, feeling cancer cell. We know that we are a part of an aggregate that is killing a much larger living thing of which we are a small subset, and yet it is almost impossible for us to do anything about it or even shun our kind and its intrinsic nature. The truth will allow us to see what we have done.

If there are interpretations of the human project beyond biological imbalance, they must include creativity, reason, and the understanding of what we are and our place in the world. They must be a part of an accurate account of the story of our species. The role of history as a critical-rational enterprise today is what it has always been: to tell the truth insofar as the historian can know it. If we are not able to reconcile morality and reason with history, then perhaps we may at least learn from it. The truth may not save us, but the search for it will keep us honest, regardless of what comes. And that is something.

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# Magnifying Lacan's "Mirror Image" (1949) to Develop the Undeveloped Notion of 'Being-Towards-Birth' in Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927)

Rajesh Sampath

**Abstract:** This essay will attempt a line-by-line reading of Lacan's famous "The Mirror Image as Formative / Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" (1949) published in the collected volume of essays, *Ecrits* (1966). The article attempts to show that Lacan's essay opens a space of primordiality, whereby we can revisit Heidegger's critique of subjectivity and the Cogito, terms that originate with Descartes and evolves to Kant's *Critiques of dogmatic metaphysics*, particularly in Heidegger's *Being and Time*. These are steps Heidegger takes to set up his attempted critique of Hegel, who in turn tries to surpass the history of philosophy rooted in modern subjectivity, particularly in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). However, missing in Lacan's essay and what remains unarticulated in Heidegger's *Being and Time* is the following: relation between time, movement, and the space of primordiality where all notions of factual existence dissolve. Being born in time, developing in time, being in or at time, and being-towards-death, as Heidegger struggles to deconstruct – by way of his unique appropriation of phenomenology in *Being and Time* – can be questioned. Indeed, what Heidegger fails to develop, and he admits it explicitly, is the other side of his 'one-sided' treatment in the investigation: he only analyzed death as a possibility of Dasein's greatest possibility to 'be-Whole' authentically (1962, 277) and completely neglected 'being-towards-birth' as the 'other end' of Dasein's movement (1962, 425). We will argue that one is never born as a biological fact of existence, a social construction assigned at physical birth, like a gender or sex, or any religious notions of a created being from God the Creator, or any notions of rebirth, reincarnation, or resurrection, namely from religions in the West, like Roman Catholic Christianity, and the East, like Hinduism. Rather, 'being-towards-birth' in relation to the linear time of flowing now-points (past as no longer now, present as now, future as yet to be now), or 'being-within-time,' (Heidegger 1962, 457) is temporalized other than a dateable origin in spatialized time or history.

**Keywords:** Lacan, Heidegger, metaphysics, time, movement.

## Main Text

Before we begin the reading of Lacan's opening moments, we need a few incipient reflections. The mirror (physical mirror as object bounded by a frame) is only a metaphor even though Lacan is literally discussing the first moments when an actual human infant (in contrast to the animal) fashions an image of itself in a physical mirror. Losing oneself in the mirror as the analogy of the exteriority of being-one-self when that is not consciousness of self as body, body as

consciousness of self, consciousness as consciousness of and as body and self, and all interrelations and fusions of all the terms. One never sees anything, the deeper they see into the mirror that is embodied life. One can never see their body, their face, and any ontic register to see the 'I' or 'self' within those physical structures; they never see, embodied seeing, the act of seeing regardless of what they see. This is, strangely, both an ontological and ontic-physical fact. You cannot see your own face, including the one in the mirror. The schism/delay/différance to use the Derridean term is your 'face.' Now imagine that 'face' (never an object in a mirror or in a picture or one's memory of both) in relation to the other's face when they are going through the same thing, and the double elision constitutes the mutual reciprocal gaze of one to the other and vice-versa. The relation is a doubling of a void. One constantly erases the other in a relationship, and that is the paradox. The persistence of the 'I' (subject as substance) in and through time is an illusion. In other words, two faces become the masks of the other, or even better the face is a mask that covers a non-being. So now we can return to Lacan's text before we move to Heidegger's *Being and Time*.

### **Lacan's 'Mirror Stage' as the Infinite Void**

In the opening moments, Lacan draws a distinction between the child and an animal, say a monkey. Without invoking any biological reductionism or essentialism, there is a primordial event or break in the child's behavior, whose temporality is unknown, because the 'age' is only for a 'short while.' (Lacan 2006, 75) There is no way for our rational adult consciousness, which has ripened over time, where reason tries to explain events and development based on experience, to penetrate this short transpiring of time. And no human being can remember an event before the age of 1, and most likely unable before 2 or 3. So this space is a mystery, this space of initial differentiation between child and animal (a monkey) of any age, young or old. But Lacan hypothesizes an observable phenomenon by way of a sophisticated theoretical description; at some 'moment' (2006, 75) the child "can already recognize his own image in such a mirror." (2006, 75) The image is not a pure representation of an actual physical body that exists outside of the mirror. Leave aside for a moment the complexity of Saussure's linguistics of the sign, signifier (word-oral or written) and signified (mental object or image). We cannot say with certainty how the image is available to not only the consciousness of the child but the consciousness of that consciousness, or self-consciousness, if we want to wade into Hegelian terms. We will bracket this for a moment because a return to Hegel, albeit through a non-dialectical deconstruction, will become necessary.

The animal may have a higher 'instrumental intelligence,' (Lacan 2006, 75) or the ability to utilize their body to achieve certain actions like walking, jumping, climbing a tree, etc., that a human infant cannot. But they – the animal – never cross this mysterious threshold of 'seeing an image of the self' according to Lacan. We are concerned with the phenomenological elucidation of this Lacanian

distinction. Let us assume counter-intuitively, there is no physical-biological child (say a nine-month-old baby) and an animal in the wild. Rather, the specular image is fashioned out of a void for which representations evoke a bad regress: namely the image is a representation of a representation on to infinity with no trace of a definable origin in time. The animal is the immanent entity of consciousness of a body, not a self as imagined in space; whereas the human baby is the non-consciousness of a body for which no identity of self (and moreover a nameable self) can be attached but rather 'some image' occurs. There are more distinctions to be drawn here, but we need to move on with Lacan's text.

To reiterate, Lacan says 'already recognizes,' which presumably means that even at a young age the baby can do what the animal cannot – namely see the image of self in the mirror. But it also means a prior disposition, a type of facticity to bring in Heidegger's language of already 'being-in-the world' as 'having-been.' (1962, 375) And with Heidegger's ontological distinction, this is not simply a present now that is no longer now and has become a dateable past, i.e a chronological date or an artifact, like a photo of one when they were a baby. This past has never been a present now, but part of Dasein's constitutional makeup is the mystery of temporality itself; one that gives rise to the ordinary notion of linear, spatial, flowing time of now points (Heidegger 1962, 377). This means we cannot simply go back in time with our own self or identity now, as if traveling in a Lacanian-built time machine, and revisit that first time we looked in the mirror and saw an image of a self. And if not a 'self,' then some-thing. Ironically, the Kantian limit of never getting to the thing in itself is inscribed in that scission-decision, which is the event of the first encounter with the mirror stage. Leaving aside the enormous question of the relation between language and sense in the early infant stage, we would not even be able to communicate with the baby version of ourselves as to what we are actually seeing. Nominally, the 'image' in the mirror could be of anything, even beyond the threshold of language.

At this point, we want to quote the full passage in Lacan's text that really launches his entire essay:

the human child... can already recognize his own image as such in a mirror. This recognition is indicated by the illuminative mimicry of the Aha-Erlebnis, which Kohler considers to express situational apperception, an essential moment in the act of intelligence.

Indeed, this act, far from exhausting itself, as in the case of a monkey, in eventually acquired control over the uselessness of the image, immediately gives rise in a child to a series of gestures in which he playfully experiences the relationship between the movements made in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it duplicates – namely, the child's own body, and the persons and even things around him. (2006, 75)

As much as we want to move on to most of the text, a mere seven pages in the English translation (Lacan, 2006), we will have to dwell here for a while. And

then we will take the plunge back into Heidegger's *Being and Time*, particularly Chapter IV of Division One on the question of 'who' Dasein 'is' (1962, 149) before setting up the possibility to engage in the question of 'being-towards-birth.' (1962, 375) The key issue that is missing from both Lacan's text and all of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, as we will argue, is the deeper primordial link between a non-linear 'temporalizing of temporality' (Heidegger 1962, 377), a notion other than 'within-time-ness' (Heidegger 1962, 465) and 'movement,' (Heidegger 1962, 441) as not the movement of something in time or the movement of an object in space. It has nothing to do with physical space-time and its relation to gravity, light, energy, mass, etc. in theoretical physics either. As for Lacan, we see the problem of movement present itself right in this opening passage.

Lacan links 'situational apperception' with an 'essential moment in the act of intelligence.' (2006, 75) One is tempted to return to the ancient Greeks, particularly Plato and Aristotle, to examine all the ways something like 'intelligence' and 'intellect' were understood, even as far as metaphysics of divine thought thinking itself (as in Book XII of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*). But, for now, we can work with the ordinary, modern connotations of apperception. This is not just the act of perceiving something; it is the motor-workings of the internal mechanisms by which a perception is created internally, presumably through some mysterious conformity of what the mind is doing in the act of perception and what may be perceived. It can also be the internal perception of the 'inward' space that makes possible all external perceptions. We are all in Kant's debt on his distinction between 'empirical' apperception and the 'transcendental' apperception (1998, 232). As Kant says in the first *Critique*:

Now this original and transcendental condition is nothing other than the transcendental apperception. The consciousness of oneself in accordance with the determinations of our state in internal perception is merely empirical, forever variable; it can provide no standing or abiding self in this stream of inner appearances, and is customarily called inner sense or empirical apperception. That which should necessarily be represented as numerically identical cannot be thought of as such through empirical data. There must be a condition that precedes all experience and makes the latter itself possible, which should make such a transcendental presupposition valid.

Now no cognitions can occur in us, no connection and unity among them, without that unity of consciousness that precedes all data of the intuitions, and in relation to which all representation of objects is alone possible. This pure, original, unchanging consciousness I will now name transcendental apperception. (1998, 232)

So even changing notions of our self-perception through various experiences require a more fundamental, underlying, and permanent substrate known as the 'pure, original, unchanging consciousness.' (Kant 1998, 232) But this is precisely what invites us to speculate on how Lacan's usage of the term – 'situational apperception' – is also a critique of the Kantian notion of an 'original, pure, unchanging' but also invisible transcendental concept. Not only are we



dealing with a pre-walking infant stage of an actual human being, and therefore no consideration of adult reason, consciousness, experience, perception, etc., we have to come back to the Lacanian text of how this non-perceptive image of self is fashioned, almost creatively, in an 'illuminative mimicry.' (Lacan 2006, 75) The first primordial image of self is actually something artificial, and therefore even imaginary. The scary thing is that whatever emerges later in advanced childhood and certainly by normative adulthood is also an illusion.

We are concerned with the 'illuminative mimicry,' (Lacan 2006, 75) which invokes a lighting up repetition, and primordial original event as a double, which exceeds the simultaneity and succession of two events. Let us try to explain this further. In other words, we need to resist every temptation of our adult reason, language, experience, and conceptualization to try and describe this 'situational apperception.' (Lacan 2006, 75) We have the baby inside and outside the mirror, the baby, and the mirror, and as the mirror mirroring itself in an infinite vertigo and elision. There is no image in that regard that references the thing itself. 'Situational apperception' is not Kant's 'transcendental apperception.' (1998, 232)

The child cannot muster the 'instrumental intelligence' of the monkey, the animal's Aristotelian *techne*, or practical knowing, from the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The monkey sees itself as another version of itself, literally jumping around as if it were playing with another monkey. But this is not what the very young child is doing. The monkey can advance neurologically to adult monkey movements without advancing self-consciousness, say given its complex description in Hegel, or come back from its sense of finitude, guilt, conscience, and the possibility of death as Heidegger describes in the 'moment of vision.' (1962, 437) Or so we must assume. But the human child is not an adult *Dasein* either. Yet it has its own primordial Ereignis, if you will, involving the 'illuminative mimicry' (Lacan 2006, 75) or non-transcendental immanence in the infinite vertigo of alterity of mirrors reflecting each other to use our language, and the 'situational apperception,' (Lacan 2006, 75) which is neither Kant's empirical nor transcendental apperceptions. Let us not confuse this apperception of the 'situation,' whereby the situation connotes an event in space-time, whether an empirical intuition or the product of the imagination, or the event as space-time as the warping effect of gravity, for example the mysteries of theoretical physics.

The next passage in Lacan's text is difficult to interpret. But we quote the original English translation again:

Indeed, this act, far from exhausting itself, as in the case of a monkey, in eventually acquired control over the uselessness of the image, immediately gives rise in a child to a series of gestures in which he playfully experiences the relationship between the movements made in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it duplicates – namely, the child's own body, and the persons and even things around him. (Lacan 2006, 75)

This 'act' is the primordial event of the leap, which can never become an object of consciousness to the infant or retroactively through memory when the older child or adult tries to reflect on the very early past infancy. In the case of the animal, the monkey reaches a limit, the point of 'exhaustion,' where they give up in trying to master through reason the creation of a possessive image of their 'self'; they do not understand the utility of the image as it is not something they can immediately consume or relate to for practical-technical purposes, say befriending another monkey in the wild. But the human baby is doubly distinct from A.) the animal's limit, the impossibility of crossing from sensorial consciousness of the world to self-consciousness of being-in-the-world, and B.) an adult human with their false sense of self-conception, whether narcissistic or not, in gazing into the mirror in seeing one's face with either delight or repulsion, familiarity or incessant surprise. We, of course, can deconstruct this simplistic characterization of 'animal intelligence' and try to imagine something more complex than our human interactions and representations allow. Derrida, for one, attempts this in his *The Animal Therefore I Am* (2008).

Getting back to Lacan, all we can say is that the irreducible space of primordially can never be equated with an actual past present, a present now, which is no longer, that comes to representation through memory, nostalgia, or even fictional affection, a super-luminary expansion of a real possibility that was experienced. The adult analyst can witness the child's behavior and try to describe it in the manner Lacan does. Something occurs in the child, which Lacan says, namely the "series of gestures in which he playfully experiences the relationship between the movements made in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it duplicates – namely, the child's own body, and the persons and even things around him." (2006, 75) We must attend to the nature of this 'play,' what it means to experience anything, the question of a 'relationship,' and the baby's apperception (not of an internal mental space generating representations of itself, the outside world, and the relations between them) of 'movements.' But what are these 'movements'? Lacan says movements in the image (presumably the baby's witnessing an image of 'itself') but also that which surround the image in the environment outside the mirror, perhaps toys or other objects surrounding the baby. Lacan calls these the 'reflected environment,' (2006, 75), which has no simple relationship to the 'situational apperception.' (2006, 75) And then we crescendo to the apex of the passage regarding the 'virtual complex,' (Lacan 2006, 75) a rich reality unto itself, which presumably 'duplicates' some other original 'reality' that is already out there. This reality is composed of the child's physical body and surrounding objects outside the mirror.

But let us complicate things a bit. The 'virtual complex' (Lacan 2006, 75) is not some artificial, illusory, derivative, inferior copy of a deeper, more sound, empirical 'reality.' (Lacan 2006, 75) The event of 'duplication' (Lacan 2006, 75) is not a simple representation that follows as the secondary point in a line of events: for example, taking a picture of oneself, whereby the real physical body of oneself

precedes the photocopy of it. Prior to all this is the mirror-play, the quaternity, that exceeds all binaries of self as subject or self as object, the dialectics or hermeneutics of subject-object distinctions and relations. We cannot move to the later Heidegger just yet on his notion of the 'mirror-play' and 'fourfold,' for example in his enigmatic work, *The Thing* (2001). We will have to pass through *Being and Time* first on the 'who' question of Dasein in Chapter IV of Division One. Whether the human baby or adult, we have to acknowledge the a priori facticity of never being able to see our own face directly, the impossibility of a direct face-to-face encounter, opens the infinite alterity and limit of transcendence, the Mosaic impossibility of seeing Yahweh from the Hebrew Bible without perishing since 'I am' is never an object, icon, presence, or image. Our face is used to see everything if we have sight (as some are born without sight and perhaps the blind has a better chance to 'see' their face); but what is behind the face is the face that can never circumvent itself, come around itself and face it directly to see the face of oneself. Since the mirror image is a false copy, and the face can never see itself, then, solipsistically, one could deduce that the face does not even exist. The surface of the ocean cannot see the depth beneath it, but the depth is always facing upwards and downwards towards and away from the surface. The face has to turn away from itself.

Lacan wants to do something with this aporia of these interrelational movements, which become the primordial creation of the image of the body and outside world of objects. The mirror may be a neutral reflection of an outside world that adults understand as existent reality with all its objects, including the adults themselves. Not so for either the human baby or for the animal. Yet this constitution of the 'I', as Lacan says, in the opening moment, deciphered as an 'experience' – that psychoanalysis tries to describe – is ontologically distinct from the certitude and fortitude of the philosophy of the 'cogito,' (2006, 75) one can say subject, self, and soul too. This ontological difference means everything because we want to resist the notion of linear time, whereby our baby self is in the past (given to us through pictures taken of us), and the mature child or adult self that is now, present, writing this text. That life is present, and death is absent, which Derrida (1967) and Heidegger (1927) would both deconstruct in their own ways. All concepts of life and death are inadmissible in this realm. Whatever the ontological status of our 'being' is and what it means cannot be taken for granted. We could just be a more 'advanced' version of the human baby at the mirror stage, the interrelational movements of the vertigo in the 'virtual complex' (beyond fake representation of a real world) that totters on falling back to the 'instrumental intelligence.' (Lacan 2006, 75) Our bodies, faces, their relations, and the specular image in the mirror are not what we think they are.

### **The 'Who' Question of Dasein in Heidegger's *Being and Time***

This sets up the transition to Heidegger's *Being and Time* to which we now turn. We will attempt a slow reading of Chapter IV of Division One titled: "BEING-IN-

THE-WORLD AS BEING-WITH AND BEING-ONE'S -SELF. THE "THEY'." It's quite astounding that just over ten years that Heidegger publishes in German his masterpiece, *Sein und Zeit*, Lacan is articulating the 'mirror stage,' (2006, 75) He tries to develop his own ontological distinction between A.) the human baby, or the interrelational-movement 'virtual complex' and many other concepts that follow in the essay, such as the 'prematurity of birth,' (Lacan 2006, 78) as a universal truth of being, and B.) the adult with reason, imagination, experience, and their interrelations so deftly analyzed by Kant, in the constitution of representations of body and face, the pillars of self-conception itself, whether through transcendental a priori rules or not, i.e. empiricism. Nevertheless, Lacan is a psychoanalyst. Presumably, his sole aim is to help people alleviate their suffering.

Although we will spend most of our time with this one chapter in Division One, what we have in mind is the possibility of articulating what is not developed at all in Division Two, let alone what is not offered since Division Three was not included in the original publication of *Being and Time*: namely 'being-towards-birth,' (Heidegger 1962, 425) And then in the future, we need to return to Lacan's text and further explore the problematic of the 'prematurity of birth,' (2006, 78) not to be confused with actual premature births or births that occur before 37 weeks of maternal gestation. What we said earlier is that do not think of physical-biological birth as past (i.e., your birth certificate) and eventual physical perishing and death as future, i.e., a patient with a certain terminal disease. Also forgo notions of an eternal repetition of the birth event that never progresses or actualizes to an end point. And, lastly, suspend any faith-based or religious-metaphysical notions of reincarnation after death or resurrection to an eternal life. Rather, ontologically speaking, if birth turns out to be a type of continuous transpiration of one distending event as a horizon and nothing present, then how we 'come' to that horizon evokes the problem of movement. It could well be that birth is more like what we would normally consider the endpoint or telos, not the beginning. True birth comes at the 'end,' whereas the Lacanian 'mirror image' is some strange hybrid of the monstrosity of the pure, auto-affection without a unified self, and the oxymoron of sinister innocence. But even these evoke spatial registers that must be destroyed. That will have to come later.

Heidegger opens this much discussed chapter by posing the question of 'who' Dasein is in its 'everydayness.' (1962, 149) Obviously, one, immediately, is inclined to think of oneself waking up every day, doing some things through the course of the day, and then going to sleep at night. At least most of us do that as a daily routine. But things get strange quickly. We want to think about the totality of Dasein's whole authentic being, which would be inclusive of its two ends (being-towards-birth and being-towards-death), everything in-between as it is in the world; and leaving the world is not just dying, leaving a dead body behind, and a soul floating off to another metaphysical realm beyond this world. Those are all moments of 'picture-thinking' as Hegel says in 'Revealed Religion' of the

*Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977, 479). One can no longer be in the world as a possibility within the world. We are racing head to Division Two, particularly chapters III to VI.

The whole treatise starts out with Dasein's 'basic state' as 'being-in-the-world.' (Heidegger 1962, 78) Do not think of that as an existent being in some physically bounded space based on some kind of Cartesian coordinates; and do not think of that as a subject whose transcendental apperception makes possible any experience of a world either. Instead, Heidegger says that these 'structures' are 'equiprimordial' with Dasein's 'basic state' as 'being-in-the-world.' (1962, 149) All of them gather up into the question of the 'who.' The 'structures' are: "Being-with and Dasein-with [Mitsein und Mitdasein]. In this kind of Being is grounded the mode of everyday Being-one's-Self [Selbstsein]; the explication of this mode will enable us to see what we may call the 'subject' of everydayness-the 'they.'"(Heidegger 1962, 149-150)

The intriguing nature of this non-virtual complex, if you will, is this composition of the 'question of the who': one as involving an 'equiprimodality' of structures that may be discussed one after another, but their togetherness as 'whole' does not mean one is prior. To reiterate, there is no prior state either in terms of temporality in a linear sequence or as a transcendental category that makes something possible. It is as if they are not isolated moments hanging together somehow, but all 'are' the whole of Dasein, at least in its 'everydayness.' (Heidegger 1962, 149) And keep in mind that Heidegger's revolution is to rewrite mystery back into the immanent and separate the ontological question of what it means to exist - factually - from the ontic description of just existing and doing things daily, i.e., the normal fact of everyday life. If we examine all these 'structures' carefully but re-transcribe them into the gaps and margins of Lacan's 'mirror image' text, then some uncanny results follow.

We are not going to arrive at any empirical 'I' as opposed to a 'they' as common humanity. But Heidegger does say at the outset that if we have any 'subject' with which to deal, it is 'the they,' which means the 'they' (however inauthentic and burdensome it might be) is built into a greater totality called Dasein; it does not lie outside Dasein. The 'they' is not Plato's Parmenidean problem of the One and the Many. This is not about mathematics either. In a way, the human infant, the animal/monkey, and adult human tripartite distinctions are also equiprimordial regarding an 'ontological structure of the human world' that Lacan describes as 'paranoiac knowledge.' (2006, 76) But with Heidegger, we do not want to begin or end with the human being, and therefore we are not doing any psychoanalysis at all. A psychoanalysis that does not deal with an infant stage is no psychoanalysis.

Back to Heidegger, let us continue reading his chapter. A quick summary could suggest that 'Being-with' (Heidegger 1962, 156) is merely the entire architectonic of the treatise whereby the question of the meaning of Being is built into Dasein's constitution (Heidegger 1962, 27), temporality becomes the horizon

to understand Being (Heidegger 1962, 19), Dasein is 'radically individuated' as the 'relation of transcendence' (Heidegger 1962, 62) and is constituted by the 'primordial finitude of temporality,' (Heidegger 1962, 438) which underpins Sorge/Care/Dread/Concern (Heidegger 1962, 237) as the basic core of Dasein's whole. Ultimately, Sorge constitutes the famous tripartite structure of "ahead-of-itself-already-in-(the-world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world)' that constitutes the 'ontological structural whole" (Heidegger 1962, 237) of Dasein. 'Dasein-with' (Heidegger 1962, 155) is not simply being in the world with and as others as empirical beings; whereby, I can just be alone in the absence of others or merge into the crowd. Rather, the 'Dasein-with' is other Daseins, like Dasein, who are also in the world but not simply present-at-hand or ready-to-hand like other ontic entities (Heidegger 1962, 154). Do not think of an athlete on a team who is the first to show up to the locker room before their teammates arrive and therefore is simply alone. A real teammate is always with their team, whether alone or playing in the game. Even remember that Being-with and Dasein-with are 'structures 'equiprimordial' to the 'who' question of Dasein (Heidegger 1962, 149). Dasein is always-with one can say regardless of whether an individual self exists in contradistinction to other members of the human species. 'Being-one's-Self' is not the isolated subject or self in solitary confinement. It belongs with the 'Being-with' because the inauthentic 'they-self' of the individual Dasein is not something negative but a 'positive constitution' of Dasein as a 'primordial phenomenon.' (Heidegger 1962, 167) All four – 'Being-with, Dasein-with, Being-one's-Self, the They' (Heidegger 1962, 149-150) – hang together in an equiprimordial manner and through a complex set of interrelated movements that comprise one large Event. The phenomenological reduction suspends all and any immediate intuitions that can shape sensorial consciousness based on the experience of being an individual in relation to others. How this is so becomes an open question.

However, this analysis is not without problems. It appears to be too quick of a summary, and so we must bracket what we have just said in light of the previous distillation of Lacan's text on the epochal threshold of the 'mirror image' – not simply as an early stage of human development but the ontological foundation of how we get at the truth of the very formation of any 'I.' Now we have the arduous task of bringing Heidegger and Lacan together on the question of time and movement as we take on the enormous question of the 'who.' We, like Heidegger, are not asking 'who' such and such a person is, like a celebrity we cannot recognize, or the old existential and metaphysical question of 'who' is the human being, i.e., a creature from the Creator God. The 'who' remains invisible and becomes the answer to another question which remains unarticulated. Our hypothesis is that the fundamental ground that eludes Lacan and Heidegger alike is a daimon-like fourfold of moving polarities between origin, end, non-origin, non-end and what are also others to all four. But the others share relations of difference with the four and do not therefore comprise an eight-fold. We know this

is hideously complex but let us make this the horizon for our inquiry as we try to develop, now, the birth-problem that mystifies Lacan and escapes Heidegger's grasp in *Being and Time*. The timing as being, the time of being and the being of time, the temporalization-event, not of being-within-time, but temporality as the passage from the question of the meaning of Being to the answer that should turn out to be time itself – the great horizon – which concludes *Being and Time*. All of this is what compels us to go forward. But to answer this question means developing some sense of possibilities of how to articulate the immature, if you will, notion of 'being-towards-birth' (Heidegger 1962, 425) in *Being and Time*.

### **Being-towards-birth and the Mirror Stage**

If we say birth is what we must 'arrive at,' but not like a change of location in terms of a moving object, something moving in space, the movement of space itself, then birth has yet to happen. But the 'yet' is not a future now like tomorrow on the calendar; this is not even the possibility of tomorrow repeating itself as a possibility, almost infinitely, and therefore never arriving. We feel a movement that seems to reverse time, pulling us back, sometimes through trauma and repression, the 'origin' that was there as infants. But this does not exist, and movement can, paradoxically, originate from a non-origin. Therefore, movement is not spatialized as linear, circular, or rectilinear, or even non-Euclidean. The realization of the human infant and animal 'instrumental intelligence' (with no self-consciousness) distinction is also the elevation of that distinction into another sphere. The eerie question is whether a whole lifetime is spent trying to fashion birth out of the Lacanian 'virtual complex' and its doubling in the mirror; this is so despite the assuredness that adults give themselves as having matured past infancy and nearly two decades of childhood and adolescence. Just because as mature children and adults, most of us can walk and talk does not mean we can prove we were born; this also attests to the dignity of peoples with disabilities who transcend normal ontic registers of what it means to 'walk and talk.' In short, questioning time and death as illusions is one thing; questioning that birth even happened seems even more improbable.

One experiment we can try is to reread section 65 of Chapter III of Division Two of *Being and Time* on 'primordial, ecstatic temporalizing of temporality' (Heidegger 1962, 380) and the statement – the 'meaning of Dasein is temporality' (Heidegger 1962, 380). But we can do it backwards. This does not mean taking every one of Heidegger's formulations and saying them in terms of their opposite. There are no hidden dialectical relations to uncover. We can say we must read them differently, against the grain of their tendencies, inversions of possibilities that were never articulated, but in tracing them we are already inverting and distorting the original intuitions that appear to us when we first read section 65.

In some senses, that does mean, literally, reading the section from the end to the beginning. The end leaves us in suspense without further developing the 'equiprimordiality' of the ecstasies of temporality in which "each temporalizes

itself in relation to the others" (Heidegger 1962, 378) in their own ways. We are certainly not talking about a fixed, unchanging line in which present now points slip into past no longer now points while future now points arrive to replace the 'current' present now point; and this movement has its own viscosity in which past relates to present and future in its own way, present in relation to past and future, and future in relation to past and present. It is not about two empty spots called the no longer now past and the yet to be now future as empty holes, in which the present, like a well, fills up and overflows in two directions to occupy them. This is not about counting the number of possibilities of interrelations of temporal relations (with three nexuses) but not because we are seeking one, unified ground of everything; that is the elusive substance highly sought after in the history of Western metaphysics.

Rather, we are concerned with focusing on developing 'being-towards-birth' (Heidegger 1962, 425) as a type of motion out of the interplay of the three ecstasies so profoundly described in section 65. The 'ekstatikon' that Heidegger introduces from the ancient Greek as the "primordial 'outside-of-itself' in and for itself" (1962, 377) is not a dialectics of an 'in and for itself' like we find in the tradition of German Idealism. Heidegger introduces the problem of exteriority beyond the binary distinction of inner and outer. Standing out from 'itself' is not leaving behind a core entity in space and time that one can look at from above; but the exteriority of the unseeable presence behind the face looking in the mirror, englobing the seer, the mirror, and the seen tempts us to describe its nature. This is not the Heraclitian nature that loves to hide. But we also do not want to move in the territory of Merleau-Ponty, particularly in appropriating his magnificent ideas of the 'Flesh' in *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968).<sup>1</sup> Then again, we cannot jump

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<sup>1</sup> Merleau-Ponty states: "The visible about us seems to rest in itself. It is as though our vision were formed in the heart of the visible, or as though there were between it and us an intimacy as close as between the sea and the strand. And yet it is not possible that we blend into it, nor that it passes into us, for then the vision would vanish at the moment of formation, by disappearance of the seer or of the visible. What there is then are not things first identical with themselves, which would then offer themselves to the seer, nor is there a seer who is first empty and who, afterward, would open himself to them – but something to which we could not be closer than by palpating it with our look, things we could not dream of seeing 'all naked' because the gaze itself envelops them, clothes them with its own flesh. Whence does it happen that in so doing it leaves them in their place, that the vision we acquire of them seems to us to come from them, and that to be seen is for them but a degradation of their eminent being? What is this talisman of color, this singular virtue of the visible that makes it, held at the end of the gaze, nonetheless much more than a correlative of my vision, such that it imposes my vision upon me as a continuation of its own sovereign existence? How does it happen that my look, enveloping them, does not hide them, and, finally, that, veiling them, it unveils them?" (1968, 131)

And then the editor's footnote to that passage: "Here in the course of the text itself, these lines are inserted": "it is that the look is itself incorporation of the seer into the visible, quest for itself, which is of it, within the visible – it is that the visible of the world is not an envelope of quale, but what is between the qualia, a connective tissue of exterior and interior horizons – it is as flesh offered to flesh that the visible has its aseity, and that it is mine – The flesh as Sichtigkeit



to the ethics of Levinas and his key term 'exteriority' in the face of the Other.<sup>2</sup> Whether it's the body for Merleau-Ponty or the ethical relation to another for Levinas, both presuppose the human being, although as ontological given the influence of Heidegger and phenomenologically explicated given the influence of Husserl. To give these iconoclastic thinkers their due, the human is not empirical or the Cogito or transcendental subject either. The immanence that is the within-ness of being in a world is not of the empirical sense or transcendental imagination; it is so real that it eludes any real representation as truth or fact.

Ironically, if there is any nucleus to Heidegger's 'ekstatikon,' it lies on the 'outside-of-itself' component which constitutes time as transcendence. Hurling towards both 'ends' always, Dasein as being-towards-death and being-towards-

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and generality. – 'whence vision is question and response...The openness through flesh: the two leaves of my body and the leaves of the visible world... It is between these intercalated leaves that there is visibility... My body model of the things and the things model of my body: the body bound to the world through all its parts, up against it –' all this means: the world, the flesh not as fact or sum of facts, but as the locus of an inscription of truth: the false crossed out, not nullified." (1968, 131)

<sup>2</sup> Levinas states in his magisterial *Otherwise than Being and Beyond Essence* (originally published in French in 1974 and the chapter in that volume originally published in 1968): "My responsibility for the other is the for of the relationship, the very signifyingness of signification, which signifies in saying before showing itself in the said. The one-for-the-other is the very signifyingness of signification! It is not that the 'beyond' would be 'further' than everything that appears, or 'present in absence,' or 'shown by a symbol'; that would still be to be subject to a principle, to be given in consciousness. Here what is essential is a refusal to allow oneself to be tamed or domesticated by a theme. The movement going 'beyond' loses its own signifyingness and becomes an immanence as soon as logos interpellates, invests, presents and exposes it, whereas its adjacency in proximity is an absolute exteriority. Incommensurable with the present, unassimilable in it, it is always 'already in the past' behind which the present delays, over and beyond the 'now' which this exteriority disturbs or obsesses. This way of passing, disturbing the present without allowing itself to be invested by the arche of consciousness, striating with its furrows the clarity of the ostensible, is what we have called a trace. 1 Proximity is thus anarchically a relationship with a singularity without the mediation of any principle, any ideality. What concretely corresponds to this description is my relationship with my neighbour, a signifyingness which is different from the much-discussed 'meaning-endowment,' since signification is this very relationship with the other, the-one-for-the-other. This incommensurability with consciousness, which becomes a trace of the who knows where, is not the inoffensive relationship of knowing in which everything is equalized, nor the indifference of spatial contiguity; it is an assignation of me by another, a responsibility with regard to men we do not even know. The relationship of proximity cannot be reduced to any modality of distance or geometrical contiguity, nor to the simple 'representation' of a neighbour; it is already an assignation, an extremely urgent assignation – an obligation, anachronously prior to any commitment. This anteriority is 'older' than the a priori. This formula expresses a way of being affected which can in no way be invested by spontaneity: the subject is affected without the source of the affection becoming a theme of representation. We have called this relationship irreducible to consciousness obsession. The relationship with exteriority is 'prior' to the act that would effect it. For this relationship is not an act, not a thematizing, not a position in the Fichtean sense." (1989, 90)

birth evokes a much larger phenomenological complexity of movement than what is offered in *Being and Time*. But this one going in two directions does not have a center like an octopus stretching its tentacles in different directions. Nothing is present-at-hand, including the event of movement. Such a movement is not circular, linear, or rectilinear, and there is nothing conceptualizable from ancient Greek metaphysics (Xeno, Plato, Aristotle, others) that can help us here.

Returning to the problem of birth, we have several intuitions that need to be deconstructed. If one were to say that your birth will only occur in the future, one does not mean posthumous fame in the present about the future world where you will no longer exist. Birthing out of the future is also not being-towards-death as the 'possibility of impossibility' and the possibility of no longer being-in-the-world (Heidegger 1962, 294). Since in *Being and Time*, death is not cessation of something or perishing of a living thing, and certainly not religiously derived or medically certified, then birth is not the beginning of a life form or anything else for that matter (an epoch in history, an artwork, a social movement, etc.). Perhaps, we have to see that in fact birth is attached to death, both as possibilities, and neither something we experience while we are in the world since they remain possibilities; and this does not simply mean one cannot travel back to a time before they were in the womb or live to tell what the death event is like by coming back and attesting to it with friends and relatives. We do not speak of past lives or future ghosts. The relation is an uncanny one because of the question of movement, not lived human experience.

We can try a thought experiment here, which we do not find in Lacan, Levinas, and Merleau-Ponty, when we consider the question of the face, the body, and the Other. And this is certainly not something that Heidegger, the fundamental ontologist, would consider. Instead of one human baby and a mirror from which the 'play of movements' (Lacan 2006, 75) occurs in the child that generates an image, imagine two mirrors facing each other. And furthermore, let us grant there are two sets of mirrors. The human face looks outwards to perceive an external world beyond one's body; but the skull beneath the face is what the face cannot see. It is like the back frame within which a mirror sits. But in this case the mirror itself is likened to a face that sees rather than an image that is seen within it. The point is that a mirror cannot see itself. Whatever images that are generated within the mirror are just as real as the external objects that are supposed to be reflected in the images that appear in the mirror. Furthermore, the mirror itself, as a physical object, is only an image itself, and hence an image that generates images, etc. Obviously, this scheme defies any simple binary distinctions.

Now imagine that the two mirrors face each other, while each of their backsides point in opposite directions. Whether there is a gap between the two mirrors or no gap and they are adjacent to one another, there is no way to tell from which mirror an image originates because the event of movement (in which neither mirror is the origin) is the frenzied interplay in deepening the invisibility of space, which reflects the true presence within each mirror. One can say the

double movements bring the mirrors alive with nothing reflected in either one. Distinctions between past, present, and future become indiscernible, but they still exist. Let us take the other set of mirrors too. They have their backsides attached to each other, and each mirror faces in the opposite direction, each, presumably, reflecting what is outside of it, i.e., the real external world. The baby who sees in one mirror has its image appear in the other (like a quantum wormhole) and vice-versa, or it appears as if there are two babies each looking into their own mirror. But this 'duplicity,' (2006, 75) as Lacan says, is already built into 'one' baby. The point is that there is much to speculate, metaphysically, when it comes to crossing out traditional notions of origin and end, and therefore anything like the event of birth (and death). This exposes a deeper 'ground' (that is beyond the distinction of presence and absence) from which all notions of origin, end, consciousness, self-consciousness, presence, even the baby and the primordial mirror image it sees of itself.

Coming back to Heidegger's ecstatic temporality, we can keep in the background these examples of two sets of mirrors. The linkage between the 'equiprimordially of the ecstasies of temporality' (Heidegger 1962, 378) in section 65 and the problem of movement and Dasein's 'two ends,' (Heidegger 1962, 425) or 'being-towards-birth and being-towards-death,' in sections 72-75 remains unarticulated. The main passages where the 'ecstasies' (Heidegger 1962, 377) are most developed are on pages 372-374 of the Macquarrie and Robinson English translation (Heidegger 1962). Unfortunately, we may have to quote all those paragraphs in full (including the footnote numbers without the translators' footnote texts) and then try to read them backwards. This will require the invention of new terms. Heidegger states:

That which was projected in the primordial existential projection of existence has revealed itself as anticipatory resoluteness. What makes this authentic Being-a-whole of Dasein possible regarding the unity of its articulated structural whole? 2 Anticipatory resoluteness, when taken formally and existentially, without our constantly designating its full structural content, is Being towards one's ownmost, distinctive potentiality-for-Being. This sort of thing is possible only in that Dasein can, indeed, come towards itself in its ownmost possibility, and that it can put up with this possibility as a possibility in thus **letting itself come towards itself** in other words, that it exists. This letting-itself-come-towards-itself in that distinctive possibility which it puts up with, is the primordial phenomenon of the future as coming towards. 3 If either authentic or inauthentic Being-towards-death belongs to Dasein's Being, then such Being-towards-death is possible only as something futural [als zukünftiges], in the sense which we have now indicated, and which we have still to define more closely. By the term 'futural,' we do not here have in view a 'now' which has not yet become 'actual' and which sometime will be for the first time. We have in view **the coming [Kunft]** in which Dasein, in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being, comes towards itself. Anticipation makes Dasein authentically futural, and in such a way that the anticipation itself is possible only in so far as Dasein, as being, is always coming towards itself-that is to say, in so far as it is futural in its Being in general.

Anticipatory resoluteness understands Dasein in its own essential Being-guilty. This understanding means that in existing one takes over Being-guilty; it means being the thrown basis of nullity. But taking over thrownness signifies being Dasein authentically as it already was. 1 Taking over thrownness, however, is possible only in such a way that the futural Dasein can be its ownmost 'as-it-already-was' – that is to say, its 'been' [sein 'Gewesen']. Only in so far as Dasein is as an **'I-am-as-having-been,'** can Dasein come towards itself futurally in such a way that it comes back. 2 As authentically futural, Dasein is authentically as 'having been.' 3 Anticipation of one's uttermost and ownmost possibility is coming back understandingly to one's ownmost 'been.' Only so far as it is futural can Dasein be authentically as having been. The character of **'having been' arises, in a certain way, from the future.** 4

Anticipatory resoluteness discloses the current Situation of the 'there' in such a way that existence, in taking action, is circumspectively concerned with what is factually ready-to-hand environmentally. Resolute Being-alongside what is ready-to-hand in the Situation-that is to say, taking action in such a way as to let one encounter what has presence environmentally-is possible only by making such an entity present. Only as the **Present [Gegenwart] in the sense of making present, can resoluteness be what it is:** namely, letting itself be encountered undisguisedly by that which it seizes upon in taking action.

**Coming back to itself futurally, resoluteness brings itself into the Situation by making present. The character of 'having been' arises from the future, and in such a way that the future which 'has been' (or better, which 'is in the process of having been') releases from itself the Present.<sup>2</sup> This phenomenon has the unity of a future which makes present in the process of having been; we designate it as 'temporality.'** <sup>3</sup> Only in so far as Dasein has the definite character of temporality, is the authentic potentiality-for-Being-a-whole of anticipatory resoluteness, as we have described it, made possible for Dasein itself. Temporality reveals itself as the meaning of authentic care (Heidegger 1962, 372-374).

Let us make one thing clear. You may want to start with yourself as a living subject in the present doing something right now at this point on the clock or the calendar. And then as time passes in a linear, one-directional flow, you start doing other things without being able to return to your previous moment because you cannot reverse time. You could repeat the same event, perhaps eternally, but that does not stop the linear flow of one-directional time. Things start to happen to you as you age, like your skin withering; but time does not go in reverse, or your skin getting younger until it looks and feels like it was when you were a baby. This then generates a complex viscosity of moving into the future and the past at the same time; you go into the future, but your acts and decisions are always receding into the past. But we must abandon all of this completely. We are not starting with a biological-physical-empirical human being on the one hand. On the other hand, as tempting as it is, we are not going to unravel the complex aporias and knots of the Christological substance (dual natures – divine and human – as one being) of Jesus living out his days and flowing through time before his climatic death and resurrection. For Jesus, the possibility of conquering death is already inscribed in

the life unfolding as a being-towards-death culminating in an actual death of a human being; but the story does not end there as the Christian world knows.

Instead, we will develop a sense that as much as we want to read ecstatic temporality in section 65 in relation to the problem of Sorge/Care and being-towards-death, we need another term other than Sorge/Care as we think about being-towards-birth; but these two 'ends of Dasein' (Heidegger 1962, 425) are neither successive nor simultaneous. To think them together in terms of the 'enigma of Being..that of motion' (Heidegger 1962, 444) requires a stitching of 'equiprimordiality' (Heidegger 1962, 378) of the interrelations of the three 'ecstases' (Heidegger 1962, 377) into each individual ecstasy described in section 65 in the above quoted passage. Then we start to get a fuller picture of the enormous complexity of the totalizing 'process' (Heidegger 1962, 377) of the 'temporalizing of temporality' in general; or that primordial event that temporalizes and derives the 'endless,' commonplace, inauthentic, spatialized linear flow of now points, whereby past is no longer now, present is now, and future the yet to be now (Heidegger 1962, 379).

Somehow the 'equiprimordiality' (Heidegger 1962, 378) of all three ecstasies in each ecstasy but each in their own unique way of movement suggests a type of mirroring-play that is irreducible to the Lacanian tripartite structure of animal, human baby, and adult or the later Heidegger on the 'mirror play' and the 'fourfold.' (2001) We do not want to go to the later Heidegger just yet, hence we must delay and differ that encounter.

Here are the terms we have to work with from Heidegger:

**'letting itself come towards itself'** (1962, 372)

**'the coming [Kunft]'** (1962, 373)

**'I-am-as-having-been'** (1962, 373)

**'Present [Gegenwart] in the sense of making present, can resoluteness be what it is'** (1962, 374)

**"Coming back to itself futurally, resoluteness brings itself into the Situation by making present. The character of 'having been' arises from the future, and in such a way that the future which 'has been' (or better, which 'is in the process of having been') releases from itself the Present. 2 This phenomenon has the unity of a future which makes present in the process of having been; we designate it as 'temporality.'"** (Heidegger 1962, 374)

Again, resist all temptations to turn, immediately, to the *New Testament* when the living Jesus before his death and resurrection keeps temporalizing Himself in several bizarre registers (for example 'no longer being in the world or coming to the Father' in John Chapter 17) precisely as he – the historical person – is occurring and flowing in endless, one-directional linear time. Those resemblances are quite eerie as they are. Rather, we want to resubmerge back into

the possibility of doing fundamental ontology again, where *Being and Time* leaves off. Here are our registers:

**Origin**

**End**

**Other than Origin**

**Other than End**

**Non-Origin**

**Non-End**

**Other than Non-Origin**

**Other than Non-End**

The goal is to flesh out the 'equiprimordiality of the ecstasies' (Heidegger 162, 378) while considering the complex movement of 'being-towards-birth' and 'being-towards-death' as Dasein heads to both of its 'ends.' (Heidegger 1962, 425) There is no room for faith here in the human-God who lived two thousand years ago, conquered death, and ascended to some heavenly realm as we on earth await His expected return or Second Coming.

We listed eight phrases using our terms, and the idea is to blow up Heidegger's phrases from section 65 so that a fuller notion of the 'equiprimordiality' comes to light with regard to the problem of motion. And the problem of motion (Heidegger 1962, 444) remains incomplete if 'being-towards-birth' is not considered (Heidegger 1962, 425). We remain focused on a four-dimensionality, ultimately, and not the counting of eight items. The goal is not some super-synthesis that will yield a monotheistic Oneness, which would then re-instantiate the Western metaphysical onto-theological logos.

For Heidegger alone (not our project), starting with the 'letting itself come towards itself' (1962, 372) and the 'coming [Kunft],' (1962, 373) we are not talking about a starting point releasing itself and arriving at itself to another endpoint; for example, a child growing over the course of a few months in a measurable time span. We must bracket the 'I-am-my-having-bee-ness arises from the future' (Heidegger 1962, 373) *while* the "future as having been or in the process of having been releases the present." (Heidegger 1962, 374) The simultaneity of the while is problematic because one is bound to take these relations and say they are happening at the same time in a nucleus that hatches a present. That would then be the ground of linear time based on the a priori presence of a notion of either linear, rectilinear, or circular time. Even though this is distinct from spatialized, endless, linear time of flowing now-points (present now becoming past now and future yet to be now taking the place of present now), Heidegger's 'primordial, finite, authentic, ecstatic temporalizing of temporality' (1962, 380) does not necessarily divide the 'having been arising from the future' with 'the future as is in the process of having been.' (Heidegger 1962, 373) And 'making present' (Heidegger 1962, 374) is not simply a self-showing process like a phenomenon in which presence is fashioned regardless of what thing or event

is being made present, including those double interrelations of 'having been' and 'future.' They all fall under the umbrella of 'resoluteness.' (Heidegger 1962, 374)

The resolve to be the authenticated whole 'stretching-along and self-stretching' of life (Heidegger 1962, 426) one is given is because of the mindful transcendence over death (which is neither accepted nor feared in linear time by human psychology). This magnanimous whole points to the very 'finitude of temporality.' (Heidegger 1962, 379) Instead of focusing on the future as 'primary' (Heidegger 1962, 378) and being-toward-death as the 'radical individuation as relation of transcendence' (Heidegger 1962, 62) because death as possibility (never an event in time) is 'certain and indefinite,' (Heidegger 1962, 310) we must pivot our attention. Furthermore, the possibility of death as the 'ownmost and uttermost non-relational impending distinctiveness' (Heidegger 1962, 294) is held out in suspense as we theorize, anew, 'being-towards-birth.' But how would that look distinct from what Heidegger says in sections 65 (on temporality) and 72 (on motion), let alone all of the first two divisions of *Being and Time*?

First, we can say that the future *futurizes* out of the having-been, not just 'in the process of having-been.' (Heidegger 1962, 374) What this means is that our normal intuition of what is origin as past (unless something is originating right now) is crossed out by what is other to the origin. This other is the future hatching out of the having-been since the having-been is not present past to memory or chronologically datable like the birth certificate. One could say, superficially but at some risk, that the future gives birth to a past that does not exist. What Dasein is 'coming up to' (Heidegger 1962, 373) and against, as in being held to account, is the meaning of birth as possibility, not death. We are moving towards our true birth. Being-towards-birth is not an encirclement of the so-called ontic-physical birth from the womb that took place in the past. It is not the Preexistent Logos from the Prologue to the Gospel of John or the virginal birth of Jesus either. Linking the future with birth, whereby the future futurizes out of having-been, in contrast to the past 'historizing' out of the future through 'fate and repetition' (Heidegger 1962, 535, 437) requires new categories other than those offered in *Being and Time*, and even the overriding question of death that pervades the entire Western logos and its metaphysical religions. This brings in the dimension of what is other to an end that is also not a repetition, reincarnation, or resurrection.

We are getting closer to the possibility of articulating 'being-towards-birth' ontologically if we distinguish it from A.) all ontic registers of physical, biological, historical, social, cultural, legal, political, economic, religious, theological and scientific views of birth and B.) Heidegger's already established ontological difference between death as possibility to be from both 'perishing,' (1962, 291) as in physical withering away (which is what most people think death is), and the qualified allocation of 'demise as dying,' or a 'way' to be and a movement 'towards' death as 'living out one's life.' (Heidegger 1962, 291) This is not the existential malaise of a dying soldier in battle. Rather, it is a transcending-finite

temporalization based on a 'radical individuation' (Heidegger 1962, 62) as the locus and inscription of 'phenomenological truth.' (Heidegger 1962, 62)

We, however, think of something other to that Heideggerean characterization, but maybe not opposite or contrary. Being-towards-birth is the possibility of erasing the origin (and therefore all linear or circular teleologies towards end) by becoming-the-death inscribed in the origin. But now we have to define what those terms mean if we do not want to repeat Heidegger's compelling definitions against what has been postulated in the history of Western metaphysics and religions. *Becoming-death-in-the-place-of* the origin seems like the reverse temporalization of Eastern reincarnation, or being born in a body, the body dying, and being reborn in a new body with the same transmigrating soul. We must 'destroy' (Heidegger 1962, 41) the history of ontology of all conceptions of birth and rebirth in the West and East, in both traditions' metaphysics, religions, and theologies. The hypothesis is that the horizon of four-dimensional time-interrelations-movement-event will allow us to accomplish this task. What is less clear is how this allows us to go 'beyond' *Being and Time* by reoccupying it to complete its incomplete missing Division Three. Because extending or completing *Being and Time's* project is not our intention. It looks like a 'authentically resolute repeating of a possibility that is handed down' (Heidegger 1962, 437) to invoke Heidegger's language. But again, that is not our aim. The uncanny resemblance between extending and completing on the one hand and surpassing, taking-the-place, and re-placing on the other hand reveals the uncertainty inherent when having two mirrors face themselves or turn away from themselves.

This, of course, is all preliminary talk. The substance is still out-standing. The road ahead is long and winding. To develop the four-dimensional time-interrelations-movement-event of being-towards-birth with being-towards-death (already articulated in *Being and Time*) in light of the underdeveloped 'equiprimordiality' of section 65 on 'ecstatic temporality' (Heidegger 1962, 378) requires terms other than 'fate, repetition, historicity' from sections 74 and 75 (Heidegger 1962, 437). Long as we keep in mind that birth is not origination, beginning, genesis, or genius. It has its other too, which is not death or reincarnation. Movement can in fact 'occur,' even when notions of origin and end split themselves into alterities, and, also, their non-dialectical opposites of non-origin and non-end and their alterities. We must become comfortable with this ultimate prospect: how all philosophical and religious traditions – West and East – have characterized time utilizing, predominantly, three aspects (past, present, future) is not an indisputable limit to the human imagination. Rather, those traditions must yield to a greater, heretofore, undisclosed complexity of intertwining dimensions.

## Conclusion

The perplexity of Lacan's famous 'mirror stage' concept served as a catalyst for reflections on birth in general. But this is not the intent of Lacan's iconic essay,



which uses the infant stage to question the history of philosophy based on the subject and the Cogito (2006, 75). However, all this preambly reawakened a long, abiding concern with what has been missing in *Being and Time* and its legacy for twentieth-century continental philosophy, the philosophy of religion in all traditions, and any allied treatments in predominantly Western Christian systematic theologies, which have been influenced by Heidegger. Considering the problem of time and movement in attempting to destroy both Western and Eastern metaphysics and religions requires a creative leap, a non-original event of origination but also what is other to the non-original without relapsing back into any simplistic concepts of an origin. What has not been revealed is the underlying drive or even 'resolve,' which is not based on an intending human subject, one that seeks to understand itself as an individual living out a life. For this we must bear fault. But this is not about conscience or guilt. It is also not about the entity – Dasein – in *Being and Time*.

Rather, as always, everything in *Being and Time* tends towards its own end, that is the end of Division Two. And we know what happens there, namely the encounter with Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. We hold to the conviction, as undeniably true, that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in *Being and Time* is, of course, not the original *Phenomenology of Spirit* in Hegel's words that the tradition has tried to understand for over two centuries. Then again, the attempt by *Being and Time* to lump the *Phenomenology of Spirit* with the rest of the metaphysical traditions that have treated time in the West, namely Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine (Heidegger 1962, 475, 479-480), is cursory, if not inaccurate. But that is something that must be demonstrated, not asserted. What is buried as a lost possibility in 'absolute knowing' (Hegel 1977, 479) of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is the challenge to reconceptualize what the Being of Time is when one is not a slave to the nexuses of past, present, or future and how they have been associated with all notions of origin as birth and end as death. And this is not just equating past with birth and future with death, or future with birth and past with death, but each time axis in relation to the other two, namely three triangles, let alone their interrelations. It means canceling the Christian resurrection too (the pictorial notion of a renewed body that had been physically dead) and the concept of the parousia or Second Coming while elevating it to a whole other 'Notion.' (Hegel 1977, 493-494) What can be Other to both the Resurrection and the Parousia? How is the Being of Time other than the great work, *Being and Time*? That is the interrelated question we will attempt to answer in our next undertaking.

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# Aesthetics and Politics: the Main Models of Relations in the Modern Political World

Dmytro Shevchuk, Kateryna Shevchuk

**Abstract:** The paper examines the relationship between aesthetics and politics. In modern humanities, we can find few conceptions of this relationship. These conceptions are not only part of political philosophy or political theory, but also a methodological instrument for analyzing modern politics and aesthetics. They provide an opportunity to understand both the features of contemporary politics and the state of modern aesthetic theory in light of the significant changes that have affected both of these spheres. This article analyzes the main models of the relation between aesthetics and politics. We intend to explore the conception of an aesthetic representation by Frank Ankersmit, the conception of aesthetics as politics by Jacques Rancière, and the conception of the emancipation of society by Gianni Vattimo.

**Keywords:** aesthetics, aesthetical representation, distribution of sensuality, emancipation, politics, political world.

## Introduction

The famous fresco *The Allegory of Good and Bad Government*, by Ambrogio Lorenzetti, from Siena's Palazzo Pubblico, shows two governments: on the one side, the republic, where people are feeling free and the community is developing; on the other side, tyranny, where people live in fear. This work of art aims to show the possible results of politics. Additionally, it warns people. Therefore, works of art play not only an aesthetic role, but also a particular political role. We could label a lot of works of art similarly. Among them, the most famous are *Liberty Leading the People* by Eugène Delacroix, *Guernica* by Pablo Picasso, and *Premonition of Civil War* by Salvador Dali, just to list a few. The political and cultural history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century presents such phenomena as Situationist International (founded by Guy Debord), which closely intertwined politics and art. This shows that the connection between art, aesthetics, and politics is extremely tight. Also, we can find that politics does not use only pure rationality, but it refers to some artistic instruments and phenomena, such as performance and carnivalization (Shevchuk and Karpovets 2020).

Several philosophers have already studied the problem of the political aspect of aesthetics. There are classic works such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theater*, Friedrich Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, and Theodor W. Adorno's *Aesthetics and Politics*, Terry Eagleton's *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. From different positions and

various aspects, the role of art in politics and the influence of aesthetic experience on the perception of political events has been explored.

We can distinguish several conceptions of relations between politics and aesthetics in contemporary humanities. These conceptions are not only part of political philosophy or political theory, but also a methodological instrument for analyzing modern politics and aesthetics. They provide an opportunity to understand both the features of contemporary politics and the state of modern aesthetic theory in light of the significant changes that have affected both of these spheres.

This article analyzes the main models of the relation between aesthetics and politics. We intend to explore the conception of an aesthetic representation by Frank Ankersmit, the conception of aesthetics as politics by Jacques Rancière, and the conception of the emancipation of society by Gianni Vattimo.

### **Aesthetical Politics and Political Representation**

The first model of interaction between politics and aesthetics is the correlation of political and aesthetic representation. The result of such a correlation is the idea of an aesthetic state. The premise of this idea is Schiller's philosophy, which distinguishes between three types of state – a dynamic state, an ethical state, and an aesthetic state. Only the last of these three motivates us to abide by the moral law; thus, it best fits with integrity and commonwealth. Schiller writes: "The dynamic state can only make society simply possible by subduing nature through nature; the moral (ethical) state can only make it morally necessary by submitting the individual's will to the general will. The aesthetic state alone can make it real because it carries out the will of all through the nature of the individual." (Schiller, Letter XXVII, 43) Thus, the idea of an aesthetic state is guided by the ideal of classical political philosophy, which implies an inextricable link between human nature and the political community. And the community must then make possible the realization of a free person through politics.

At the same time, the conception of an aesthetic state aims to replace ethics with aesthetics as a source for political philosophy. Therefore, in this case, we encounter a revision of political philosophy, a rethinking of its principles and ways of understanding political reality.

The conception of aesthetic politics is presented most clearly in the works of Franklin Ankersmit. He observes that, traditionally, the problems of politics, state, and society were considered in the light of two questions: "What is?" and "What should be?". In this case, aesthetics was rarely considered a political philosophy partner.

The concept of representation is central to aesthetic politics. Within the framework of this conception, the nature of political representation as the core of any policy is studied. But we should also compare the political representation with the aesthetic representation of reality. The concept of representation has begun to play an essential role in modern political philosophy. Representation is

associated with three functions – power, cognition, and manifestation. In the political realm, representation relates to the mechanism of creating the unity of people based on their plurality. In addition, it acts as a form of collective subjectivity. In the contemporary political world, the issue of representation is particularly relevant. It is connected with the theory of democracy, when, through democratic elections, the representation of the will of the people is carried out by elected representatives. At the same time, the contemporary political world needs to revise the representation mechanism, since we can observe a crisis in implementing this mechanism in today's democracies. The reason for this crisis is that the implementation of simulacra in the political world makes doubt and uncertainty the basis for representation. Also, we could observe the formation of a post-ideological or even post-political paradigm. Therefore, the attempt to correlate political representation with aesthetic representation aims to preserve and update the idea of democratic politics.

Ankersmit uses the concept of representation in the meaning formed from the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, the problem of representation was related to the issue of when and in what circumstances the government and its decisions reflected the spirit of the people. Therefore, it can be argued that the principles of modern democracy were already forming in this period.

Analyzing the discussion about representation in contemporary political philosophy, Ankersmit distinguished two opposing positions. The first position is called the mimetic representation theory. According to this position, the representation of the people should be reflected as accurately as possible. The second position is defined as the theory of aesthetic representation. It implies a less precise reflection of the people, a mimetic representation. Ankersmit writes: "According to this theory, the difference between the representative and the person represented, the absence of identity of the representative and the person represented, is an unavoidable difference between a painted portrait and the person portrayed." (Ankersmit 1996, 28)

Mimetic representation has a close connection with modern philosophy. In particular, it presents the similarity of Cartesian rationalism and dualism in the aspect of the link between thought and action. Ankersmit argues that mimetic representation is based on the idea that political representation should always be perfect mimesis or an exact copy of the reality that appears. However, such an idea is false, because we have an unnecessary mechanism complicating political reality. According to Ankersmit, "[...] if the representation has to be the represented's indiscernible twin, we could just as well do with represented reality alone and abandon representation as a dangerous and useless detour. Put differently, the mimetic theory of (political) representation is, in fact, not a theory of representation at all, but a theory *against* representation." (Ankersmit 1996, 44)

The political representation must present what is absent. In other words, the institution that implements the representation presents the thoughts, positions, values, and actions of absent people. Thus, the reality of the will, which

is present in one element (in a liberal democracy, it is the people), is provided in another element (e.g., parliament). The presence of the missing is also provided with an aesthetic representation. Therefore, in the case of politics and aesthetics, we have a mechanism for proposing a substitution, which creates the illusion of reality being excellent. According to Ankersmit, the difference between representation and the represented element becomes the source and condition of aesthetic experience. The conception of an aesthetic state requires the rejection of a mimetic representation: "We have to reject mimetic political representation not so much because it shows certain theoretical shortcomings, but [...] simply because it is not a theory of political representation at all. We can only talk about representation when there is a difference – and *not* an identity – between the representative and the person represented." (Ankersmit 1996, 46)

Moreover, Ankersmit argues that the political reality is created through representation. Political reality does not have the identity of the representative and the represented person. Therefore, we have no reason to state the identity of the will. Ankersmit defines the political reality created by aesthetic representation as political power. The difference between the representative and the represented person is that there is an aesthetic essence that forms the preconditions for the legitimacy of political power. At the same time, the legitimacy of power acquires two aspects: on the one hand, the power formed through representation is legitimate; on the other hand, the power used inappropriately in connection with the representation can be overthrown legitimately.

For Ankersmit, representation is not an instrument for solving the practical problem of gathering all citizens together. It should not be replaced by direct democracy. In this conception of the aesthetic state, representation is a necessary and unified constitutional procedure for creating political power. The aesthetic representation provides the preconditions for solving complex social and political problems. Ankersmit is convinced that, without representation (in particular, aesthetic representation), society enters into chaos wherein people find themselves powerless to change anything.

Mimetic representation leads to a merger of power and society. For this merger, power begins to adapt to the social context fully. The danger inherent in this merger can be the birth of totalitarianism.

Ankersmit reaches two essential conclusions in the analysis of the representation problem. The first conclusion is that aesthetic representation is evident in politics. It is recognizable and understandable to people. Instead, the mimetic representation tends to become invisible and ceases to be fully controlled. As Ankersmit writes, aesthetic representation "[...] keeps alive at all levels, from the mind of the individual citizen to the collective 'mind' of the representative institutions, the desire to control and to check collective power. Mimetic representation paralyzes political control; aesthetic representation stimulates it while simultaneously creating political power. Hence only aesthetic representation enables us to avoid the Scylla and Charybdis of tyranny and

impotence.” (Ankersmit 1996, 55) The second conclusion is that the individual becomes a citizen through aesthetic representation. It is explained by the fact that an individual who lives in a political world without representation or with a mimetic representation does not need to go beyond his limits and look at the political order from a different perspective. According to Ankersmit, the mimetic representation promotes the creation of a political order in which no one needs to comprehend the meeting with the other person. The individual has a feeling of complete fusion with the team. And only the aesthetic representation allows the individual to become a political subject (‘political life’ or *bios politikos*).

### **The Politics and Changes in Aesthetics**

The second model of relations between aesthetics and politics deals with the idea of a change of art and aesthetics in modern conditions. This model assumes that art must withstand the existing practices of domination. Thus, art is political because it shows the ‘stigmata of enslavement.’

This model is mainly associated with the political philosophy of Jacques Rancière. He aims to trace and reproduce the logic of the ‘aesthetic’ relationship between art and politics. Appeal to the problem of politicizing an artistic image is a prerequisite for determining the political role of imagination. In Rancière’s writings, we can find the concept of the aesthetic in two meanings. On the one hand, the aesthetic has a relatively broad meaning; it outlines a system that emanates from a specific sensibility associated with political cases. This meaning emphasizes that politics always represents a conflict. On the other hand, the aesthetic has a narrower meaning and concerns certain artistic practices through which special modalities of thought are manifested. One of the most important concepts of the political philosophy of J. Rancière is the concept of distribution (*partage*). It denotes ordering and divisions that are not exposed by power relations.

In the case of Rancière, we have an original comprehension of aesthetics. However, it could be compared with the ideas of other philosophers, for example, Immanuel Kant. This issue has been analyzed by Katharine Wolfe. She writes:

...Rancière claims the relation aesthetics bears to politics is analogous to the relation Kant’s a priori forms bear to sense experience. Just as these a priori forms determine the organization of human experience and provide its conditions, aesthetics comes in various structural systems that serve both to condition the shared world of our daily experience and to partition that world and delimit the positions one might occupy within it. Politics is not reducible to this partitioning of the sensible on the condition of aesthetic systems, yet it is conditioned by aesthetics, just as sense experience is conditioned by the a priori, according to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, insofar as it requires the partitions of the sensible as its space of disruption. (2006)

Rancière states that art and politics are not two realities that arise as separate fields in relation to one another, and about which we have questions and

doubts if they should be combined. Politics and art are, in fact, two forms of distribution of sensuality, which are associated with a certain type of identification. According to Rancière, art is not politics if it refers to feelings or messages that it can carry. It can also not be interpreted as politics in terms of how the social structure is represented and the conflicts and identities of social groups. Art appears as politics through its distance in relation to its functions. In other words, it is connected with politics through the distribution of material and symbolic spheres of social reality.

In Rancière's works, the division between autonomous art and heteronomy (between art for the sake of art and art serving politics, between museum art and the street art) is denied. Such an opposition is rejected by the aesthetic art order, which establishes a link between forms of art identification and forms of political community. Also, it removes the question of contrasting the 'purity of art' and its politicization.

However, in trying to find the reason for the politicization of art, Rancière pays attention to the phenomenon of aesthetic metapolitics. In the order of aesthetic metapolitics, we have a kind of paradox: art becomes art in authentic meaning as much as it is non-art. This paradox means that art itself opposes the art, which realizes the politics. Rancière emphasizes that art has never been closed to itself and has a very wide field of application in a variety of spheres of life. Identification of artistic practices has always opened up such forms of thought that linked them with other forms of experience. The aesthetics is paying attention to this unifying character of art. Because of this, aesthetics will provoke hostility among those who would have liked art and philosophy, philosophy and politics to be separated from each other (Rancière 2007, 67). Rancière demonstrates that such seemingly incompatible discourses, on the aesthetic, which postulate the autonomy of self-identified art, and the political, which sees in art only one form of collective experience, are based on the same way of thinking, which can be reconstructed.

Politics and aesthetics are closely linked. If it is a matter of aesthetics to establish a relationship between what can be seen and what is said, then politics establishes a relationship between what is being done and what can be done.

Politics, as Rancière states, is connected with the way of capturing space and possession of time. In turn, He defines aesthetics as a connecting of ways of action, forms of visibility of these ways of action and ways of understanding their relationships, including some idea of the effectiveness of thought. In other words, aesthetics is a system of a priori forms that define what is revealed in the sensitivity. Also, aesthetics is a division of time, space, that which is visible and invisible, language and noise. At the same time, it defines the place and purpose of politics as a form of experience (Rancière 2007, 70).

As a result, the political realm is formulated by using political and aesthetic categories. In this case, it is not about the politicization of art, nor about the aestheticization of politics. However, the specifics of aesthetic thinking suggest



models that are suitable for comprehension of politics, because, in aesthetics, the mechanisms of division are more advanced. Politics, as Rancière argues, begins when the distribution of sensibilities is questionable, that is when it becomes the basis for struggle.

The key concept of Rancière's philosophy is the 'aesthetic regime of art.' He deduces three important aspects of the regime of art: the ethical mode of effective speech (according to Plato), the depiction mode of theatrical play (according to Aristotle), the aesthetic mode of writing (according to Kant and German romantics). Rancière notes that, in the history of Western culture, we can find a transition from a 'mimetic' (or 'poetic') to an 'expressive' (or 'aesthetic') artistic system. As the result of such a transition, the task of creativity is not the reproduction of reality by artistic means and codes, but the creation of reality manifested through the conscious/unconscious sensibility of works (Rancière 2007, 79-83). The ability of art to create reality is a precondition for the creation of a policy of aesthetics that changes the political world. The aesthetics of the last two centuries is not a discipline that has the subject of the property of artistic practices or taste as a basis for judgments. It is a continuous mode of art identification, which also implies the mode of thinking. Rancière states that there is no art in itself: it is not enough to assert that this is 'art' based on the reality that we have artists or musicians, actors or dancers, or people who love to watch them, and listen to them. Their performances have to be the object of views that distinguish their special field of activity; we need judgments that argue for their peculiarity, as well as institutions that give a 'flesh' to the art (Rancière 2002, 18).

The aesthetic regime of art is a network of new relationships between 'art' and 'life'. It has created a place for artistic inventions and a sphere for mutations of the usual everyday forms of perception and sensitivity. However, this mode is not a simple consequence of external transformations. This regime has its own rationality, which is different than the rationality that emerged from philosophical discourses. The aesthetic regime separated the artistic works of art from the rules of representation, enabling the free expression of the artist and a greater internalization of the criteria for creation. However, this freedom must combine works with the forces that put in them the feature of other things: 'the breath of society,' 'the life of speech,' 'the deposition of matter,' 'the unconscious work of thought.' (Rancière 2002, 19)

The aesthetic regime equated the power of art with the immediacy of sensual presence. Its forcefulness brings into the very life of works of art the endless and alienated work of criticism. Also, it facilitated the launching of works of art into a moving process of staging various rewritings and transformations. As Rancière states, the aesthetic regime confirmed the autonomy of art and multiplied the discovery of unknown beauty in the objects of everyday existence, which erased the distinction between forms of artistic and commercial or collective life (Rancière 2007, 79-83).

We should also consider that Rancière pays attention to a so-called 'ethical turn' in aesthetics and politics. This issue was analyzed in his book *Malaise dans l'esthétique* (published in English as *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*). Rancière tries to present equivalent models in contemporary art and modern politics.

In general, Rancière criticizes such a term as 'ethics.' In his opinion, it is a sphere of indistinguishability between the norm and fact. Thus, it fundamentally differs from the politics, that distinguishes between violence, morals, and law. The modern political community is increasingly migrating towards a community of ethics. In such a society, there is no exclusion and no place for conflict. An example of such an apolitical society is depicted by Lars von Trier in the film *Dogville* (the story of a foreign woman who tries to establish relations with the town's inhabitants by serving them, but subsequently hides when they persecute her). In an ethical society, the absolute rights of the disenfranchised (refugees, repressed, etc.) can only be provided by someone else. This is what the global law of the Other affirms.

In the aesthetic paradigm, the 'ethical turn' is traced in the fact that the 'unrepresentable' becomes a major category, which follows from the indistinction between the 'existing' and the 'proper.' Rancière writes: "the unrepresentable, which is the central category of the ethical turn in aesthetic reflection, is also a category that produces an indistinction between right and fact, occupying the same place in the aesthetic reflection that terror does on the political plane." (Rancière 2009, 123)

According to Rancière, contemporary art is transformed into an ethical domain, and the work of art is no longer subject to moral law, nor to the laws of sensitivity, but to the law of heteronomy, where the commandment coincides with the facts of reality. In such a way, there is a transformation of modernism into ethical modernism, which does not cause the emancipation of society. Rancière refuses to accept the concept of 'postmodernism' and talks about the transformation of contemporary art as a manifestation of the contradictions of modernism. Thus, the ethical turn changes the timing, which previously, in modernism, aimed at the emancipation of society, flowing towards the future revolution. Now the timing comes from an event that has already taken place. As an example of such an event, Rancière recalls the Holocaust.

We should also pay attention to the fact that Rancière criticizes the attempts by some modern philosophers to reduce works of art to some kind of intelligent machines, appealing not to the aesthetic categories, but to external discourses. Such discourses do not have anything in common with art. Therefore, they put a modern aesthetic theory in a paradoxical situation. As an example, Rancière names such works as Jean-Marie Scheffer's *Adieu à l'esthétique*, Alain Badiou's *Petit manuel d'inesthétique*, Jean-François Lyotard's *L'Inhumain*.

Unlike these theories, Rancière criticizes the notion of aesthetics as a discourse and defines it as a historically determined regime of separation of art from the fact that there is no art. The philosopher denies the need for a farewell

to aesthetics, because, as he says, the refusal of aesthetics leads to its dissolution and the dissolution of the politics associated with it in the general ethical realm.

### **Aesthetics and Emancipation of Society**

The third model of relations between politics and aesthetics, which we'd like to present, is connected with the idea of social emancipation. The emancipatory potential of aesthetics is manifested through the political as an imaginary, which closely connects with fantasy. Fantasy acquires a special political significance since it can be defined as imagination that produces images in a free way. This definition is based on the Kantian concept of fantasy, which he presents in the work *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. According to Kant, the comprehension of imagination with its special forms can be realized on the basis of the distinction between two types of imagination – productive and reproductive. Reproductive imagination acquires social and political significance by means of preserving and legitimizing the actual order of the political world. Productive imagination may be seen as providing the means for the emancipation of the individual, which is realized, for example, by aesthetics and art's social and political function. In this aspect, aesthetics and art provide the means for implementing a policy aimed at establishing authentic political dimensions. Herbert Marcuse writes about aesthetics as an instrument for the liberation of the human being: "the foundation of aesthetics as an independent discipline counteracts the repressive rule of reason: the efforts to demonstrate the central position of the aesthetic function and to establish it as an existential category invoke the inherent truth values of the senses against their deprivation under the prevailing reality principle." (Marcuse 1974, 181) Aesthetics and art implement a new principle of reality. This principle forms the basis of politics, which, in contrast to the order of reason, seeks to establish an order of sensuality. The approval of this new order is intended to liberate feelings from the pressure of civilization (to a certain extent, we can interpret it as one aspect of the liberation of human nature from the dominance of civilization, which has an instrumentalist character). It is implemented not by repressive means, but by means of a game impulse. An example of aesthetic politics is the political project of the Great Refusal, developed by Marcuse. This project refers to fantasy as a political mean: "Phantasy is cognitive in so far as it preserves the truth of the Great Refusal, or, positively, in so far as it protects, against all reason, the aspirations for the integral fulfillment of man and nature which are repressed by reason." (Marcuse 1974, 160) The emancipatory essence of politics based on imagination (fantasy) is due to the fact that the productive imaginary does not reveal strict attachments to the being having the ability to create its relationship to reality.

The emancipatory potential of aesthetics and its political role can become evident in a critique of modern mass media society. Gianni Vattimo emphasizes that critical sociology pays attention to equalizing the masses, manipulating public opinion, and forming totalitarianism. Still, these things are not inevitable

consequences of the overarching domination of mass communication. In the modern political world, there is a need to oppose the tendencies of the universalization of domination due to the boundless influence of mass media. We should also state that mass media provides special mobility and ephemerality for experience, weakening the perception of reality. It is necessary to compare such tendencies with some features of aesthetical experience, for example, ambiguity and fragility. Vattimo draws attention to the fact that the experience of ambiguity is constitutive for art. This property turns art into a source of creativity and freedom in the world of universal communication.

In this context, we should notice that Vattimo criticizes the philosophical position of Jürgen Habermas, who tries to renew Kantian aesthetics and defend the Enlightenment. Vattimo believes that the position of Habermas does not capture and does not appreciate many phenomena of the mass 'aesthetic' culture. A more adequate interpretation of the new form of aesthetic experience is the philosophical hermeneutics of H.-G. Gadamer. He states that the experience of beauty is characterized by the community's consent about what constitutes beauty in relationship to the division of beautiful objects into natural objects or objects of art (Gadamer 1986, 9).

We want to add that the most appropriate contribution to the modern aesthetical experience in its fullest expression is the aesthetic conception of the Polish philosopher Mieczyslaw Wallis. He is convinced of the existence of different but equally valuable works of art, as well as various types of aesthetic experiences – the experience of beauty, of the ugly, of the sublime, etc. He also distinguishes between the various types of aesthetic subjects. Moreover, Wallis focuses on the existence of various types of aesthetic values. All of this testifies to the artistic and aesthetic pluralism of his conception of aesthetics (Wallis 1972, 3). Wallis's concept of aesthetic subjects is much wider than only the world of works of art. For Wallis, things and phenomena of nature, human actions and communities, ourselves as objects of aesthetic knowledge, products of technology, scientific and philosophical doctrines, etc. – all are a part of the world of aesthetic objects.

In the article *The Changes in Art and the Changes in Aesthetics*, Wallis states the need to revise the traditional concept of the work of art in its confrontational engagement with the works of contemporary art. Wallis argues that aesthetics requires new concepts and research approaches. One of them may be the concept of 'open work' proposed by Umberto Eco, who wrote of the existence of many incomplete interpretations, of which none has a privileged meaning.

In this way, the program of pluralistic aesthetics is established. This aesthetics is open to new phenomena in art, which perceives and interprets reality differently, has a different semantic structure, and evolves from a different existential background. Such an aesthetics is conscious of the fact that in the human world everything is changing, and that from time to time there are new types of art, new directions, and artistic manifestations. 'Open' aesthetics should not be allowed to build closed systems of art or aesthetic values. On the contrary,

it must be flexible and ready at any moment to take into account the emergence of new artistic phenomena or newly discovered or re-interpreted artistic works of the past, and realize the constant revision of its principles. Wallis is convinced that this is the aesthetics of the future.

This conception of aesthetics is fully in line with the ideas of Vattimo, who observes that modern mass culture did not make the aesthetic experience vanish, thereby homologizing its 'beauty.' On the contrary, we can observe the diversity of the 'beautiful,' giving voice to not only different cultures, the presence of which becomes more and more visible and significant, but also to the very subsystems of which western culture itself is composed. Vattimo writes: "the utopia of an aesthetic rehabilitation of existence through a unification of the beautiful and the everyday has come to an end in parallel with the end of the revolutionary utopia of the sixties, and for the same reasons, namely the explosion of systematicity and the unintelligibility of unilinear history." (Vattimo 1992, 67) According to Vattimo, the changes that have taken place in the field of aesthetic experience and in the relations between aesthetics and everyday life are related to the manifestation of the phenomenon of mass aesthetic experience, which is the discovery of a voice by numerous systems of social recognition and various self-expressing communities. Thus, the essence of the aesthetic experience acquires a political significance and forms the preconditions of emancipation. It acquires a new meaning, wherein 'beauty' is the experience of the community, while at the same time the community really becomes 'universal' and 'free' as it creates an irreversible process of social development and pluralization.

Deploying aesthetic experience as an experience of a free community, unlike aesthetic experience, which focuses on the evaluation of structures, is possible only in the world of universal systems of thinking. Thus, the realization of aesthetic utopia is possible only as heterotopy. The perception of beauty as an act of recognition of patterns on the basis of the world and communities becomes possible only at a time when we are facing the multiplicity of these worlds and communities (Vattimo 1992, 69).

Among a large number of modern studies of the impact of media on the formation of a new type of society, the conception of Vattimo appears as a rather original and, above all, an optimistic project. Without neglecting a number of problems and negative effects of the media's influence on the political world, which is emphasized by many researchers, Vattimo seeks to present it as an opportunity for our emancipation from mass media society. The positive aspect of this concept of the relation between aesthetics and politics lies in the reality that we are opening new opportunities for the realization of freedom in the political world, in spite of the dominant rhetoric about the total loss of ideals, metaphysical landmarks, and identities.

## Conclusion

Summing up, we should say that there are two main aspects of the relationship between the aesthetic experience and the political sphere, that is reflected in the three models analyzed. The first concerns the establishment of political order. We should state that the political order is maintained not only in formal regulations, but also through the formation of certain ideas and beliefs. Therefore, *the political* manifests itself as an imaginary. A human being begins to perceive and evaluate events in the political world from the perspective of imaginary structures. Thus, aesthetic experience, which is connected to imagination, can be a component of imaginary structures that are associated with the understanding of political phenomena by human beings. This first aspect concerns the desire to ensure the legitimacy of the political order through the establishment and justification of political representation. Also, in today's political world, we can find attempts to renew or revive a modern democratic project. This renewal needs to happen through rethinking the principle of political representation. Political representation, which reproduces the precise presence and causes institution-duplication only, is replaced by a political representation based on the principles of aesthetics, wherein the presentation of reality implies freedom, as well as the plurality of positions.

The second aspect of the connection of aesthetic experience with political experience concerns the search for a change in the political order or certain dimensions of it. Such a strategy is based on the criticism of the current state of politics. It is a question of overcoming the negative tendencies in the development of the modern political world, which enslaves man and distorts the authentic dimensions of the human being as *bios politikos*. The aesthetic experience, which relies on the freedom of creativity and the potential of art, appears to be one of revolutionary means. Thus, the specific policy of aesthetics, which is focused on reformatting the attitude of man to politics, is realized. In this way, a new political meaning will be attained, capable of establishing the authentic dimensions of the political world.

In general, aesthetics and politics are not far from one another. The reference to aesthetics gives a new perspective on political analysis, which allows us to better understand the possibilities of implementing democratic principles or emancipated projects in the modern political world.

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# What Is Metaphysics? Heidegger's Evolving Account of Metaphysics

Yu Xia

**Abstract:** In this paper, I deal with Heidegger's evolving account of metaphysics, since Heidegger's persistent concern, the question of being, is a basic metaphysical question. To date, most Heidegger scholars have focused only on a particular stage of Heidegger's philosophy: either his early attempt to deconstruct metaphysics, or his efforts to overcome metaphysics in the 1930s, or his late embrace of 'releasement' from metaphysics. However, these limited approaches fail to address Heidegger's different understandings of metaphysics, which lie at the root of his changing approaches to the question of being. They also fail to explain whether there is any inner connection between the various approaches. Further, given Heidegger's unremittingly negative attitude towards metaphysics, some scholars have even maintained that Heidegger thought it both possible and desirable to leave metaphysics behind altogether. I address these issues first by arguing that metaphysics for Heidegger has three interconnected meanings: initially it is the representation of the totality of things that are present-at-hand, a view subsequently developed into subjective representational thinking, and finally radicalized into an expression of the will to power. At each stage, Heidegger critiques the metaphysical tradition but never claims that it can be fully eliminated, since it is a mode of Dasein's being and ultimately possibilized by being itself. For this reason, Heidegger's own philosophy of being remains inseparable from metaphysics.

**Keywords:** Being, Martin Heidegger, metaphysics, representational thinking, will.

## 1. Heidegger's Motivation for Dealing with Metaphysics

A substantial part of Heidegger's philosophy deals with the problem of metaphysics. This is quite obvious given his perennial concern, namely, the question of being, which is also the basic question of metaphysics. Heidegger finds the traditional metaphysical account of being problematic and wants to rethink this question in his own way. To do so, he must explain what traditional metaphysics is and in what sense it fails to do justice to being. At different stages of his philosophy, Heidegger describes the tradition of metaphysics differently, and his attitude towards it changes accordingly. For us philosophers, tracing Heidegger's ways of responding to the metaphysical tradition helps to comprehend and evaluate his own approach to the question of being, i.e., to determine whether Heidegger has found an alternative, more promising way to

deal with the question of being that allows him to leave the metaphysical tradition behind, or whether his own philosophy is still committed to this tradition in one way or another.

Contemporary Heidegger scholarship normally focuses on one or another stage of Heidegger's attitude towards metaphysics. For instance, most readers address either Heidegger's early attempt to deconstruct [*Destruktion*] metaphysics in *Being and Time* (1927) (Barash 1994; Thomson 2000) or his effort to overcome [*Überwindung*] metaphysics in works from the decade of 1935-1945 (Engelland 2007; Young 2015), or his intention to release [*Gelassenheit*] from metaphysics after around 1945 (Davis 2007; Rae 2013). What has not been scrutinized sufficiently is, first, his own evolving account of metaphysics. Without addressing what metaphysics is for Heidegger at each stage, we cannot comprehend his changing attitude towards metaphysics. Second and more importantly, even if some Heidegger readers, such as Dominique Janicaud (1994), have observed Heidegger's changing attitude towards metaphysics, they have not attended to the development of, or the inner connections between, Heidegger's different understandings of metaphysics. Third, given Heidegger's dominantly negative attitude towards metaphysics, his readers (Stambaugh 2003; Trawny 2019) have tended to think that the metaphysical tradition can or will be left behind sooner or later, and hence they have failed to see that even for Heidegger, metaphysics is grounded in being.

To deal with the first and second issues, I present Heidegger's own understanding of metaphysics and then highlight three important shifts in Heidegger's different accounts of metaphysics throughout his philosophy. Heidegger does not simply change his view of metaphysics randomly. To deal with the third issue, I show that even what Heidegger identifies as problematic in the metaphysical tradition has roots in being as such. It can be critiqued but not eliminated if the question of being is to be retained. In fact, Heidegger himself seems to think that his own approach to the question of being is a new way of doing metaphysics or at least a new approach to the essence of metaphysics.

To proceed, I first highlight some core features of Heidegger's evolving account of metaphysics throughout his philosophy by focusing on key texts at each stage. Since the aim is to show an internal coherence in these accounts by identifying the systematic core of this evolution, I will not consider everything Heidegger wrote or said about metaphysics. This is an obvious limitation of my approach. Yet, given that my aim is to restart a debate, and not to present comprehensive results, we must at present rest content with unavoidable limits in scope.

Specifically, in Sections 2, 4 and 6, I argue that Heidegger's sometimes implicit account of what the term 'metaphysics' refers to is framed in three rather different ways over the years: Whereas in *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger takes metaphysics to be a representation of the totality of things as being present-at-hand, he tacitly moves to presenting it as the canonical expression of

representational subjective thinking in the 1930s (e.g., in *Nietzsche I & II* (1936-46)), and, finally, as an important expression of the will to power both in his middle<sup>1</sup> and late philosophy (e.g., in "The Question Concerning Technology" (1953)). To support my arguments, I will also consider other key texts related to the problem of metaphysics, such as "What Is Metaphysics?" (1929), a series of fragments in his middle philosophy, e.g., "Overcoming Metaphysics" (1936-1946), and *The Country Path Conversations* (1944-46). I will show that it is because of Heidegger's peculiar understandings of metaphysics that he finds metaphysics in all these senses problematic and attempts to deconstruct metaphysics (Second 2), to overcome it (Section 5), and eventually to peacefully refrain or release from willful metaphysics (Section 6), respectively. At the same time, however, metaphysics is a mode of Dasein and thus rooted in being itself according to Heidegger's own standards, which I will address in Sections 3, 5 and 6. This is the fundamental reason why Heidegger cannot simply turn his back on the problem of metaphysics. Lastly, I will argue that Heidegger himself recognizes that his own account of the question of being is committed to 'metaphysics,' notwithstanding his sustained critique of the metaphysical tradition (Sections 3 and 6). For these reasons, Heidegger's philosophy of being cannot help but remain closely connected to metaphysics. It is, as it were, condemned to study metaphysics and its history.

## 2. Deconstructing the Metaphysical Tradition as the Task of a Philosophy of Being

Since Aristotle, metaphysics has been considered the science of being qua being. In his various attempts to engage with the tradition of metaphysics, Heidegger's ultimate concern is always the relation between metaphysics and being, that is, whether metaphysics can attend to being itself as it is. In this section, I will examine Heidegger's early account of, and engagement with, metaphysics up until around 1929.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger does not begin by giving a definition of what metaphysics is but by critiquing the metaphysical tradition for failing to fulfil its aim. That is, it has failed to do justice to the question of being. Heidegger claims that "the question of being has been forgotten" in metaphysics – not that the metaphysical tradition no longer considers the question of being but that it never addressed being in an appropriate manner at all (1962, 21; GA 2, 2). The metaphysical tradition thinks of being as the 'most universal,' 'indefinable' and 'self-evident' concept (Heidegger 1962, 22-24; GA 3-4). This is not to say that these characterizations of the concept of being are necessarily incorrect but rather that

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Heidegger already takes metaphysics as an expression of the will to power in the 1930s. It is considered as self-willing and self-wanting during this period (*Nietzsche I*, GA 6.1). I will argue that it is in Heidegger's late philosophy that the will to power is further developed as the will to power over the other, making the other to serve the self.

they do not really explain why being poses a problem in the first place. We take being for granted. For instance, being is indeed indefinable since it cannot be derived from some higher concepts, but it is not a particular entity either. Clearly, such a purely negative account of being does not tell us much about what being is. We need to “look that question in the face,” as Heidegger writes (1962, GA 23; 4).

The Heidegger of *Being and Time* basically identifies traditional metaphysics with ontology. According to him, the reason why the question of being is no longer attended to in this tradition is because the philosophical tradition “blocks our access to those primordial ‘sources’ from which the categories and concepts are handed down to us,” “makes us forget that they have had such an origin” and therefore prevents us from going back to these sources (Heidegger 1962, 43; GA 2, 21). We are uprooted from the origin by the tradition so that the question of being is no longer perceived as an issue. At bottom, Heidegger simply argues that the tradition of philosophy does not consider whence and how the history of understanding being is handed down to us. Heidegger intends to re-raise the question of being and find a different approach, one that can do justice to being.

Heidegger claims that the first task is therefore to tear down the tradition of metaphysics. That is, we must “destroy [*Destruktion*] the history of ontology” (Heidegger 1962, 41; GA 2, 20):

If the question of being is to have its own history made transparent, then this hardened tradition must be loosened up, and the concealments which it has brought about must be dissolved. We understand this task as one in which by taking the question of being as our clue, we are to destroy the traditional content of ancient ontology until we arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieve our first ways of determining the nature of being – the ways which have guided us ever since. (1962, 44; GA 22)

Despite the controversy caused by his own choice of words, what Heidegger means by ‘de(con)struction’ here is not the simple abolition of traditional ontology. Instead, in shaking off the negative aspect of the tradition, the aim is to discover its positive potentiality to account for being itself (Heidegger 1962, 44; GA 2, 22-23). In his 1955 essay “On the Question of Being,” Heidegger complains that some readers of *Being and Time* misconstrued ‘de(con)struction’ [*Destruktion*] as the elimination of ontology whereas his true intention is to “reattain the originary experiences of being belonging to metaphysics by deconstructing [*Abbau*] representations that have become commonplace and empty.” (1998, 315; GA 9, 244-245)

Here, I want to point out that Heidegger’s attempt to deconstruct metaphysics is limited to his treatment of metaphysics in the late 1920s but not beyond. The Heidegger scholar Iain Thomson (2000), however, thinks that Heidegger’s approach to the metaphysical tradition is to deconstruct metaphysics through and through and takes what Heidegger means by metaphysics to be equivalent to ontotheology. There is indeed a certain level of continuity and inner

connection in Heidegger's treatment of metaphysics throughout his philosophy – something I try to argue in this paper. But such an inner connection needs to be argued for rather than taken for granted. The same goes for Heidegger's interpretation of metaphysics as ontotheology: although the idea of ontotheology already appears in *Being and Time*, it is mainly a theme in the late Heidegger. What Heidegger means by ontotheology is that the metaphysical tradition either takes being as some universal idea and essence, i.e., an ontological question; or it takes being as the highest being, i.e., God, as he clarifies in "Introduction to 'What Is Metaphysics?'" (1949) (1998, 287; GA 9, 207). Both interpretations of being have the problem of reducing being to some particular being.<sup>2</sup> Heidegger does point out this problem already in *Being and Time*<sup>3</sup>, but Thomson cannot simply pair 'de(con)struction' with 'ontotheology' without first justifying his claims. In my reading, Heidegger's deconstruction of metaphysics is limited to his early period where the term 'ontotheology' remains relatively scarce. This is because Heidegger deconstructs metaphysics for a reason; namely, he wants to propose a more primordial kind of metaphysics, which is not always the case for Heidegger's later philosophy.

These are precisely the questions I want to address: If the tradition is torn down, what are we left with? How exactly can we recover an originary experience of being? Does this new approach to being still belong to metaphysics? If so, how? If not, what is this new philosophy instead? Heidegger tries to come up with a new way to think of being for the first time in *Being and Time*. For the early Heidegger, the question of being is equivalent to the question of the meaning of being. This is because it is an ontological question that can only be raised and understood by 'Dasein' – a special mode of being for whom the question of the meaning of being can be a problem in the first place (Heidegger 1962, 31-32; GA 2, 11-12). The original experience of being is only accessible to Dasein. Against a common misunderstanding, it must be stressed that Dasein is not the human subject but the structure of human existence. It is a concrete mode of being in which the abstract notions of subject and object of (inter-) subjectivity and objectivity are grounded, a mode of always already being-in-the-world-with-others. It is *ek-sistent*, prior to the external-internal or subjective-objective dichotomy that structures mainstream traditional philosophy.<sup>4</sup> Dasein's being is its comporting different possibilities in the world, manifesting different ways of being within this

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<sup>2</sup> I will not elaborate on ontotheology in my account of Heidegger's understanding of metaphysics, since as I explain here, the problem of ontotheology is that it reduces being to particular being, which will be treated in Section 4.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, this can be seen in Heidegger's criticism of the cogito argument. He accuses Descartes of not explicating the 'am' in 'I am,' and of hastening to ground his own existence in God as the primary being instead (Heidegger 1962, 46; GA 2, 24).

<sup>4</sup> Charles E. Scott uses the phrase 'body of thought' to refer to the *ek-sistence* of Dasein, meaning "by it living and alert events that are both physical and extensive beyond the intentions and abilities that compose one of their aspects, subjectivity." (2001, 19)

fundamental ontological structure. Heidegger's key idea in *Being and Time* is that Dasein accesses and reveals being via its own being. Accordingly, he calls the existential structure of Dasein 'the existential analytic of Dasein' and his investigation into this structure a 'fundamental ontology.' (Heidegger 1962, 34; GA 13)

According to Heidegger's analysis of fundamental ontological structures, there are different ways of being with others and of dwelling in the world, i.e., of being with others in different modes of interpersonal exchange and of relating to things as either 'ready-to-hand' or 'present-at-hand.' (Heidegger 1962, 101; GA 2, 71-72) The former term refers to knowing how to handle things in Dasein's practical engagement in the world, prior to reasoning or conceptual analysis, and the latter refers to theoretical knowledge, which, according to Heidegger, in a way presupposes readiness to hand. Presence-at-hand is, as it were, an elevated form of readiness-to-hand, since Heidegger takes the most primordial mode of knowing being to be the practical attitude. The theoretical attitude is grounded in *praxis* although we often do not recognize this. Heidegger takes theoretical knowing to be a latecomer, a certain advanced modification of practical experience. Primordial experience takes place in the practical encounter with things as being ready-to-hand. At the same time, Heidegger also claims that Dasein is 'thrown into the world' in a way that causes a certain opacity so that even Dasein's primordial and practical being-in-the-world has an aspect of concealment, e.g., with matters being partially distorted or covered up by 'idle talk' unfocused 'curiosity' and the resulting 'ambiguity.' (Heidegger 1962, 167-175; GA 211-219) This is what Heidegger calls the 'fallen' mode of Dasein, inauthentically being merely one of 'them' instead of being authentically in its own accord (1962, 175; GA 219-220). Authenticity, by contrast, is a way to at least partly overcome the opaqueness of our average everyday encounters with being and attends to being as it is.

By contrast, relating to things as being present-at-hand means focusing on how things present themselves to us, how they are given to us in perception and thought, abstracting from our more primordial practical relations to them. Conceiving things as present-at-hand finds its expression in (re)presenting things, which are thereby turned into objects of (conceptual) representation, into instantiations of universals. On top of this, the inevitable fallenness of Dasein tends to further ossify universal concepts into pieces of information that circulate among 'them.' For Heidegger, the traditional way of doing metaphysics as a theory that analyzes the universal concept of being is an important variety of this kind of abstract, representational thinking that has lost all contact with primordial experience. This allows us to infer that the early Heidegger takes metaphysics to be the universal representation of the totality of things as being present-at-hand. At the same time, it should be noted that even this allegedly problematic way of doing metaphysics is essentially grounded in and emerges from the fundamental ontology of Dasein. This might explain why Heidegger barely talks about what metaphysics is in *Being and Time* but is more interested in its ground. As Otto

Pöggeler writes, "*Being and Time* attempts to recover through thinking that which has remained unthought, the forgotten ground of metaphysics upon which everything that has been thought certainly rested." (1987, 34)

Heidegger famously claims that only an authentic way of relating to Dasein allows us to encounter being primordially, and he equally famously, but perhaps less plausibly, links authenticity to the proper awareness of our own finitude. Dasein, he suggests, can only face its own being by heeding the call of conscience. The call summons Dasein to its own finitude, its being-towards-death, the abyss or nothingness of existence (Heidegger 1962, 310; GA 2, 265-266).<sup>5</sup> In the face of nothing and the receding of beings, Dasein becomes anxious: as "the receding of beings as a whole, closing in on us in anxiety, oppresses us," Heidegger further explains in "What Is Metaphysics?" (1998, 88; GA 9, 9). Attending to Dasein's own finitude anxiously transforms human existence as a whole into its authentic modes of being. It is by comporting its modes of being authentically that Dasein truly experiences its being. Conversely, Heidegger suggests that being inauthentic means failing to attend to the finitude of Dasein, and that engaging in traditional metaphysics is one way of relating to finitude inauthentically, which is why it fails to do justice to being.

So far, I have argued that, for the early Heidegger, deconstructing the metaphysical tradition makes the original experience of being possible, namely, via Dasein's authentic mode of being. But Heidegger's early philosophy does not stop there. He goes on to argue that the primordial experience of being as such is still a metaphysical topic, albeit one for a different kind of metaphysics.

### 3. Heidegger's Early Philosophy of Being as Primordial Metaphysics

Immediately after *Being and Time*, in "What Is Metaphysics?" (1929), Heidegger argues that since Dasein's ownmost, innermost and uttermost possibility is its being-towards-nothing, this finitude of Dasein signifies a more fundamental nothing, namely, the nothingness of being or being as nothingness. It perhaps goes without saying but being is more than just Dasein's being. This notion of being allows Heidegger to move from the fundamental ontology of Dasein to a more fundamental metaphysics, or at least to consider such a move. Heidegger maintains that thinking of being as nothingness is precisely the task of a true metaphysics that is more fundamental and originary than the metaphysical tradition. It is an 'arch-metaphysics,' so to speak. So, by turning down the way in which the metaphysical tradition deals with being, Heidegger wants to treat the problem of being anew, in a different kind of metaphysics. For him, the question of being is still a metaphysical question.

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<sup>5</sup> To note: Since Dasein is always being-towards-death, its ownmost possibility, Dasein is always futural and returns from its futurity to its authentic having-been, the present. In this sense, for the early Heidegger, the ultimate ground of Dasein's existence is time.

He writes that unlike all other sciences, which think of beings as beings, including even those that address the entirety of all beings in this manner, true metaphysics needs to think of 'the nothing,' i.e., not of anything particular but of nothingness as such. He argues that being, which is nothing particular but also not an empty universal, is the boundary and condition of all things. Heidegger accordingly seeks to transform the Leibnizian question "why is there anything rather than nothing?" into an identification of being as such with nothingness.<sup>6</sup> In order to access 'the nothing,' we must suspend beings, i.e., "remove all things and human beings and oneself along with them into a remarkable indifference." (1998, 86-87; GA 9, 7) This approach corresponds to Heidegger's novel notion of metaphysics: "Metaphysics is inquiry beyond or over beings that aims to recover them as such and as a whole for our grasp [...] In the question concerning the nothing such an inquiry beyond or over beings, beings as a whole, takes place. It proves thereby to be a 'metaphysical' question" (1998, 93-94; GA 15):

Going beyond beings occurs in the essence of Dasein. But this going beyond is metaphysics itself. This implies this metaphysics belongs to the "nature of the human being." It is neither a division of academic philosophy nor a field of arbitrary notions. Metaphysics is the fundamental occurrence in our Dasein. It is Dasein itself. (1998, 96; GA 9, 18)

If the question of the nothing unfolded here has actually questioned us, then we have not simply brought metaphysics before us in an extrinsic manner. Nor have we merely been 'ransposed' into it. We cannot be transposed into it at all, because insofar as we exist we are always already within it. (1998, 96; GA 19)

Hence, Heidegger now openly argues that true metaphysics can only access being as nothingness via the fundamental ontology of Dasein, although this move is in a way already implicit in *Being and Time*. That is to say, true metaphysics, too, emerges from Dasein's fundamental ontology. It implies that genuine metaphysics must not address being as a present-at-hand thing or object and that it requires Dasein to face its own finitude authentically. Metaphysics in this sense radically breaks with the metaphysical tradition.

Up until 1929, Heidegger hence maintains that both the metaphysical tradition and primordial metaphysics are grounded in the existential structure of Dasein. Although the tradition of metaphysics fails to fulfil its task to address the question of being rigorously, his aim is not to destroy metaphysics but to deconstruct its history and to find out its positive possibilities. He seeks to justify metaphysics by tracing back the question of being to its ground. For the early Heidegger, the question of being as such is still a metaphysical question.

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<sup>6</sup> In his *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935), Heidegger unpacks this question "why is there anything rather than nothing" in greater detail, i.e., what is asked in this questioning, the way in which the tradition of philosophy deals with this question and Heidegger's elucidation of the meaning of being, and its relation with non-being (GA 40).



#### 4. Metaphysics as Representational Thinking and Will to Power

But, for Heidegger himself, the problem of metaphysics, namely, its failure to do justice to being, is not solved in the late 1920s but merely takes on a different form. Heidegger continues to ponder the relationship between metaphysics and the question of being after 1930, but the way in which he does so differs from his earlier approach. From 1930 onwards, Heidegger seems to realize that his early approach to being via Dasein's being still tacitly accepts the idea of a totality of beings. What is worse, accessing being via Dasein as a peculiar mode of being renders the early approach subjective and anthropocentric, as it were. In order to avoid such problems, Heidegger thus attempts to address being directly. This is the so-called turn [*Kehre*]. The underlying idea is not that being itself no longer needs the mediation of Dasein but that, in its mediation, Dasein does not play the determining role: beings other than Dasein no longer gain determinateness and meaning in their relations to Dasein and its comportments. Heidegger now holds that Dasein rather opens up a space for other beings, allowing them to reveal themselves as what they are in themselves rather than only in terms of Dasein. As Gavin Rae cites Eugene Thacker: this approach to being is "human centered but unhuman oriented." (2013, 256)

As regards the notion of truth, Heidegger develops the notion of *aletheia* from *Being and Time*. In the 1930 essay "On the Essence of Truth," he stresses the inherent and antecedent concealment of truth (Heidegger 1998, 148; GA 9, 89). Being is concealing-revealing, *a-lethe-ia* with an inherent *lethe*. The idea perhaps comes from the Husserlian account of perception, and notably from Husserl's observation that we always perceive things partially from and in certain aspects.<sup>7</sup> Heidegger broadens this notion by further developing this partial hiddenness of being in his middle philosophy, calling this inherent concealment a 'mystery' and the movement towards the readily available, which is caused by this concealment, an 'erring.' (1998, 149-150; GA 91-92) Human beings inevitably err, for being is partially open to humans but cannot be entirely transparent to them. There is a double concealment: the inherent concealment of being and a concealment due to the forgetfulness of being as such in average everydayness. Thus, to properly think of being is not simply to return to being itself in its openness, as the ancient Greek philosophers had assumed in the so-called 'first beginning,' i.e., the beginning of the metaphysical tradition. To do so rather requires us to retrieve [*wiederholen*] being as concealing-revealing, in what Heidegger calls the second or the other

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<sup>7</sup> Rudolf Bernet comments that this hidden 'potential truth' belongs essentially to what appears; and "the more that shows the more it hides, since each thoughtful response to the thing intensifies its ultimately unsolvable mystery." (2019, 249) I agree that Heidegger's initial inspiration for developing the inherent concealment indeed comes from Husserl; but what Heidegger ultimately means by inherent hiddenness is not so much a promise for potential truth or potential revealing but the ultimate origin, the possibilizing power for being to reveal itself. It is not exactly that "the more that shows the more it hides." The origin simply does not reveal itself at all.

beginning in *Contributions* (2012, 135; GA 65, 171). The ontological difference between beingness and beings that he wants to keep is also no longer the 'ontological difference' (Heidegger 1962, 31-33; GA 2, 11-12) of *Being and Time* but a more radical one, since being as nothing is not just the beingness of beings or of Dasein.

Heidegger's view of the metaphysical tradition has also developed in the meantime. As I have already argued, the early Heidegger maintains that the tradition of metaphysics is based on the present-at-hand mode of relating to being but that theoretical knowledge itself is rooted in the being ready-to-hand of things for Dasein in its average everydayness. Heidegger now takes this argument further by characterizing metaphysics as a peculiar way of thinking, namely, subjective representational thinking. The idea is that once metaphysics treats being as a totality of given things, it naturally represents beings as a set of objects that are there before human subjects. In acts of representation, being is objectified and a subjective-objective dichotomy is established between human and non-human being. Further, in human cognitive representation, objects are idealized, reduced to their essences and then transformed into mere concepts, since, as Heidegger writes in "Sketches for a History of Being as Metaphysics" (1939-46), a concept is considered as "what is represented as such, thinking, representing; that is, presenting itself." (1973, 61; GA 6, 464)

Given Heidegger's engagement with, and critique of, German idealism in the 1930s, Daniel Dahlstrom claims that for Heidegger, idealism is a kind of 'synecdoche' for metaphysics (2013, 242). In line with this I argue that, for the middle Heidegger, metaphysics culminates in subjective, idealistic and rational thinking, and that it can ultimately be reduced to epistemology.<sup>8</sup> Reason thinks and even pre-determines beings to such an extent that it only deals with the concepts that denote beings, using the propositional language of 'S is P.' Concepts as fixed ideas are prone to be picked up by anyone and taken for granted, further contributing to Dasein's fallen mode of being. Metaphysics, as understood by Heidegger, does not suffice to consider the question of being – an ontological question – adequately. The metaphysical tradition is rather a history of the separation of thinking and true being. No proper way of thinking can attend to being as such.

So far, Heidegger has not offered any explanation of why the present-at-hand mode of relating to things, which he takes to be the root of representational thinking, including metaphysics, can become so dominant. The mere idea of fallenness does not offer any clue to this issue. Therefore, Heidegger performs a radical turn after 1930. Instead of blaming the theoretical attitude as such, he starts to reinterpret it as something practical and willful, and as motivated by

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, in "Overcoming Metaphysics" (1936-46), Heidegger argues that Kant's so-called metaphysics is simply epistemology (1973, 88; GA 7, 84).

what he calls the will to power (a term that he takes from Nietzsche (cf. *Nietzsche* I, GA 6.1, 15-17). This will is a self-will, wanting itself (33).

To clarify this idea, Heidegger's critique of German Idealism as metaphysics in 1941 might be helpful. There, he argues that German Idealism is basically a philosophy of subject and of subjectivity. He attributes two kinds of subjectivity to the subject, the '*subiectum*,' which he identifies with the will in his claim 'the will is *subiectum*': 1) the willing subject is a *hypokeimenon*, a willful, striving, 'basis'; 2) it has egoity, consciousness, spirit, 'Word,' *logos* (GA 49: 90, 93). This means that, in the metaphysics of German Idealism, the *hypokeimenon* as the underlying ground wills to become a self or ego. This process of willing is the process of self-becoming. By willing itself, the *hypokeimenon*, the basis, becomes determined and able to represent itself as the subject that comes to be. The latter is the 'genuine *subiectum*,' the 'referential center of beings as such', as Heidegger comments in "The Age of the World Picture." (1950, 66-67; GA 5, 88) According to Heidegger, not only German Idealism but the whole metaphysical tradition focuses on the willing subject and its willful interactions with the world. Hence, if metaphysics is nothing but an expression of this self-wanting of subjective being, it cannot fail to be based on an extreme subjectivism.

In line with this move, Heidegger even argues that metaphysical thinking is not limited to metaphysics as a philosophical discipline. For him, modern science and technology are nothing but a dramatic expansion of metaphysical thinking. He holds that science, including technology, is the the most important by-product of metaphysics because science, by focusing on objective facts that it seeks to register precisely in order to gain control over them, cannot fail to be a mode of subjective thinking, which is not thinking beyond the subject-object dichotomy. "Science does not think," Heidegger thus later writes in "What Calls for Thinking?" (1977, 264; GA 7, 133). I will show that Heidegger's account of the will to power is exacerbated in Heidegger's late writings on technology, for technological thinking is not only self-wanting but rather willing to power over everything, including one's own self. To a certain extent, Heidegger's late claims on this issue are also already implicit in his writings from the 1930s, just as his radical reading of the metaphysical tradition builds on his early view of metaphysics. His path of thinking [*Denkweg*] is always evolving but not always straightforward.

In spite of all his misgivings about metaphysics, however, Heidegger still clings to the basic idea that what we need is to think being. The question then is in what way a genuine experience of being is possible and what a corresponding 'philosophy of being,' or rather a proper, non-representational way of thinking being would look like. Is it still an alternative way of metaphysical thinking, as Heidegger apparently held in the late 1920s, or something entirely different?

## 5. Heidegger's Attempt to Overcome Metaphysics

Heidegger wrestles with metaphysical thinking more fiercely during the time of his engagement with Nietzsche. He no longer thinks that it suffices to deconstruct

the metaphysical tradition but claims that additional measures must be taken to entirely overcome metaphysical thinking. At first sight, the expression 'overcoming metaphysics' might be taken to indicate that Heidegger simply wants to eliminate representational thinking as such. But this is not quite the case. According to him, we can 'overcome' metaphysical thinking by taking a 'leap' from representation to being itself, notwithstanding the problem of concealment.

As he writes in *Contributions*, "the leap is the extreme projection of the essence of the being, of such a kind that we place ourselves in what is thereby opened up, become steadfast, and by being appropriated come to ourselves for the first time." (Heidegger 2012, 182; GA 65, 231) A leap is an event or *Ereignis*, a happening of being. In this 'original happening,' humans can attend to and experience a genuine relation with being itself. In this way, the *Ereignis* is said to show that human beings and being belong together essentially. "Of all beings, only the human being, called upon by the voice of being, experiences the wonder of all wonders: that beings are"; only humans can at least partially experience being itself, Heidegger writes in "Postscript to 'What is Metaphysics?'" (1943) (Heidegger 1998, 234; GA 9, 103). Indeed, what he describes here seems more like an 'image' than an account of how leaping actually takes place, since this leap itself sounds mysterious and it is not clear what it is like to experience being genuinely.

For Heidegger, the very idea of such a leap from metaphysical thinking into the realm of being is to allow us to trace the origin of metaphysics. In the 1930 essay "On the Essence of Truth," Heidegger himself emphasizes that what he truly means by overcoming metaphysics is to examine how the tradition of metaphysics comes to represent being as a concept or idea (1998, 154; GA 9, 202). Therefore, overcoming metaphysics, for Heidegger, means to recover the origin and the course of the development of metaphysics. It is an attempt to move beyond traditional metaphysical thinking and beyond representation. Being itself is the source of metaphysics, but the source itself cannot be grasped by its own product, metaphysics. It is also questionable whether it can be grasped by Heidegger himself because the 'leap' itself is not a theoretical exercise but something that might eventually happen or else fail to happen. Overcoming in this sense implies a transition or transfer [*Übergang*] from one realm to the other, to the other beginning (GA 67, 11). Despite the shifts in rhetoric, this argument does not seem radically different from the one offered by Heidegger in his early period, since the early Heidegger had already claimed that the original experience of being is not accessible to the metaphysical tradition, nor to any conceivable theoretical alternative. Then what is the point of emphasizing that metaphysics is to be not only deconstructed but overcome?

The real difference from his earlier view is that, at this stage, Heidegger no longer thinks that the question of being is a metaphysical question at all. In other words, the task of metaphysics has never been to give us access to an originary experience of being, nor does it presuppose such an experience. In *Contributions*, he writes that in this transition, what appears as metaphysics is "already no longer

metaphysics, but the overcoming of metaphysics"; at the same time, however, this overcoming "is not an 'opposition' to 'metaphysics,' as that would simply bring metaphysics back into play; rather, the task is an overcoming of metaphysics out of its ground." (Heidegger, 2012, 135-136; GA 65, 171-173) In the 1938/39 fragments "The Overcoming of Metaphysics," he writes that over-coming [*Überwindung*] means a twist [*Windung*] into that which is no longer metaphysics, and this twist is the essence of being (GA 67, 15). By this overcoming, the 'abandonment of being' in modernity is overcome; the question of being is regained. Therefore, in his "Postscript to 'What Is Metaphysics?'" (1943), Heidegger writes that the metaphysical tradition is what comes first in philosophy but not what comes first in thinking (1998, 278-279; GA 9, 197). True thinking is thinking of the truth of being, which requires us to move beyond representational thinking to its source, to being itself. This, however, is something that we cannot bring about ourselves but must be called to by being. Therefore, after his critique of the metaphysical tradition in his early philosophy, Heidegger now attempts to contribute to the overcoming of metaphysics to prepare a new openness to being.

I also want to point out that Heidegger himself does not seem to think that the notion of a leap to being can solve the problem of metaphysics as representational thinking and as will to power. He addresses the reason why he is concerned about the problem of metaphysics at all, from the very beginning up until the end of his philosophy. Responding to this question, he identifies metaphysical thinking with *Dasein*'s metaphysical constitution. In "On the Essence of Truth" (1930), tracing the development of metaphysics, Heidegger suggests that even if we begin with the concealing-revealing nature of being itself, the most original beginning, the problem of representational thinking cannot be avoided. This is because what we immediately perceive in daily life are always particular truths, whereas being itself can only be accessed indirectly via the being of beings. By heeding readily available things, we cannot help taking ourselves as subjects and others as objects, setting up our own standards for all beings and approaching them based on our subjective needs. Given the human will to power, this natural tendency can be radicalized in theoretical thinking and eventually in metaphysics. In representing things 'clearly and distinctly,' as the Cartesians put it, we naturally forget the concealing-revealing nature of being as the source of all beings.<sup>9</sup> We forget what makes individual beings possible in the first place, i.e., being itself.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> "Thus left, humanity replenishes its 'world' on the basis of the latest needs and aims, and fills out that world by means of proposing and planning. From these human beings then take their standards, forgetting beings as a whole [...] yet without considering either the ground for taking up standards or the essence of what gives the standard [...] Human beings are all the more mistaken the more extensively they take themselves, as subject, to be the standard for all beings. The inordinate forgetfulness of humanity persists in securing itself by means of what is readily available and always accessible." (Heidegger 1998, 149-150; GA 9, 195-196)

<sup>10</sup> Daniela Vallega-Neu clarifies that beings arising from being does not mean that being generates beings (2015, 19). It is not a generation or production of some actual thing, but rather

The double concealment of being prevails: the inherent concealment of being itself and the concealment due to subjective thinking. But it is because of the peculiar structure of human existence that we inevitably turn to beings and forget being, even if we start with being itself as nothingness. Metaphysical thinking somehow belongs to human existence in problematic ways. The source of the forgetfulness of being lies in human nature and ultimately in being itself. Representational thinking is a natural consequence of our peculiar way of existence. Or better, it is the fate of human rationality.

In fact, Heidegger claims, in line with his ideas about the *Ereignis*, that both the progression to metaphysics and then to overcoming metaphysics to recover its origin are demanded by being as such. In *Nietzsche II*, Heidegger writes that “being releases itself into beingness and withdraws its dignity in concealment, which is itself at the same time concealed”; and this “progression of being to beingness is that history of being – called metaphysics.” (2003, 79, 81; GA 6.2, 486-87) In *Metaphysics and Nihilism* (1938/39), he writes that the attempt to overcome metaphysical thinking might sound as if it were a request from us – something done by us humans – but in fact it is demanded by being itself: “This overcoming stems from being itself and commences in its abandonment of beings.” (GA 67, 8) Also, “the over-coming belongs to the history of being, that it springs out as its first clearing.” (GA 15) More extensively, Heidegger explains in *Nietzsche II* (1939-46):

Metaphysics is the history of being as the progression [*Fortgang*] out of the origin. This progression allows the return to become a need, and allows recollection in the origin to become a needful necessity. That history of being which is historically familiar as metaphysics has its essence in that a progression from the origin occurs. In this progression being releases itself to beingness and refuses the opening out of the origin’s originating. (Heidegger 2003, 79; GA 6.2, 486)

Even if metaphysical thinking does not account for being properly, it is a consequence of how being manifests itself. In other words, as an *existentiell* mode of being, so to speak, subjective representational thinking is also grounded in being. Human Dasein is torn between being attentive to the originary mode of being and falling back into representational thinking, with ontotheology being one of the dominant modes of metaphysical thinking.

In the 1930s, Heidegger argues, on the one hand, that subjective metaphysical thinking is not able to do justice to the question of being; on the other hand, he acknowledges that this particular *existentiell* mode of being belongs to modern human existence, in addition to the problem of will to power. This is still in line with, and a continuation of, his early philosophy. What he gives up, however, is the idea that the origin of metaphysics, being itself, can be accounted for by theory at all, even by a different and genuine theory. Fundamental ontology

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describes how beings can come to show themselves as phenomena, given the possibilizing power of being.

is a theory too, even if it is grounded in Dasein's practical dwelling in the world, and hence another variety of representational thinking. This move radicalizes Heidegger's very idea of overcoming metaphysics. Since the problem of metaphysics prevails, Heidegger continues to deal with it after 1946. His giving up of the view that the question of being is a metaphysical question is not his last word on the subject. His way of treating metaphysics changes again afterwards.

## 6. Metaphysics and the Will to Power Again

In *Country Path Conversations* (1944-46), Heidegger again changes his approach to the metaphysical tradition, speaking of a certain releasement [*Gelassenheit*] vis-à-vis metaphysics. The Heidegger of this period continues to argue that the metaphysical way of thinking dominates not only metaphysics and science but also technology – not just technology in some of its varieties but the essence of technological thinking. Indeed, Heidegger's critique of technology already appears in his middle period works, such as "The Origin of the Work of Art (1935-37)" and "The Age of the World Picture (1938)," but his most developed critique of technology appears in the 1950s. Expanding his critique of metaphysics as self-willing during his middle period, Heidegger now takes metaphysical thinking, which he still takes to be an expression of the will to power, as the essence of technological thinking, given that technological thinking seeks power and control over everything. Once metaphysics is understood as self-grounding and self-willing thinking, being is unavoidably objectified as the counterpart of human subjectivity. The will to power is not only self-willing but also a will to power over the other. Any object is potentially at human disposal and becomes a potential resource to fulfil human needs. In this way, Heidegger represents technological thinking as a product of subjective metaphysical thinking.

As he writes in "The Question Concerning Technology" (1953), technology is a peculiar way of revealing being that undergirds modern existence by sweeping away the original way of revealing being as *aletheia*: unlike the latter, technology rather conceals the truth of being (Heidegger 1977, 222-224; GA 7, 13-16). He calls this a modern condition or framework [*Gestell*] of existence. By mathematizing and systematizing nature in scientific and technological thinking, humans seek to gain power over, exploit, and manipulate nature. In doing so, technological thinking threatens to objectify, control, and manipulate human nature, too. Human beings are therefore in danger, "not just any danger, but *the* danger, the supreme danger." (Heidegger 1977, 231; GA 7, 27) At the same time, paradoxically, Heidegger also holds that the greatest danger is not necessarily just negative, for salvation can also only emerge from such a danger. As Bret Davis explains: "Not only that there remains a glimmer of hope for a turning beyond the technological will to will, but that it is precisely in the midst of this desolate age of technology that there lies the possibility for catching sight of a more originary way of being." (2007, 180)

But even if the turn to being itself is possible in a technological world, Heidegger at this stage realizes that it is impossible to actively overcome and get away from metaphysical thinking. He no longer strives to overcome metaphysics but softens his approach by taking a more peaceful attitude of releasement towards metaphysical thinking. He maintains that in the modern way of thinking and dwelling, we can only wait to be released into the sphere of being, beyond willing, representing, and manipulating.<sup>11</sup> His attitude towards metaphysics as an expression of the will to power is consistent with his earlier view, but his approach is less polemic now.

The idea of non-willing first appears in Heidegger's *Country Path Conversations* (1944-46). Non-willing could mean either actively and thus willfully renouncing the will or non-willing as releasement (Heidegger 2010, 69; GA 77, 106). The former would be slightly inconsistent: 'Wrestling' and 'overcoming' are expressions of the will, a counter-will that remains committed to willful thinking.<sup>12</sup> Hence only the latter can be an option. Heidegger thus takes the less polemic approach of releasement in order not to be caught up in willful thinking again. Non-willing as releasement is a peculiar notion in that it is "a third possibility beyond either actively willing or being swept along involuntarily by the technological will to will"; namely, "one of twisting free of such dichotomies within the domain of the will by way of cor-responsive meditative thinking," Bret Davis comments (2007, 180). In line with this 'third possibility,' Gavin Rae further elaborates that the will-less thinking is not devoid of all will but is a special type of will:

The willing of non-willing is not self-centered, closed and dominant but open, expansive and free that releases thought towards being [...] Rather than try to impose itself on being or reveal being in a predetermined manner, non-willing wills thought to open itself to being in a way that releases itself to, and so takes its cue from, being. Non-willing is, therefore, a continuous process, rather than an end to be attained, whereby thinking brings itself to a different intentional approach towards being than that constitutive of metaphysics. (2013, 253)

*Gelassenheit*, as opposed to non-willing as willfully renouncing will, is a peculiar free and expansive will. In this way, "thinking learns to renounce the aggressive willing of metaphysics through a letting-be of being, learns to listen to being, and answers being's call in accordance with being's releasement toward thought." (Rae 2013, 254) This explanation of releasement is again closer to an 'image' than

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<sup>11</sup> In *Country Path Conversations*, Heidegger argues that waiting is not awaiting: the former does not have an object but "lets representing entirely alone"; whereas awaiting "already links itself with re-presenting and what is re-presented," namely, relating to some object (2010, 75; GA 77, 115). Only waiting can release Dasein into the realm of openness.

<sup>12</sup> As I mentioned above, Heidegger already makes a similar point in *Contributions*. That is, the overcoming of metaphysics is not an 'opposition' to metaphysics, which would bring metaphysics back into play. The task is to overcome metaphysics out of its ground.



a concrete account, just as what Heidegger calls the 'leap' in his middle period. It is not clear whether it can happen or not.

So far, by explaining what metaphysics means for Heidegger at different stages of his philosophy, I have shown the reason why Heidegger has different attitudes towards metaphysics, as deconstruction, as overcoming and as releasement. Dominique Janicaud has likewise identified Heidegger's early and middle attitudes toward metaphysics as deconstruction and overcoming metaphysics, respectively; and although he has characterized Heidegger's late approach to being as twisting free [*Verwindung*] from metaphysics, this is not very different from releasement (Janicaud 1994, 1). What Janicaud has not explained, however, is how and why Heidegger develops from one stage to the next. He has only observed that the transition from destruction to overcoming has to do with Heidegger's developed understanding and approach to being and with a certain polemical attitude inherent in the expression of deconstruction (1994, 4-5). But these are not decisive reason why Heidegger changes his approach. As I have shown, the main reason for this move has to do with his evolved understanding of metaphysics from a problematic way of thinking to an expression of the will to power. The transition from overcoming to twisting free from metaphysics in late Heidegger is even more obscure in Janicaud, since he seems to simply claim that overcoming is a 'forerunner' of twisting free (1994, 7). Here, he does not seem to have argued for the inner development of Heidegger's philosophy at all.

At this point, the question returns once again: what kind of philosophy emerges when we are released from metaphysics? Is there any philosophy left at all? In this regard, Heidegger proposes an additional, more constructive attitude towards metaphysics and its basis. He writes:

The recovery [*Verwindung*] from metaphysics initially appears to be an overcoming that merely brings exclusively metaphysical representation behind it, so as to lead thinking into the free realm attained by recovery from the essence of metaphysics. But in this recovery, the enduring truth of the metaphysics that has seemingly been rejected first returns explicitly as the now appropriated essence of metaphysics. (Heidegger 1998, 314; GA 9, 244)

That is to say, what he seeks to regain in recovering from metaphysics is a different, more constructive approach to its roots, i.e., a way to think being which he calls recollecting [*andenken*] of being – which the metaphysical tradition necessarily fails. In other words, his initial intention to move beyond metaphysics eventually gives way to the wish to recollect a certain original metaphysical impulse to do justice to being. In a sense, then, metaphysics is 'incorporated,' and its partial truth vindicated (Heidegger 1998, 91-92; 77).

Later in "On the Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics," he maintains that "the step back out of metaphysics into its essential nature [of being] requires a duration." (Heidegger 1969, 51; GA 11, 60) By stepping out of the metaphysical tradition, Heidegger claims to turn to an original, non-metaphysical attitude towards being. As Günter Figal puts it, there is no post-metaphysical

[*nachmetaphysisch*] thinking in Heidegger but only a paradoxical non-metaphysical metaphysical thinking [*die Paradoxie eines nitchtmetaphysischen metaphysischen Denkens*] (1997, 459, 464). Figal's target here is perhaps Habermas (1992), who famously defends the project of post-metaphysical thinking.

But what exactly is this non-metaphysical metaphysical thinking? It might appear as if Heidegger returns to his early position regarding metaphysics, namely, aiming at a different kind of metaphysics, albeit no longer via the fundamental ontology of Dasein. This is not the case. In his late philosophy, this so-called different kind of thinking metaphysics itself is ambiguous. Apparently, the aim is not to re-establish metaphysics or to come up with an alternative metaphysical paradigm, as other 20<sup>th</sup>-century philosophers have tried to do. This is more so since the meaning of '*Verwindung*' is ambiguous: on the one hand, it can mean to 'recover' or 'regain something,' on the other hand, it also means to 'get over something.' This is one reason why Peter Trawny holds that Heidegger's philosophy is in the transition of stepping out of metaphysics and seeking for another beginning (2019, 103-104).

In any case, I take Heidegger's desire to be released from metaphysics to be an expression of his wrestling with the will to power and, to a certain extent, his intention to recover a genuine sense in which some aspects of metaphysics seem legitimate and not compromised by scientific and technological thinking, to be the defining features of the late phase of Heidegger's philosophy.

It should be stressed, however, that the dynamic relation between will-driven metaphysics and true, will-less non-metaphysical metaphysical thinking does not go away. Besides the 'technical difficulty' of leaping into this realm of willlessness, dwelling in being cannot be a stable condition, a permanent possession. At best, we stay both near and far from being. The problem of subjectivism also remains. Metaphysical and representational thinking cannot be eliminated, simply because thinking is unavoidably representational. Heidegger therefore engages in a struggle with metaphysics that he cannot win.

Heidegger himself acknowledges subjective willful thinking. Dasein can both dwell near being itself and stay far from it, albeit in different respects. We always engage in the interplay of willing and non-willing. In the "Letter on Humanism," he refers this idea to the ek-sistence of Dasein:

Forgetting the truth of being in favor of the pressing throng of beings unthought in their essence is what 'falling' [*Verfallen*] means in *Being and Time* [...] the terms 'authenticity' and 'inauthenticity,' which are used in a provisional fashion, do not imply a moral-existential or an 'anthropological' distinction but rather a relation that [...] has yet to be thought for the first time, an 'ecstatic' relation of the essence of the human being to the truth of being. But this relation is as it is not by reason of ek-sistence; on the contrary, the essence of ek-sistence is destined existentially-ecstatically from the essence of the truth of being. (Heidegger 1998, 253; GA 9, 163-164)

In the same vein, Werner Marx likewise suggests the 'dual-state' of dwelling,

## What Is Metaphysics? Heidegger's Evolving Account of Metaphysics

What may in the end prove to be the truth of being is that being in its immeasurable richness grants the world as creative *and* uncreative, the thing as worldly *and* substantial, man as open to the world *and* subjective, and holds them together in their manifold relations. The true concern of a thinking that carries on would then be the concrete demonstration of these relations. (1971, 225-256)

Eventually, Heidegger's philosophy as a philosophy of being includes both an ongoing struggle with the 'problematic metaphysics' and an attempt to form at least the idea of gaining access to being via and beyond traditional metaphysics. Only by the former can the latter emerge.

### 7. Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined Heidegger's engagement with metaphysics and his attitude towards it at the different stages of his philosophy. The aim is not to present an exhaustive account of Heidegger's writings on metaphysics but to sketch the changes and inner connections in the development of his reading of metaphysics, and therefore, in the course of his path of thinking itself. Specifically, the early Heidegger holds that metaphysics is a representation of the totality of things as being present-at-hand, and in his middle period, it is further characterized as subjective representational thinking. But even if his own fundamental ontology is a genuine and primordial approach to being, it is somehow also a theory, belonging to representational thinking. This 'theoretical impasse' motivates him to take metaphysics as something practical, i.e., an expression of the will to power. But his attempt to overcome metaphysics in 1930s is a willful act too, i.e., a counter will. And his approach to the origin of metaphysics remains an 'image' or provision, something more mysterious than concrete. His later expression of releasing from metaphysics has a similar problem. Lastly, his attempt to recover from metaphysics does not tell us much either, simply because one cannot overcome metaphysics without re-establishing it again and again, at least as long as one keeps philosophizing. Heidegger cannot give up his ongoing engagement with the problematic tradition of metaphysics, because he takes it to be an essential expression of the will to power, which belongs to Dasein. Metaphysics, for Heidegger, is thus a mode of Dasein. To a certain extent, Heidegger's own approach to the question of being can be called metaphysical, too, despite his anti-metaphysical polemic. All the complex and continual engagement with metaphysics shows that Heidegger is always concerned with the problem of metaphysics and its relation to being.

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