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Expressivism and Alternative Normative Concepts

Matti EKLUND* 

ABSTRACT. In recent work – primarily the book *Choosing Normative Concepts* (2017) – I have presented what I see as a new, significant problem regarding normativity. Briefly, it has to do with the existence of alternative normative concepts. What if I know that I ought to ϕ , but at the same time I know that I ought* to ψ , where ψ is an incompatible course of action and the concept OUGHT* is an alternative OUGHT-like concept? I think that this kind of question raises many different issues. But one thing it does is to present problems for what I call ardent realism, a view which I believe often underlies what realists about normativity say and hold. Several theorists have suggested that expressivism somehow provides a way out of the problem I present, and my main aim here is to evaluate this suggestion.¹ My conclusions are negative. Expressivism does not provide a way out. Or, more carefully: it does not provide a way out not already afforded by other views, and that has not already been discussed in the context of discussing such other views.

Keywords: Ardent realism, normativity, alternative concepts, expressivism, truth

1. Introduction

In recent work – primarily the book *Choosing Normative Concepts* (2017) – I have presented what I see as a new, significant problem regarding normativity. I will describe the problem in detail in sections 2 and 3, but briefly, it has to do with the existence of alternative normative concepts. What if I know that I ought to ϕ , but at the same time I know that I ought* to ψ , where ψ is an incompatible course of action and the concept ought* is an alternative ought-like concept? I think that this kind of question raises many different issues. But one thing it does is to present

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problems for what I call *ardent realism*, a view which I believe often underlies what realists about normativity say and hold.

Several theorists have suggested that expressivism somehow provides a way out of the problem I present, and my main aim here is to evaluate this suggestion.¹ My conclusions are negative. Expressivism does not provide a way out. Or, more carefully: it does not provide a way out not already afforded by other views, and that I have not already discussed in the context of discussing such other views. I am skeptical of there being any reasonable way out at all, but that is a bigger issue.

My view, that expressivism is unhelpful, may seem trivially correct given the brief summary I have given. The main target of my argument is ardent realism, something associated with realism about normativity, and expressivism is standardly seen as an alternative to realism. But, as I will get to, what distinguishes ardent realism from other kinds of normative realism is a certain kind of commitment to objectivity in normative matters, and it is at least not out of the question to hold that an expressivist view can be appealed to in support of this kind of objectivity, despite how expressivism in other ways is in opposition to realism. I think the view that expressivism might help is false, but the view is at least not an obvious non-starter.

Much in this introduction is abstract, and cryptic for anyone who is not yet familiar with the issues I bring up. In what way is ought* an alternative to ought? What is ardent realism and what is the kind of objectivity at issue? Let me, as already promised, start by explaining the problem I want to focus on in more detail.

2. Conflicting alternatives

Let me start by introducing the notion of normative role. “Normative role”, as I use the label, is a covering term for whatever it is about the use of normative expressions that distinguishes their use from the use of non-normative expressions. One view on normative role and reference is that if two concepts are associated with the same normative role, they have the same reference – ascribe the same property. This is a view one might accept or reject. Let two normative expressions or concepts be *conflicting alternatives* if and only if they have the same normative role but differ in what property they ascribe.²

¹ Theorists who have done so in print are Golub (2022) and Köhler (2019), the latter in a review of Eklund (2017).

² I adopt the nice label “conflicting alternatives” from McDaniel (2020), but McDaniel goes on to explicate the notion in a different way.

Suppose there are conflicting alternatives. Suppose, more specifically, that our concept ought has a conflicting alternative, ought*, and that one ought to ϕ but one ought* to ψ . What then to do? Of course, I can tell myself that surely I ought to do what I ought to do. But it may equally be true that I ought* to do what I ought* to do, which is what member of a community of “ought*“-users would tell themselves. What we want, one might say, is a reason to go by what we ought to do rather than what we ought* to do. But the problem is that even if we can tell ourselves that there are such *reasons*, there can be *reasons** to go by what we ought* to do. And so on and so forth.

One way to dramatize the problem is by imagining a *-community, not using our concepts but the alternative *-concepts. Even if we know perfectly well what is right, what ought to be done, and what one has reason to do, they might know equally well what is *right**, what *ought** to be done, what one has *reason** to do, etc. In terms of tracking truth, the communities are doing equally well: we are only tracking different truths. But they differ in that a community guided by considerations regarding what is right, etc., will be led to behave differently from a community guided by considerations regarding what is right*. We might find what they do abhorrent, if abhorrent things are among the things that it is right* to do; but they can react the same way to us.

The problem is that, intuitively, there is an *alarming symmetry* (to use Tristram McPherson’s useful phrase³). When we seek to compare the different normative concepts, the way to do so seems to be by employing other normative concepts. But since the issue affects them too – if normative concepts generally have conflicting alternatives, they too have conflicting alternatives – there is no way to get around the problem.

So far, I have not said anything to support the assumption that there really are possible conflicting alternatives of the kind indicated. So for all I have said, one can resist the problem by just denying that presupposition. One might say that normative role fixes reference, so that it is impossible that expressions have the same normative role but differ in reference. Introducing a bit of terminology that I use in (2017): one might say that the relevant concepts are *referentially normative*.⁴ What is more, I have not said anything about the extent of any supposed conflict. If the conflict only arises in very special cases – if cases where what I ought to do isn’t exactly what I ought* to do are few and far between and seemingly not of great importance – it may not be of great significance. There is a problem only if the conflict is more extensive.

³ McPherson (2020).

⁴ There are many complications regarding how exactly to formulate the idea that I here put in terms of normative role determining reference. See Eklund (2017), ch. 3, for discussion of some of these complications.

Let me briefly indicate some reasons one might have for thinking that normative role does not fix reference. One important point is that prominent theories of how the reference of normative terms is determined invoke other factors besides normative role. One example is how Cornell realists appeal to causal facts; another example is how neo-descriptivists appeal to folk theories linking normative terms to descriptive terms.⁵ Another point is that, whatever in the end should be said, it can seem mysterious how normative role could fix reference: how can facts about action-guiding or motivating role do that kind of reference-fixing job?

However, suppose that the considerations just mentioned are on the wrong track, and normative role does fix reference. Then the problem, in the form in which I have raised it, is avoided. I raised the problem in terms of conflicting alternatives, and there are then no conflicting alternatives. But one can still worry, and seemingly reasonably, that problems similar in spirit remain. In (2017), I brought up the issue of similar problems that remain: the problem of *embarrassment of riches*.⁶ For example, consider an alternative community like the *-community considered earlier in that what falls under their positive normative concepts is different from what falls under ours, but is unlike the *-community in that their normative concepts are in no straightforward way counterparts of our normative concepts. This community is then more exotic. But still their system of normative concepts does seem to be in an extended sense a conflicting alternative to ours. Upon realizing that there are these different systems of normative concepts, one can wish to ask oneself which system of normative concepts to employ. The difficulties in actually raising this question mirror difficulties already brought up: no matter how we try to raise the question we will use normative concepts from one or other of the systems, but then we fail to state the question.

The remarks in the two previous paragraphs speak to the question of what to say about the very existence of conflicting alternatives. I have mentioned reasons to believe that conflicting alternatives do exist, and I have also indicated how the problem at issue might arise even if in fact there are no conflicting alternatives as characterized. These remarks also apply to concerns about the extent of the conflict. Arguments to the effect that normative role does not determine reference function, *mutatis mutandis*, as arguments to the effect that normative role does not significantly constrain reference. Arguments to the effect that versions of the problem remain even if normative role actually determines reference also function as arguments to the effect that the problems remain even if normative role significantly constrains reference.

⁵ See Boyd (1988) and Frank Jackson (1998), respectively. For discussion of these views on reference, see Eklund (2017), ch. 2.

⁶ I will stick with that label here. But North-Concar (2024) introduces the better label *revenge pluralism*.

3. Ardent realism

So far I have been concerned to lay out a possible problem, and to make the case that it is plausible that there is a problem there. But I have not said anything about exactly who the supposed problem is a problem for. Even if it is plausible that there is a potential problem here, it is not clear that everyone needs to regard it as such. It is certainly open to someone to hold that it is just a fact that there are these alternative concepts, that there are facts both about what ought to be done and about what ought* to be done, and that the supposed “further” question just is a chimera. In fact, this may be my own view. The supposed problem is a problem for theorists who seem committed to holding something else.

Realism – moral, or more generally *normative*, realism – as standardly characterized in the literature says that normative sentences are truth-apt, and that some atomic normative sentences are objectively, mind-independently true. It is occasionally added that they must be true not just in a minimalist sense. Realism as thus characterized – call it *mere* realism – is perfectly compatible with there being both objective ought-facts and objective ought*-facts, and with there being nothing to break the seeming alarming symmetry. So the supposed problem I have raised is not a problem for mere realism.

But I think it is intuitive, or at least intuitive for many realists, that some actions, or states of affairs, are, so to speak, favored from the point of view of reality. This intuitive thought is impressionistic and inchoate. However, it is clear enough what is intended that we can see that the problem sketched is a problem for the intuitive thought. One might have thought it obviously sufficient for an action being favored from the point of view of reality if it is mind-independently the case that it *ought* to be performed. But if other actions are such that they ought* to be performed, then what is to say that reality prefers the actions that ought to be performed to the actions that ought* to be performed? One word that plays the relevant role for one community picks out one property; a word that plays that role for another community picks out another property. What is to say that reality favors one over the other? In my (2017) I called a realist who wants to respect the intuitive thought at issue an *ardent realist*.⁷ The problem described is a potential problem for the ardent realist (potentially among other theorists).

The ardent realist wants to say that there’s more to normativity in the world than that there’s what’s right and what’s right* and that’s that. Somehow, some normative concepts/properties are, in some relevant way, *privileged*. But what might this privilege amount to? “Privilege” is here just a label. Use of this label is

⁷ Eklund (2017), p. 1.

compatible with skepticism about whether it has content, and there is good reason to worry that it does not in fact have any content. If the concept privilege is normative, then will it not have a conflicting alternative, so that even if our concepts are privileged, theirs are privileged*? But if a concept does have a conflicting alternative like this, does it really express what we are seeking? Let me elaborate. Here is a dilemma. Either privilege is a descriptive concept or it is a normative concept (where “descriptive” is meant to contrast with “normative”). If it is taken to be a normative concept – e.g., “the privileged concepts are the ones we *ought* to employ” – the alarming symmetry arises also with respect to privilege. Corresponding to privilege there is privilege*, understood in the obvious way. Suppose then that privilege is instead a descriptive concept. A first concern is that appeal to privilege does not seem to address what is at issue. When I decide whether to use ought or ought* to guide my actions, what I am wondering is not what “is F”, where “F” expresses some descriptive concept. A second concern is that the issue of alternatives does not go away. Suppose I propose to identify privilege as some descriptive concept D. What can be said, even in principle, to an objector who instead proposed to identify it as D*? (It might be tempting, of course, to fall back on claims of the form *we ought to care about D rather than D**, but given the essential employment of “ought”, this is obviously unhelpful.)

What can the ardent realist say in response to the challenge presented (henceforth: *the alternative concepts challenge*)? One option is to employ *the direct strategy*. The direct strategy involves saying that it is possible to make adequate sense of the notion of privilege. This involves saying that even if there are alternative concepts as described, the dilemma outlined can be avoided. Another option is to employ *the metasemantic strategy*. This is the strategy, alluded to earlier, of appealing to theories about reference-determination in order to rule out the possibility of there being seriously conflicting alternatives of the kind characterized. The idea is that the relevant concepts are referentially normative. The discussion in my (2017) focuses chiefly on the metasemantic strategy. The main reason for this focus is that I am pessimistic about the direct strategy. If there really are the conflicting alternatives mentioned, then, for the reasons given, it seems impossible even to state the issue of which concepts are privileged. This is of course not to say that the metasemantic strategy actually works. In the previous section, I mentioned some problems raised.

A strategy distinct from both strategies mentioned is to allow (contra the metasemantic strategy) that there are the alternative concepts at issue, and to allow (contra the direct strategy) that no relevant notion of privilege can be expressed – but insist that there is such a thing as privilege although it is ineffable.⁸ However,

⁸ See Eklund (2017), pp. 23ff.

I mention this *ineffability strategy* only for the sake of completeness. It does seem rather desperate. It involves saying that there is an issue there, but it is absolutely impossible to say – and hence, presumably, to *think* – what the issue is.

4. Expressivism and objective backing

What separates ardent realism from mere realism is a yearning for certain kind of objectivity. Mere realism is compatible with a kind of what I have dubbed alarming symmetry; the ardent realist wants to say that reality itself favors some actions over others, and it is not merely that some actions ought to be performed, others ought* to be performed, and that is that.

Let me call that which distinguishes ardent realism from mere realism the idea of *objective backing*. I have emphasized that realism does not by itself imply that there is objective backing: one can be a realist without being an ardent realist. Can one also be “ardent” without being a realist? That is, can one accept the claims that distinguish ardent realism from mere realism without accepting everything that is part of realism? It seems that this is principle possible.⁹

Consider expressivism. Expressivism, as it tends to be discussed, is the conjunction of two claims:

(E1) Moral thought is non-representational.

(E2) The meaning of a moral sentence is a function of the role it plays as a device for expressing moral thought.¹⁰

As is well-known, there are good questions that can be raised about what (E1) comes to. On a natural understanding of whether some thought or sentence is representational, this is a matter of whether it has truth-conditions, but many contemporary expressivists of course agree that moral thoughts have truth-conditions. And if one understands (E1) to mean merely that moral thoughts have truth-conditions in virtue of some more fundamental, non-representational features, then one seems to lose something distinctive of expressivism: for then for example anyone who gives a conceptual-role account of the contents of moral thoughts risks ending up being classified as an expressivist. But even if questions can be raised about (E1) I will treat it as sufficiently clear to proceed.

As I will elaborate on below, it seems that one can – at least in principle – be an expressivist, while still holding that somehow, some normative concepts are privileged in the (elusive) sense at issue here. If so, one holds on to the idea of

⁹ See the discussion of ardent non-realism in section 8.3 of Eklund (2017).

¹⁰ This exact characterization is quoted from Perez Carballo (2014).

objective backing even if one is not an actual realist. Maybe distinctly expressivist resources can be what are needed to show that there is something breaking any seeming alarming symmetry (the direct strategy) or that expressions with the same normative role are guaranteed to have the same reference (the metasemantic strategy).

Now, objective backing, while explained only impressionistically, was explained in terms of, for example, what *reality favors*. That kind of slogan, impressionistic though it may be, may be thought to rule out expressivism. It may be thought that for *reality* to favor ϕ -ing, there must be mind-independent facts such that given those facts ϕ -ing is favored, and this kind of reliance on mind-independent facts is incompatible with expressivism. But I think that whatever in the end should be said about expressivism and objective backing, a quick dismissal such as this would be mistaken. To use a relatively simple example, consider the stance of R. M. Hare.¹¹ Hare is not exactly an expressivist, since he focuses not on attitude expressed but on prescriptivity, but his view is close enough to contemporary expressivism to be relevant. Like the expressivist, the prescriptivist Hare takes moral language to be characterized by its non-descriptive function. On Hare's conception, moral judgments are prescriptive, universalizable and overriding. On the basis of these general supposed features of the nature of moral judgments, Hare seeks to derive a version of consequentialism. One may think that if indeed Hare's attempted derivation succeeds, consequentialism has some sort of objective backing – consequentialism is shown to be true by impersonal considerations endorsable from any perspective – and consequentialism is in this sense favored by reality, even though there is no appeal to what independent moral facts are like anywhere in the story.

Of course, objections to Hare's reasoning can be raised. And even assuming that Hare's reasoning is cogent as far as it goes, the conclusion is only that "moral" judgments, with their specific features, have the features described by him. It is in the spirit of the alternative concepts challenge to raise questions like: what relevantly privileges the making of moral judgments over making alternative ("moral*") kinds of judgments? The point of bringing up Hare is just to show how an expressivist, or a similar kind of theorist, might reason.

So the expressivist may be as concerned as the traditional realist to defend that which separates ardent realism from mere realism. She may be as interested in securing objective backing. There is nothing in her view that immediately rules out objective backing.

¹¹ See Hare (1981), and, for helpful commentary, Sinnott-Armstrong (2001). Hare is discussed in Eklund (2017), p. 153.

One might then wonder: might the expressivist somehow or other be in a *better* position than a traditional realist when it comes to responding to the alternative concepts challenge and securing objective backing? From this point on, I will address this question in some detail. Let me first bring up, only to set aside, an obviously mistaken idea. Having done so, I will turn to more promising suggestions.

Some critics of expressivism have in different ways argued that the expressivist is committed to accepting subjectivist-sounding claims of the form

(1) ϕ -ing is good iff I approve of ϕ -ing.

There are prominent responses to such criticisms. Theorists like, for example, Simon Blackburn and Mark Schroeder have convincingly argued that expressivism is by no means committed to such a thing. A central part of the reply involves emphasizing that for the expressivist, claims of the form (1) are themselves normative claims, to affirm (1) is to affirm a particular kind of subjectivist normative claim, and expressivism is itself a metanormative theory, silent on normative claims.¹²

The mistaken idea that I want to set aside is that these points also help when it comes to objective backing. Even if arguments like those of Blackburn and Schroeder are perfectly cogent, all that they show is that the expressivist can mimic what I have called mere realism in a particular way: she can affirm mind-independence in the way the mere realist can. But a central point of the alternative concepts challenge is that mere realism is not sufficient for ardent realism. Analogously, securing the result that the expressivist can mimic what the mere realist says is not sufficient for her to vindicate the idea of objective backing.¹³

It may be suggested that just as the expressivist can mimic the *mere* realist, she can mimic the *ardent* realist. That is, just as she can get to say the characteristic things the mere realist says, she can get to say the characteristic things the ardent realist wants to say. But there are general problems regarding such a strategy. While it is clear what the mere realist wants to say, part of the very point of the alternative normative concepts challenge is that it just is not clear what can be sufficient for ardent realism. But then it is not clear what the expressivist could reasonably seek to mimic.¹⁴

¹² See, e.g., Blackburn (1999) and Schroeder (2014).

¹³ Compare too Golub (2022), p. 482.

¹⁴ Also, if the aim is to actually *defend* what I have called objective backing, merely *mimicking* what the ardent realist says is not obviously enough. Compare what is going on in the case of mere realism. The typical expressivist does not want to defend mere realism; she only wants to say some characteristic things the mere realist says.

I do offer metaphorical and impressionistic descriptions of what ardent realism demands. I speak in terms of, for example, what reality favors. An expressivist can perhaps say that she can mimic *that*. But an obvious problem with such a strategy is that it is in the nature of these metaphorical and impressionistic descriptions that they in principle allow for all sorts of different readings. At one extreme, one can hold that for reality to favor ϕ -ing just is for it to be the case that one objectively ought to ϕ . If so, then so long as the expressivist can get to say “one objectively ought to ϕ ”, she can say that which characterizes ardent realism, namely that there are some things that reality favors. But expressivism is hardly needed for this. If the talk of what reality favors can be cashed in terms of what one objectively ought to do, then that is enough to defuse the alternative concepts challenge. For the supposed fact that there also are objective facts about what one ought* to do does not in any way problematize, and is not meant to problematize, the idea that there are objective facts about what one ought to do.

Let me now turn to a different kind of suggestion. This is one I will discuss at some more length: it can be thought that there can be something about expressivism that makes the metasemantic response more plausible than it otherwise would be.

First, it can be held that expressivism makes it more plausible than it otherwise would be to take normative concepts, or at least thin, unadulterated ones, to be in some relevant sense fully characterized by their normative roles, in a way that helps the metasemantic strategy.¹⁵ To take just one example, one of the most prominent expressivists, Allan Gibbard, stresses what he calls the “last ought before action”.¹⁶ When all the facts are in and one asks oneself what to do, this can equally well be expressed as *what ought I to do?*, in one recognizable sense of “ought”. It may be thought that Gibbard’s “last ought before action” is exactly the kind of concept upon whose existence the metasemantic strategy relies: it is a concept that does not have any possible alternatives of the relevant kind. The idea of engaging in normative thought but not having a concept with this role does not make sense, someone might say.

However, *none* of the concerns raised regarding the metasemantic strategy concerns the *plausibility* of there being a concept like this. Perhaps there is such a concept, and perhaps Gibbard has identified it. However, this clearly does not amount to granting that all concepts with this normative role must have the same reference. Whether all thinkers capable of normative thought must possess a concept associated with R is one thing; whether those concepts all have the same *reference* is another.

¹⁵ About “thin, unadulterated”: what is suggested in the main text is much more plausible regarding so-called thin normative concepts such as OUGHT and RIGHT than regarding so-called thick normative concepts like GENEROUS and BRUTAL.

¹⁶ Gibbard (2003).

But, second, the expressivist might be thought to have something to say also about the issue of sameness of reference. It can be suggested that the expressivist somehow has special reason to think that even if one can speak of the reference of (thin, unadulterated) normative expressions, the referential features of such normative expressions are mere reflections of their normative roles, whence the idea of expressions with the same normative roles but with different reference is misguided. However, how exactly could it be the case that all concepts associated with the same normative role have the same reference? And what role might expressivism play there?

One way for all concepts associated with the same normative role to have the same reference is if they are all indeterminate in the same way. In the extreme case, all such concepts could be indeterminate among an extremely wide variety of candidate referents. But I take it that anyone who wants to secure objective backing would want to hold that the reference of the relevant concepts is relatively determinate.

One possibility might be that something *about the world*, independently of our attitudes, makes this the case. There is perhaps a question about whether appeal to something like this even is available to the expressivist. But even if it is, it is hardly specific to the expressivist, so appeal to this is not a distinctly expressivist strategy.

Another possibility is that something about the nature and structure of the normative role associated with, for example, ought makes it the case that every concept associated with this normative role has the same, relatively determinate reference. Compare again how, according to Hare, the prescriptivity, universalizability and overridingness jointly determine reference. But first, again this strategy does not seem specific to expressivism. Second, it seems that any strategy of this kind has a hope of succeeding only if the normative role in question has a fairly *specific* nature, as for Hare it does. Any appeal to such specific normative roles positively invites embarrassment of riches worries: for it is then natural to wonder about concepts with alternative normative roles, not having exactly this specific set of features but instead with a different set of features.

There is a third, quite different route, which appeals to considerations about the nature of truth. Appealing to a form of minimalism about truth, the expressivist can say that ““p” is true” expresses the same mental state as “p”, and then if “one ought to ϕ ” expresses approval of ϕ -ing so does ““one ought to ϕ ” is true”. And if “one ought* to ϕ ” expresses approval of ϕ -ing so does ““one ought* to ϕ ” is true”. But given this, then a speaker is in a position to affirm that “one ought* to ϕ ” is true exactly when she approves of ϕ -ing in the right way – which also is when she appropriately judges that one ought to ϕ . It seems that this is a way for the expressivist to arrive at the conclusion that what one ought* to do is exactly what one ought to do. But

even granted all this, it seems quite useless in the present context. It only reflects that a speaker expresses approval in the same way both when using ought and when using ought*. Why think that this has anything to do with securing objective backing?

5. Golub on expressivism and objective backing

Thus far I have discussed in general terms the possibility that expressivism might secure objective backing. In general terms, the main points have been these. Some suggestions along these lines are clearly mistaken: they do not even promise to secure what they are being claimed to secure. A paradigmatic example is the suggestion that the expressivist's strategy for getting to say some specific things that the realist characteristically says might help. Other suggestions are not so clearly mistaken qua general strategies, but they are not distinctively expressivist suggestions. A realist might say the same sort of thing, and just as plausibly.

Thus far my discussion of expressivism has been conducted in general terms. In this section I turn to Camil Golub (2022), which argues at some length that expressivism helps secure objective backing.¹⁷ Golub's overall conclusion is that "Quasi-naturalism [Golub's favoured brand of expressivist quasi-realism] can vindicate ardent realism in the face of Eklund's challenge by ruling out the possibility of alternative authoritatively normative concepts".¹⁸ This is obviously very much in line with the expressivist strategy already discussed. I will not attempt to provide an overall summary of what Golub says but only discuss the parts of his discussion that may seem directly relevant to the preceding. In brief, my conclusions regarding Golub will be of the same kind as the general conclusions already drawn regarding the appeal to expressivism. Some suggestions emerging from his discussion seem mistaken. Other suggestions seem clearly better but do not seem to amount to any advance over what already the non-expressivist realist might suggest.

Golub favors a Kratzer-style contextualist semantics for "ought" of a kind that has become standard.¹⁹ One aspect of this contextualist semantics is that there is an ordering source which ranks worlds by how well they satisfy certain standards. When it comes to the relevant kinds of normative uses of "ought", the ordering source has to do with "acceptable standards" of practical reasoning. Summarizing his view,

¹⁷ Golub's expressivism differs in some way from other kinds, but I think the differences are of little consequence as far as the general issue of objective backing is concerned, so I will abstract away from some details regarding Golub's positive view.

¹⁸ Golub (2022), p. 485. Golub speaks of the authoritatively normative in order to distinguish the normativity at issue from (e.g.) the normativity of predicates pertaining to etiquette.

¹⁹ See Kratzer (2012). Golub specifically relies on Ridge (2014).

he says that “Normative realists can adopt this semantic model and claim that the ordering source in authoritatively normative contexts of use consists in objectively acceptable standards of practical reasoning...” and that on his hybrid expressivist, view an “ought”-sentence such as “You ought to give a large part of your income to charity” will, “if used in an authoritatively normative sense”, express “a relational mental state comprising a normative perspective and the belief that donating a large part of your income to charity is highly ranked by any acceptable standard of practical reasoning”.²⁰

The notion of an “acceptable standard” looms large. There is an obvious possible concern regarding Golub’s reliance on such a notion. Can’t the alternative concepts challenge be raised also regarding the notion of “acceptable standard”? If it cannot then certainly anyone who seeks to secure objective backing, whether realist or expressivist, can appeal to that fact when responding to the alternative concepts challenge. But the alternative concepts challenge does not hinge on specific features of “ought” so there is no reason to think “acceptable standard” is any better off.

A central argument that Golub provides is in the form of a dilemma. Either our concepts and some given alternative concepts are similar enough to be in “normative competition” or they are not. If they are not similar enough to be in normative competition, these alternative concepts are simply not relevant to consider. So suppose the concepts are in normative competition. In this case, Golub says,

Determining the correct reference of “ought,” both for us and for the other community, now becomes an internal normative question, to be settled with the tools of normative theorizing. That is, we can make a first-order normative case for why our claims involving “ought” are true and the claims of the other community are false, and this is in effect to argue that normative reality privileges our use of “ought”.²¹

Golub emphasizes what can be *settled* with the tools of normative theorizing. “Settle” is factive. If we can settle that p with the tools of normative theorizing, then it is true that p. But then I do not see what is lost by instead formulating matters directly in terms of what is true and not. The way to put Golub’s point is then: our claims involving “ought” are true and the other community’s claims involving (their) “ought” are false. But once matters are put this way, the question is: why would it be so? The same options as were discussed at the end of the last section are again

²⁰ Golub (2022), p. 488.

²¹ Golub (2022), p. 493f.

the natural suggestions, and the same concerns as before are relevant. If the reason our claims are true and theirs are false is because that's just how the world is, the idea is not distinctly expressivist (and one might even wonder whether this route is available to the expressivist). If the reason has to do with the nature and structure of the normative role associated with ought, the same remarks as above are apt. And lastly, if the idea is to appeal to minimalism, it seems we have left objective backing behind, for the same reasons as mentioned above.

Maybe, in light of Golub's emphasis on normative theorizing and making a first-order case, the idea is that the reason our "ought"-claims are true and their claims are false is that this is what first-order inquiry tells us. The idea would be that while a natural view might be that it is because of what it is true and false that inquiry (conducted properly, and given the right circumstances) yields what it does, this can be turned on its head. What inquiry (conducted properly, etc.) yields determines what is true and false and not vice versa. Given this reversal, this strategy is different from one that simply appeals to what the world is like.

What should one say about this strategy? Distinguish between two different versions of the idea that what inquiry yields determines what is true and what is false. On the one hand, there is a relativist version of the view according to which the inquiry conducted by different inquirers yields different truths, and hence the truth is relative to different inquirers. On the other hand, there is a non-relativist version, according to which all inquiry meeting the relevant conditions yields the same truths. It is the latter, non-relativist possibility that would be relevant to the idea objective backing. The relativist version is anathema to that idea. But it is hard to see how there could fail to be any sort of explanation of why all inquiry meeting relevant conditions would issue the same results. And if the explanation doesn't appeal to what the world is like, the natural thing to appeal to would be the normative role of ought and how that serves to determine reference. But that is again the same idea as before, and subject to the same worries.

6. Another route from the alternative concepts challenge to expressivism?

Thus far I have discussed, and criticized, the idea that expressivism helps secure what I have called objective backing in the face of the alternative concepts challenge, and that the alternative concepts challenge in that way helps motivate expressivism.

There is also a *very* different possible route from the alternative concepts challenge to expressivism. Assuming that there are the alternative normative concepts, along the lines of what I have discussed, it seems intuitively that after questions about

what ought to be done, what ought* to be done, etc. have been settled, there is somehow a remaining question, one that it is tempting to express in terms of *what to do*. Am I to let my actions be guided by ought-considerations, or by ought*-considerations, or...? Now, the locutions I just used – “what to do”, “am I to” – are somewhat special, and it is at least somewhat reasonable to suspect that these are just stylistic variations of corresponding locutions involving “ought”. If so, the questions described raise the very same issues as corresponding questions concerning what I ought to do: maybe I *ought* to be guided by ought-considerations, but at the same time I *ought** to be guided by ought*-considerations.

But suppose, as may be the case, that questions about “what to do” are not mere stylistic variations on corresponding ought-questions.

One possibility, even given this supposition, is that the alternative concepts challenge generalizes to the case of “what to do” even so. *What to do* is one thing but *what to do** is another. Even having settled what to do, I can reasonably wonder whether what to do* is something else, and this raises the same issues as were raised in the ought case.

However, one can also propose a kind of expressivism regarding “what to do”. The question of what to do corresponds to a decision rather than to a belief. Even if expressivism is not generally true of normative language, an expressivist construal of questions about “what to do” is correct. Asking whether to do what one ought to do or what one ought* to do does make sense – it is a matter of deciding to do one or the other. This suggestion can also be used to explain, for someone rejecting the idea of objective backing, why there intuitively is a further question remaining even after it has been settled what one ought to do, what one ought* to do, etc. The further question is simply the practical question of what to do. It is not a question of fact.²²

In principle, there is much to say about whether something like what has just been sketched this really is plausible, and, if so, about the details concerning the type of expressivism that is motivated through this kind of reasoning. All I wish to stress for present purposes is that what is now being considered is obviously very different from the idea that expressivism can help secure objective backing. Expressivism is explored as a response to the alternative concepts challenge, but in quite a different way.

²² What I am describing in the text is the kind of view that Justin Clarke-Doane (2020), ch. 6, and Risberg (2023) favor.

7. Concluding remarks

Here is what I take myself to have done here. First, I introduced the alternative concepts challenge and identified one specific target of the challenge: the so-called ardent realist. Then I turned to the possibility that expressivism might suggest a way out. An expressivist too might hold views threatened by the alternative concepts challenge: she might think our normative judgments have objective backing, in just the way the ardent realist thinks so. And the expressivist might perhaps be thought to have available an especially good strategy for securing objective backing even in light of the alternative concepts challenge. In the latter part of the paper I discussed this. My conclusions are negative. Some suggestions regarding what the special expressivist means might be are clearly mistaken. Others may be more promising but do not amount to any advance over what already the non-expressivist might say.

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The New Lexicon of the Anthropocene and Some Divergent Narratives

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ABSTRACT. Surprisingly, although the term “Anthropocene” belongs to a geological taxonomy, it was categorically rejected by the scientific community of geologists. Their verdict was that we cannot grant the human species a geological force. However, the wider group of Earth Sciences has proposed a conceptual scheme starting from the “Anthropocene” as a keyword and several narratives have been developed, the best known being that of climate change as an effect of human activities. But the new lexicon of the Anthropocene has been developed spectacularly in the humanities, so we can already talk about an environmental humanities focused on this topic. My goal in this paper is to clarify the epistemologically distinct ways in which these three frameworks of thought work narratively.

Keywords: Anthropocene, lexicon, narratives, geological taxonomy, Earth Sciences, Environmental Humanities

The Anthropocene lexicon and its uses

The term “Anthropocene” has been used in recent decades to designate the geological epoch we are currently living in, in the vocabulary of scientists, in philosophical and cultural narratives, and in specific contexts of common language. Since the debate is still ongoing, and the temptation to postpone a verdict on the legitimacy of this linguistic use is sometimes assumed¹, I will try to consider from

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¹ Carlos Santana, for instance, ultimately argued „that formal recognition of the Anthropocene should be indefinitely deferred” (Carlos Santana, “Waiting for the Anthropocene”, *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, 70, 2019, p. 1073).



a unitary and strongly philosophical perspective the various reasons invoked so that we can at least identify the main problems and categorical divergences at the scientific, philosophical and cultural levels.

Broadly speaking, we can identify three main divergent contexts in which the term “Anthropocene” is used in different narratives. First of all, although the term apparently belongs to a specifically geological taxonomy, it was ultimately rejected by the scientific community of geologists, but not by the wider group of Earth Sciences that gave it a privileged place in a conceptual scheme that describes natural phenomena in relation to anthropogenic effects, such as climate change. However, it is spectacular how this lexicon has been integrated into common language, the term “Anthropocene” becoming almost colloquial not only in popular science literature, but also in fields of citizen science, such as ecology, biology and conservation. The idea of the Anthropocene has proven all the more vigorous and expansive in the area of humanities, as well as in literary creativity, exciting the imagination to seek new exploratory science fiction adventures. Therefore, viewed with suspicion by geologists, the term “Anthropocene” is accepted by Earth scientists and friendly used by the humanities and literature.

Before going into the details of each of these approaches, it is necessary to clarify the sense in which we are talking about lexicon (lexicons) here. I have to mention from the very beginning that I am taking up the thesis developed by Thomas S. Kuhn in his later philosophy, when he tried to provide an answer to the challenges posed by the concept of paradigm and the idea of semantic incommensurability. Kuhn gave a new and complete definition:

A lexicon or lexical structure is the long-term product of tribal experience in the natural and social worlds, but its logical status, like that of word meanings in general, is that of convention. Each lexicon makes possible a corresponding form of life within which the truth or falsity of propositions may be both claimed and rationally justified, but the justification of lexicons or of lexical change can only be pragmatic.²

It is easy to recognize in this definition certain influences from the later Wittgenstein’s terminology³. A lexicon has the logical status of a convention and it

² Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Road Since Structure. Philosophical Essays, 1970-1993, with an Autobiographical Interview*, edited by James Conant and John Haugeland, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2000, p. 244.

³ See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, paragraph 241, where he asserts the idea of forms of life: “So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false? It is what human beings say that is true and false and they agree in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life” (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1953, p. 88).

is connected with a “form of life” as frame of reference within which the truth or falsity of different linguistic statements is claimed and rationally justified. But, on the other hand, Kuhn added, the justification of lexicons and of lexical change is a matter of pragmatic assessment. This means that a lexicon can’t be appraised just theoretically, but we need to consider the practical consequences.

Moreover, we accept that different cultures or different historical phases of the same culture are related with different lexicons and different uses of the same words. Kuhn mentions the phenomena of “change in descriptive language” and the “alteration (...) of the lexicon which one uses”⁴ to describe the world, both phenomena implied by the development of science. The main practical consequence of these phenomena is the incommensurability between different lexicons and the incapacity to understand why some narratives are developed. Even if we may grasp or catch what the members of a past community or of other community than ours try to communicate with their statements, it is impossible for us to obtain a complete understanding. In terms of lexicons, we will say that a statement made in our lexicon will always be a different one from the statement made in an old or foreign lexicon, even if we use the same vocabulary. The only way for us to understand the old or the foreign statement is to learn the incommensurable parts resting at the core of that linguistic expressions⁵. But the consequence of such a move is the effective placement in another narrative.

Moreover, each lexicon defines the boundaries of our world descriptions and represents the frame of reference for any meaningful discourse about world performed in our linguistic community. Kuhn argues that the terms in which are expressed the beliefs of a community “carry the community’s ontology, supplying names for things which its world can and cannot contain”⁶. Thus, the language sets what can or cannot be meaningfully stated and it determines what enters into our world-description and what remains outside of it. Therefore, the acquisition of a lexicon is a process that determines how knowledge claims are assessed, namely, what can be counted or not as “knowledge”.

The choice between lexicons necessarily depends on social goals because “lexicons are instruments to be judged by their comparative effectiveness in promoting the ends for which they are put to use”⁷. Or, to put it another way, the choice between lexicons is interest-relative. Each scientific world-description is just

⁴ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Last Writings of Thomas Kuhn. Incommensurability in Science*, edited by Bojana Mladenović, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2022, p. 15.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 114.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 47.

⁷ Ibidem, p. 78.

a set of sentences that serve practical purposes and whose truth-value depends on the frame of reference determined by the structured lexicon.

Finally, even if incommensurability means untranslatability, there remains a possibility of some overlaps between different lexicons:

To possess a lexicon, a structured vocabulary, is to have access to the varied set of worlds which that lexicon can be used to describe. Different lexicons – those of different cultures or of different historical periods, for example – give access to different sets of possible worlds, largely but never entirely overlapping.⁸

Therefore, the Anthropocene lexicon offers a new taxonomy and moves us in another world, the new world of the Anthropocene. In Hacking's terms⁹ to live in a new world is nothing but a taxonomic problem: all that happens is that we produce another narrative about the objects we know, just as the Copernicans tell us a different story about the celestial objects that the Ptolemies saw. The Earth becomes a planet for the Copernicans, falling from its position as the center of the universe, while the Moon becomes a satellite of the Earth, and the planets Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn retain their previous status. Similarly, the Anthropocene produces various narratives and by accepting them we place ourselves in one possible world or another according to certain pragmatic and cultural criteria.

Consequently, to understand these alternative narratives we must judge them contextually and relate them to the various purposes of discourse. It is not a question of different types of rationality or divergent criteria of truth, but one of the adequacy of our narratives to contexts that are pragmatically different. For example, if the natural scientist asks himself the question of criteria of scientificity that would legitimize a new taxonomy of geological eras so that the Anthropocene would be accepted, the writer will propose a coherent fiction whose goal will be to generate emotional or aesthetic experiences regarding the supposed Anthropocene.

I will further investigate these different narrative contexts to identify virtues and limits of the Anthropocene lexicon in each of them.

⁸ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Road Since Structure. Philosophical Essays, 1970-1993, with an Autobiographical Interview*, edited by James Conant and John Haugeland, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2000, p. 61.

⁹ Ian Hacking, "Working in a new world: The taxonomic solution", in Paul Horwich (ed.), *World Changes. Thomas Kuhn and the Nature of Science*, MIT Press. Cambridge, MA: Bradford. 1993, pp. 275–310.

Geology first. Is the Anthropocene a new geological epoch?

It is obvious that human activities are transforming the planet and the changes are visible, even from space. The question is whether these anthropogenic effects, comparable in magnitude to natural processes such as the evolution of life or catastrophic natural phenomena, entitle us to grant the human species the status of a geological agent and thus attribute to it the geological force to transform the planet decisively and irreversibly.

There is a consensus within the geological community that we are currently in the Holocene as a geological epoch, beginning approximately 11,700 years ago, after the Last Glacial Period, that the Holocene was preceded by the Pleistocene and that together they form the Quaternary period. The word "Holocene" was formed from the Ancient Greek words, "Hólos" (ὅλος) which means "whole" and "Cene" (kainós/ καινός) which means "new", so that the meaning of the word "Holocene" is that of a "entirely new epoch".

The term "Anthropocene" was proposed by people outside of the geological scientific community, but was later taken into consideration by geologists, albeit with some delay. The Anthropocene Working Group (AWG) of the Subcommittee on Quaternary Stratigraphy (SQS) of the International Commission on Stratigraphy (ICS) voted in April 2016 to proceed towards a formal proposal to define the Anthropocene Epoch in the Geologic Time Scale as a formal unit. The group presented the proposal to the International Geological Congress in August 2016 and since then an intense scientific debate has erupted.

The main task undertaken by the research group was to identify certain geological phenomena, persistent and with long-term effects on the Earth System, that can be associated with human activities and which would thus justify the geological demarcation of the Anthropocene epoch as a new sequential unit of geological time. The main categories of geological phenomena brought into discussion were the increase of erosion and sediment transport as an effect of urbanization and agriculture, perturbations of the natural cycles of some basic chemical elements such as carbon or nitrogen, environmental changes, including climate changes and ocean acidification, changes in the biosphere as a result of human invasion in the natural habitats, proliferation of new materials and the waste resulting from them, including concrete and plastic.

The Anthropocene Working Group developed a proposal to formalise the Anthropocene on the following basis:

1. It is being considered at series/epoch level (and so its base/beginning would terminate the Holocene Series/Epoch as well as Meghalayan Stage/Age);

2. It would be defined by the standard means for a unit of the Geological Time Scale, via a Global boundary Stratotype Section and Point (GSSP), colloquially known as a 'golden spike';
3. Its beginning would be optimally placed in the mid-20th century, coinciding with the array of geological proxy signals preserved within recently accumulated strata and resulting from the 'Great Acceleration' of population growth, industrialization and globalization;
4. The sharpest and most globally synchronous of these signals, that may form a primary marker, is made by the artificial radionuclides spread worldwide by the thermonuclear bomb tests from the early 1950s.¹⁰

Thus, in order to be accepted as a formal geological time term, the Anthropocene has to fulfil two necessary conditions, the first, to be scientifically justified, and the second, to be useful to the scientific community.

One of the issues discussed by the scientific community of geologists regarding the use of the term "Anthropocene" was whether by it we designate an epoch on the geological time scale or just a geological event. Thus, a group of researchers notes that although the term has begun to be used widely, within and beyond the scientific literature, including in public space, it is not yet well defined and requires attention in this regard. They agree that a "formal definition of the Anthropocene as a chronostratigraphical series and geochronological epoch following the Holocene"¹¹, with a fixed horizon and a precise global start date at the mid-20th century, synchronized with the thermonuclear bomb tests, fails to account for the anthropogenic effects generated since the appearance of *homo sapiens* on Earth and materialized into a major impact on different systems of global environment during the late Quaternary. They argue that a definition of the Anthropocene as "an ongoing geological event" reflects more closely both the historical human-environmental interactions, and the social processes related with the anthropogenic environmental changes. Therefore, by contrast with the strictly geological definition, the concept of an Anthropocene Event incorporates altogether anthropogenic environmental and cultural effects.

The difference between the two approaches is given by the wider context offered by the concept of Anthropocene as an Event. Anyway, the term was already used in non-chronostratigraphic contexts so that it became an informal term or at

¹⁰ See Subcommittee on Quaternary Stratigraphy, Anthropocene Working Group, <https://quaternary.stratigraphy.org/working-groups/anthropocene>, accessed 2 of March 2025

¹¹ Philip Gibbard, Michael Walker, Andrew Bauer, Matthew Edgeworth, Lucy Edwards, Erle Ellis, Stanley Finney, Jacquelyn L. Gill, Mark Maslin, Dorothy Merritts, and William Ruddiman, "The Anthropocene as an Event, not an Epoch", *Journal of Quaternary Science*, 37(3), 2022, p. 395.

least a non-rigid designator. In this larger sense it denotes a cluster of possible interpretations of the diachronic anthropogenic impact on the planet. I also think that the non-chronostratigraphic interpretation of the Anthropocene, although it no longer identifies the Anthropocene with a unit of geological time, but defines it as a process or interaction between humans and their global environment, may be analogous to the geological interpretation supposed by the lithostratigraphical framework, were the geologists discuss about the stratified rocks based solely on their physical characteristics and not on their geological age.

This alternative approach of the Anthropocene received a reply from a large group of geologists. They classified the definition of Anthropocene as a geological event as a time-transgressive one based on the decoupling of the Anthropocene from the geological stratigraphic characteristics and major planetary perturbations. The group claims that the Anthropocene as a geological event is really an interdisciplinary concept “in which historical, cultural and social processes and their global environmental impacts are all flexibly interpreted within a multi-scalar framework”¹². They concluded that although this new concept is very different from that based on the stratigraphic method and on the designation of a temporal unit as a geological epoch, it covers an anthropogenic phenomenon and it may be considered a complementary one. Thus, it might be useful, but with the necessary condition to be separately defined and differently named.

The main argument for considering the Anthropocene as a geological epoch was that the humans are “the most significant global geomorphological driving force”.¹³ One of the phenomena taken into account was the transformation of the Earth’s surface as a result of mineral extraction and of great infrastructure. According to the different data on a scale of measurements, the effects of these human activities are much greater than the natural erosive geological processes, so that we may speak from a geological point of view about the significant size of anthropogenic sediment flux.

But despite these arguments, in March 2024 the International Commission on Stratigraphy (ICS) and the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS)

¹² Martin J. Head, Jan A. Zalasiewicz, Colin N. Waters, Simon D. Turner, Mark Williams, Anthony D. Barnosky, Will Steffen, Michael Wagemich, Peter K. Haff, Jaia Syvitski, Reinhold Leinfelder, Francine M.G. McCarthy, Neil L. Rose, Scott L. Wing, Zhisheng An, Alejandro Cearreta, Andrew B. Cundy, Ian J. Fairchild, Yongming Han, Juliana A. Ivar do Sul, Catherine Jeandel, J.R. McNeill, Colin P. Summerhayes, “The Anthropocene is a prospective epoch/series, not a geological event”, *Episodes*, 46, 2023, p. 229.

¹³ Anthony H Cooper, Teresa J. Brown, Simon J. Price, Jonathan R. Ford, Colin N. Waters, “Humans are the most significant global geomorphological driving force of the 21st Century”, *Anthropocene Review*, 5 (3). 2018, p. 222.

rejected the Anthropocene Epoch proposal for inclusion in the Geologic Time. Their motivation was that it is not correct to talk about humans as a new geological force. The IUGS statement explained the rejection and concluded:

Despite its rejection as a formal unit of the Geologic Time Scale, Anthropocene will nevertheless continue to be used not only by Earth and environmental scientists, but also by social scientists, politicians and economists, as well as by the public at large. It will remain an invaluable descriptor of human impact on the Earth system.¹⁴

The results are the same if we consider the possible expectations of a future geologist as to what he might discover relative to our own era. This approach from the past to the present, made in terms in which we now relate from the present to the past, is a heuristic approach through which we can learn how to better understand the problematic context created by the claim to reclassify geological time. Carlos Santana¹⁵ proposed such a thought experiment and reached conclusions that close the discussion in a philosophical way and explain why we are not yet justified to proclaim the Anthropocene:

1. Many present human geological impacts can be mitigated by future human behaviour. Therefore, for a future geologist, these anthropogenic effects might become insignificant or treated as anomalies.

(2) There are some major anthropogenic activities that are best conceived as processes originated in Holocene, so that it will be nonsensical for a future geologist to search for a demarcation line between Holocene and Anthropocene as a post-Holocene epoch.

(3) The future geologist will view the present cases of human impact as local catastrophes rather than global and long-term geological events. Or, it is clear that from a geological point of view an epoch is defined by such global and long-term events, not by local and momentary (on the scale of geological time) catastrophic changes.

Earth and Environmental Sciences. Anthropocene and the human impact

I would say that by rejecting the Anthropocene as an epoch on the Geological Time Scale the geologists have done their job well and have reached a coherent decision in relation to the scientific criteria internal to their field and have also

¹⁴ Raymond Zhong, "Are We in the 'Anthropocene', the Human Age? Nope, Scientists Say", *The New York Times*, 5 March 2024.

¹⁵ Carlos Santana, "Waiting for the Anthropocene", *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, 70, 2019, p. 1078.

achieved a dialogical opening with other sciences and society at large. We are not living in the Anthropocene from a geological point of view, but the Anthropocene is a process that must be considered from the broader perspective of Earth and Environmental Sciences and public discourse because the anthropic effects on the Earth cannot be neglected, on the contrary, by their size they compete with the natural processes. Although the discussion about the Anthropocene at some point became a geological issue, it did not begin in this field, and the connotations of the term are not nullified by rejecting its geological significance in the strict sense. On the contrary, I believe that its original meaning did not concern the later attributed claims regarding the revision of geological time, but the obvious issue of anthropogenic effects on the environment.

The term “Anthropocene”, used with a different sense by the ecologist Eugene F. Stoermer in the 1980s, was launched in 2000 by atmospheric chemist Paul J. Crutzen and again Eugene Stoermer himself in a short paper published in *Global Change Newsletter*¹⁶ and then two years later the same Crutzen brought in *Nature* journal some extensions and intensional clarifications¹⁷. The two scientists talked initially about the influence of human activities on Earth’s atmosphere in the last centuries after the beginnings of The Industrial Revolution around the year 1750 and the invention of the steam engine, but then the meaning was enlarged to all the Earth systems.

The semantic “hard core” of the concept is the idea of anthropic effects on the environment and it wasn’t reduced in no case just to the problem of Geological Time Scale. The main extensions are related with different views regarding the beginning of the Anthropocene, a useful triple model being the following:

1. 300 000 years ago homo sapiens emerged as a species and secures his food from nature, hunting and fishing. Some of the effects are the biodiversity loss and the anthropogenic extinctions because each species has its biological niche and humans displaces them from their native places.

2. 12000 years ago began The Neolithic Revolution and its effects were the rise of agriculture and a new way of life based on habitation. We have to talk now about biogeography, changes in natural landscapes, and evolution towards the urban life.

3. Around the year 1750 The Industrial Revolution began and since then we have to talk about climate change and greenhouse emissions, a symptom resulting from the increase of atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) as a result of human activities.

¹⁶ See Paul J. Crutzen, Eugene J. Stoermer, “The Anthropocene”, *Global Change Newsletter*, 41, 2000, pp. 17-18.

¹⁷ See Paul J. Crutzen, “Geology of Mankind”, *Nature*, 415 (6867), 2002, p. 23.

4. In the last decade the effects on the global environment escalated. The analyses of air trapped in polar ice showed the accelerated growing of global concentrations of carbon dioxide and methane

The result of these extensions of the Anthropocene meaning are some ambiguities and some overlaps if our main aim is to use the term "Anthropocene" as a name for a geological epoch. Thus, we prefer to talk about Anthropocene as a process related with the increased effects of human activities on all Earth systems. If we follow this hypothetical idea then it is easy to discover a concern for these aspects among scientists since the nineteenth century.

Here are some of the most telling examples given by Crutzen and Stoermer.¹⁸ George P. Marsh published already in 1864 a book with the title *Man and Nature*, more recently reprinted as *The Earth as Modified by Human Action*¹⁹, in which he expresses this concern for the effects of human activities in the new lexicon of pragmatic concern and urgency. His assumed aim is to describe the changes produced by humans in the conditions of the earth and to point out the dangers of this imprudence and the necessity to act for the restauration of disturbed natural harmonies. It is obvious that human activities are described as a geomorphological force. Few years later, in 1873, the Italian geologist Antonio Stoppani, who has used the expression "Anthropozoic era", described mankind's activities as a new telluric force which in power and universality may be compared to the greater forces of the earth.

The main transforming factors in relation to the initial terrestrial conditions that are mentioned in the literature of the last century are the growth of population and food needs, urbanization and deforestation, the intensive use of water resources, the increase in energy needs and the use of fossil fuels, but also of other toxic substances. Crutzen's conclusion is the same formula that began to take shape in the nineteenth century with Marsh:

Unless there is a global catastrophe - a meteorite impact, a world war or a pandemic - mankind will remain a major environmental force for many millennia. A daunting task lies ahead for scientists and engineers to guide society towards environmentally sustainable management during the era of the Anthropocene. This will require appropriate human behaviour at all scales, and may well involve internationally accepted, large-scale geo-engineering projects, for instance to 'optimize' climate. At this stage, however, we are still largely treading on terra incognita.²⁰

¹⁸ Paul J. Crutzen, Eugene J. Stoermer, "The Anthropocene", *Global Change Newsletter*, 41, 2000, p. 17.

¹⁹ George P. Marsh, *The Earth as Modified by Human Action*, Belknap Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1965.

²⁰ Paul J. Crutzen, "Geology of Mankind", *Nature*, 415 (6867), 2002, p. 23.

Therefore, from the perspective of Earth and Environmental Sciences, the meaning of the discussion about the Anthropocene is given by the recognition of the impact of human activities on nature, with all the indirect consequences that these anthropogenic effects produce in society. The Anthropocene is nothing but a record of the shaping presence of humans in the world or universe as a transformative force. Although the validity of Anthropocene as a scientific term for a geological epoch remains disputed, its underlying premise, *i.e.*, that humans have become a geological force, or rather, the dominant force shaping the Earth, first of all, its climate, has become a commonplace, almost a truism, for the academic field of Earth and Environmental Sciences.

Literary narratives, between documentary and fiction

It can be claimed without any doubt that the literature dealing with the topic of the Anthropocene predates the appearance of the term in the 2000s. The framework narrative in which the new lexicon of the Anthropocene is valued is focused on anthropogenic effects or on catastrophic natural events that radically change the way of life on Earth. The two major fields are documentary literature, from reportage to popular science, and science fiction literature, the latter predominantly dystopian, full of pessimistic scenarios about the future. Adam Trexler notes the abundance of literature on these issues, both in the areas of non-fiction and fiction, from independent journalism and academic works to novels of various genres, from narratives close to scientific truth to post-apocalyptic perspectives that are combined with mystical visions. The main subjects of these are the effects of climate change, the causes of this phenomena, the capacity to struggle and to resist as a civilization, what has been done by our institutions so that to avoid a disaster. Trexler expresses his own worries “that the rest would be preachy, politically partisan in the worst sense, apocalyptic rather than scientific, or, yet worse, craven rehearsals of the facts”, but also notes that fiction can play a decisive role in shaping consciousness because non-fiction works lack by “the novel’s capacity to interrogate the emotional, aesthetic, and living experience of the Anthropocene”.²¹

A selective inventory is instructive and illuminating. A genre of science fiction is the post-apocalyptic literature that describes a limit situation for humanity as a result of natural or human-made catastrophes. A subgenre of it is devoted to global warming and climate change. One of the first and the best novels about a post-apocalyptic world on Earth is *The Drowned World* by J. G. Ballard, published in 1962,

²¹ Adam Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions, The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*, University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville, VA, 2015, p. 6.

a story about a post-apocalyptic future in which global warming is caused by increased solar radiation and, as a result, it is very difficult to live on the surface of the earth. A group of scientists are conducting environmental research in London, which has become a flooded city. The topic is successfully repeated by the Australian writer George Turner in his novel *The Sea and Summer* (1987), also known as *Drowning Towers*, with the mention that the novel also marks the turn towards a social issue. Sometime in the future the Melbourne city is affected by climate change with the sea slowly flooding the coastal urban area. Unemployment reached huge proportions, and the poor were ghettoized in two skyscraper towers, a symbol of a possible social rupture as a result of the ecological crisis. Maggie Gee in *The Flood* (2004), adds other cultural and ideological dimensions and the tone becomes much more sceptical, because instead of scientific expertise that could lead to a rescue, complex situations such as the selfishness of the rich people, religious fanaticism or civil violence are brought to attention.

Another pack is represented by novels that discuss not only the effects, but also the causes of climate change, with all the consequences that result from it. The novel *Heat* by Arthur Herzog, published in 1977, is one of the first to draw attention to the effects of increasing carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, the immediate catastrophic effects being devastating hurricanes and unbearable heat waves in urban areas. Despite the evidence and the warnings from experts, government authorities are not taking preventive action. This type of hesitation of public decision-making authorities will become the way in which, as a rule, the institutional behaviour and that of political leaders will be depicted in literature, thus shaping an extremely critical literature against them. A new narrative stage is aimed by *A Friend of the Earth* (2000), a novel by T.C. Boyle. In the year 2025, as a result of global warming and the greenhouse effect, the climate has severely changed, and, as a consequence, the environment was destroyed and the biodiversity was practically extinct. Deforestation and overpopulation are other phenomena which have gotten out of control and are causing serious social problems regarding habitation and the health system. Finally, Saci Lloyd offers in the *Carbon series*²² a soft vision that excludes catastrophe, but we still arrive at an apocalyptic future through a persistent crisis. Laura, a teenager who sings in the band Dirty Angels, is so convincing to Vanessa Thorpe, a columnist at *The Guardian*, that she writes: "Forget Harry Potter: Saci Lloyd thrills teenagers with a heroine who battles climate change and extremism"²³.

²² *The Carbon Diaries 2015* was published in 2009 and *The Carbon Diaries: 2017* in 2010.

²³ Vanessa Thorpe, "Forget Harry Potter: Saci Lloyd thrills teenagers with a heroine who battles climate change and extremism", *The Guardian*, 17 January 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/jan/17/carbon-diaries-saci-lloyd-television>

Another science fiction subgenre that addresses the issue of anthropogenic effects is that of the political novel, in which political actions that are mainly caused by climate change are related to a geopolitical context. Matthew Glass's *Ultimatum* (2009) seems to me to be a pioneer in this regard both in terms of acuity and topicality. In November 2032 Joe Benton is elected as president of the United States and he is immediately informed that the effects of global warming were underestimated. Benton's option is to abandon the multilateral negotiations at the Kyoto-4 summit and begin secret negotiations with China, as if other smaller nations could be neglected when it comes to a global issue.

Truth and choice. The idea of a 'dynamic lexicon'

From what has been stated so far, it becomes justified to conclude that the Anthropocene has emerged as a popular scientific term used equally by scientists from different domains, especially Earth and Environmental Sciences, by the scientifically engaged public concerned with knowledge of nature and also by the media to designate the period of Earth's history during which humans have a decisive influence on the actual state, dynamics and future of the Earth System. Also, many writers and artists from different areas, as it would be cinematography, photography, fine arts, or music, have been inspired by the Anthropocene issues and have developed new subgenres in their fields. We may conclude that the term "Anthropocene" is "increasingly penetrating the lexicon of not only the academic socio-sphere, but also society more generally."²⁴

I believe that the multifaceted approach I have proposed makes it clear that the use of the term Anthropocene has a dual character in that it concerns both the problem of establishing a truth and that of certain choices or conventions that we can make or establish during research. Shortly speaking, the Anthropocene is not only a question of scientific truth, but also one that involves certain choices. Thus, if the debate about is also a matter of choice, then it means that we must take into account the social context and involve in our research the social sciences, from anthropology to sociology. Therefore, we accept the claim that the causes of Earth's transition from one state to another are both natural, human and social. From a social and anthropological standpoint we agree without any doubt that the anthropic influences on the Earth should be recognized, but remains the question to find a good criterion or the so called markers for a demarcation on the scale of geological time. It seems that if no marker is privileged then we have no other

²⁴ Rodolfo Dirzo, Gerardo Ceballos, Paul K. Ehrlich, "Circling the drain: the extinction crisis and the future of humanity", *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, 2022, p. 2.

solution than to go back from the 1950s of thermonuclear tests to the 1750s of the beginning of the industrial revolution and the use of the steam engine and from there back to the Neolithic agricultural revolution or even to the use of fire for food preparation by homo sapiens. But this is a Eurocentric and technocratic narrative which we are not entitled to extend to all the civilizations that have succeeded one another. Therefore, without a strong criterion or marker, the risk of a definitional “slippery slope” is obvious. The correct choice is to agree that “the Anthropocene was not made in a day, nor was it created uniformly: the material records of human alterations of Earth are thick, deep and heterogeneous. They highlight huge social, cultural and technological differences across time and space.”²⁵

I believe that a consensus is emerging within the philosophical community regarding the different approaches to the Anthropocene, both from a descriptive and a normative perspective. Sébastien Dutreuil, and Pierre Charbonnier²⁶ proposed to distinguish from an epistemological standpoint between three contexts in which the Anthropocene is discussed, first the most general one of the Earth Sciences, then the particular one of Geology, and the last, that of the Human and Social Sciences. This third level would be necessary because the Earth Sciences and Geology have different epistemological regimes that are intertwined with two different normative registers related with the political decisions focused on the issues of global environment. Earth Science have from the beginning a normative position, while Geology, by contrast, is more caution to engage in this kind of political debate. Anyway, the result is the development of a highly politically charged level of reflection in the social and political sciences and, by extension, in the humanities.

But I think we can go even further than that, so that to take into account and to develop new topics of philosophical reflection²⁷ concerning the humans in the Anthropocene, beginning with the recognition of the human dependence from the environment that itself depend from the humans in the form of a closing circle. Some of these topics are the human precariousness, the finitude, the responsibility, or the emotional interactions between humans and nature with the biotic community. At the same time, complementary to the philosophical discourse and in conditions of full legitimacy, the narratives of the Anthropocene can be identified at the

²⁵ Erie Ellis, Mark Maslin, Nicole Boivin, Andrew Bauer, “Involve Social Scientists in Defining the Anthropocene”, *Nature*, 540, 2016, p. 193.

²⁶ Sébastien Dutreuil, Pierre Charbonnier, “Philosophy of the Anthropocene”, Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Environmental Science, Oxford University Press, published online 24 May 2023, <https://oxfordre.com/environmentalscience/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780199389414.001.0001/acrefore-9780199389414-e->

²⁷ See as a good example for this strategy Sverre Raffsnøe, *Philosophy of the Anthropocene. The Human Turn*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2016.

pragmatic level of environmental management. I'm thinking about Friske's paper, "Towards an Anthropocene Narrative and a New Philosophy of Governance: Evolution of Global Environmental Discourse in the Man and the Biosphere Programme"²⁸ (2021), where the lexicon of the Anthropocene is used according to the historically dominant narratives of conservation and sustainable development.

Therefore, if we accept that we have some different or even divergent narratives of the Anthropocene that are based and lead to different contextualizations of the vocabulary elements, then we implicitly admit that our choices are expressed through preferential uses of the Anthropocene lexicon. Traditionally speaking, the relation between a lexicon as a vocabulary and truth depends on the words meanings stability and their truth conditions. I think that the question is if this dynamic changes from one lexicon to another, in the case of the Anthropocene from the narrative of Geology as a science to the narratives of literary fictions, is compatible with the traditional truth conditional semantics as it was developed from Tarski to Davidson as a standard approach.

As we have seen, in the case of the Anthropocene lexicon the meanings are not fixed but open to debate and negotiation at the level of different communities, scientific or not, so that it is possible to produce new taxonomies and reclassifications. I think that we may use Ludlow's idea of a "dynamic lexicon"²⁹ to explore this unstable relation between our lexicons as vocabularies and truth conditions. We'll agree that the meanings of the lexical terms are opened to changes and negotiation among the speakers of a linguistic community so that the vocabulary is semantically adapted to the different new discoveries and approaches. If we return to Kuhn's research we may mention his ideas about the shifts in meaning and truth in the time of Copernican Revolution when the word "planet" was more correctly applied to the celestial bodies³⁰. Ludlow also mentions the recent debates regarding the meaning of the word "planet" so that to include or not Pluto in its extension³¹.

²⁸ Desirée Friske, "Towards an Anthropocene Narrative and a New Philosophy of Governance: Evolution of Global Environmental Discourse in the Man and the Biosphere Programme", *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning*, 24 (1), published online: 03 August 2021 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/363304784_Towards_an_Anthropocene_Narrative_and_a_New_Philosophy_of_Governance_Evolution_of_Global_Environmental_Discourse_in_the_Man_and_the_Biosphere_Programme

²⁹ See Robert Ludlow, *Living Words: Meaning Underdetermination and the Dynamic Lexicon*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2014.

³⁰ See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution: Planetary Astronomy in the Development of Western Thought*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1995.

³¹ Ludlow extracted this fragment from a report of IAU Working group: "Rather than try to construct a detailed definition of a planet which is designed to cover all future possibilities, the WGESP has agreed to restrict itself to developing a working definition applicable to the cases where there already are claimed detections . . . As new claims are made in the future, the WGESP will weigh

Undoubtedly, this idea of a “dynamic lexicon” will lead to much stronger contextual commitments and will challenge us to take into account some traditional topics in analytic philosophy regarding the so-called rigid designation.

All these developments confirm the need for a space of reflective balance between conceptual research (searches) and practical applications. First, the institutionalization of a narrative is not a clear-cut process, second, the Anthropocene narratives express the need for introspection, but also urgency and uncertainty in light of ecological changes, and the third, the Anthropocene lexicon transforms global environmentalist philosophy, revealing a gap between theoretical commitments and practice of sustainable development. But the idea of sustainable development continues to steer its ideological power, revealing another gap between philosophy as a *Weltanschauung*, the divergent narratives related with the Anthropocene, and the ways in which the practices oriented towards sustainability are institutionalized. This paper may be considered an attempt to harmonize and understand all these choices.

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their individual merits and circumstances, and will try to fit the new objects into the WGESP definition of a ‘planet’, revising this definition as necessary. This is a gradualist approach with an evolving definition, guided by the observations that will decide all in the end”. (*Apud* Robert Ludlow. *Living Words: Meaning Underdetermination and the Dynamic Lexicon*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2014. p. 77).

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A Formal Reconstruction of Interpretive Scarcity

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ABSTRACT. The theory of hermeneutical injustice analyzes the wrongs suffered due to deficiencies in the shared interpretive resources of a society. A hermeneutical injustice is diagnosed when individuals of a social type are persistently and systematically hindered to understand a significant part of their experiences due to such interpretive scarcity. The theory uncovers a number of important phenomena, such as the relationship between symmetry in ignorance and asymmetry in consequence. In this paper, we develop a reconstruction of deficient interpretive resources to capture such phenomena more precisely and investigate novel implications of the existing theoretical account. The formal reconstruction is set in the framework of imprecise probabilities, a generalization of classical probability which represents an additional quality of uncertainty or ignorance. This quality we deploy to reconstruct a kind of interpretive deficiency and analyze it for both normative force and explanatory power. We conclude that (1) symmetrical ignorance is consistent with asymmetric epistemic action even under shared values and (2) insufficiently developed interpretive re-sources, as represented by imprecise probabilities, can induce a dispersion of credal states. The former is a contribution to the established theoretical discourse, whereas the latter is a novel observation; in tandem, these conclusions illustrate the continuity of the reconstruction with existing work as well as its surplus value in aiding discovery.

Keywords: Epistemic Injustice, Hermeneutical Injustice, Imprecise Probabilities, Bayesian Epistemology, Psychiatric Diagnosis

1. Introduction

Human language and the underlying conceptual structures are inevitably ambiguous, vague, and hence require continuous interpretation in their use to make sense of and communicate human experiences. This essential openness

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enables creativity and adaption to ever-changing conditions of human existence; however, it is also the source of misunderstanding, failed communication and prone to abuse by the powerful: They can use their social position, intentionally or as a structural condition, to manipulate the negotiation for meaning in their interest.

In recent discussions, this latter phenomenon is often understood as a form of hermeneutical injustice. The term denotes a gap or shortcoming in the shared interpretive resources disadvantaging members of a social type in their ability to understand and communicate a substantial part of their experiences (Fricker (2007, ch. 7), Medina (2017)).

While the general idea of hermeneutical injustice is compelling enough, the details, and hence the identification, comparison and evaluation of particular cases, remain somewhat open to interpretation – an irony maybe not lost on the scholars engaged in the conversation. As noted, we should not expect any linguistic or conceptual resources to be free of ambiguity, closed for interpretation. Nevertheless, if the theory of hermeneutical injustice is itself meant to provide a powerful interpretive resource, we have to partake in the negotiation of its content.

In this paper, we investigate the utility of the framework of imprecise probabilities as an analytic tool in the theory of hermeneutical injustice. Unlike classical probability, imprecise probabilities allow not only for the uncertainty inherent in a probabilistic reconstruction of belief, but an additional dimension of ignorance about those very probabilistic judgments (see Wheeler, 2022, for an introduction). This more expressive theory extends the conceptual space to leave open cognitive gaps – which, as we will argue, are suitable to reconstruct interpretive gaps described by the theory of hermeneutical injustice.

In particular, we

1. offer a reconstruction of a subset of interpretive deficiencies in terms of imprecise probabilities to then
2. recover the relationship between shared ignorance and divergent epistemic as well as practical consequences and
3. show how resources deficient in this manner can, according to the theory of imprecise probabilities, render evidence inert or even have it disperse further the credal state of its recipient.

Before we turn to this investigation, a word of caution is in order: Formal methods come with a great deal of abstraction and idealization, and imprecise probability theory is not an exception. We should therefore be aware that any such account covers only an aspect of the phenomenon. The purpose is to improve our understanding of this aspect, and to thereby contribute to a broader intellectual

project – not to replace, but to complement. The following analysis ought to be understood not as one of the whole complex phenomenon of hermeneutical injustice, but the particular subset described.

The investigation proceeds as follows: It starts with a very brief introduction to the theory of imprecise probabilities, eschewing some of its more subtle technical detail in service of the application at hand. Then, Section 3.1 introduces the theory of hermeneutical injustice and the underlying notion of deficient interpretive resources and maps it onto the framework of imprecise probabilities. Section 3.2 reconstructs the epistemic symmetry of hermeneutical gaps and shows the conditions under which its asymmetric consequences arise for members of different social types. Section 3.3 follows the implications of the possibility of dilation to a dispersive effect of hermeneutical gaps on credal states. The paper closes with a summary and short outlook in Section 4.

Imprecise Probabilities

2.1 Basic Idea

We can rather intuitively approach imprecise probabilities as a generalization of classical probability. Consider first the following case: An agent holds $p(F) = 0.4$ and $p(E) = 0.3$.¹ However, the agent is ignorant of the probability of the joint event $F \cap E$. From the credal states regarding E and F , the agent can narrow down the possible probabilities for the joint event to $[0, 0.3]$ – any probability within this interval would be consistent with everything the agent knows about these two events.²

Imprecise probabilities generalize this basic idea of ignorance, such that an agent holds a set P of probability distributions instead of a single distribution p .³ An important, if not unique characterization of a credal set is given by its lower⁴

¹ We interpret probabilities as graded beliefs or credences. Unless noted otherwise, we assume that credences obey the axioms of probability and the agents follow conditionalization for learning. See e. g. citetjoyce2011development for a historical introduction to subjective probability or Bovens and Hartmann (2003) for a systematic application to normative epistemology.

² It is possible to discuss imprecise probabilities in purely mathematical terms, as Pedersen and Wheeler (2014) demonstrate, leaving a plurality of philosophical interpretations. For our purposes, it is most appropriate to adapt the interpretation of indeterminate credal states.

³ In principle, the credal set can be topologically varied, but as much of the literature, we assume P is convex.

⁴ For a more detailed discussion of the technical aspects, see Wheeler (2022); Haenni et al. (2010).

$$\underline{p}(E) = \inf \{p(E) : p \in \mathbb{P}\}$$

and upper

$$\bar{p}(E) = \sup \{p(E) : p \in \mathbb{P}\}$$

probability; we rely on Wheeler (2022) and Haenni et al. (2010) for the technical background.

Upper and lower probabilities will be used below to guide imprecise decision-making.

We consider two possible sources of the kind of ignorance expressed in the imprecise framework. The most obvious case is that of a simple lack of knowledge. To commit oneself to a particular distribution is, in such a case, simply not rationally warranted.

The traditional counterpoint to this idea is objective Bayesianism. As, for example, Joyce (2011) lays out, objective Bayesians argue for the existence of a uniquely rational credal state relative to a set of evidence. This view can be framed primarily in terms of the choice of priors, that is, the initial credal state prior to evidence; but more broadly understood, objective Bayesians are committed both to a uniquely rational prior and position in the space delineated by empirical constraints (Williamson, 2007). The possibility of imprecise probabilities undermines, however, the standard picture. Under an imprecise framework, we are no longer asking which of an infinite number of distributions to choose, and trying to identify a non-arbitrary choice. Instead we can simply retain the whole space of possible distributions admissible under the constraints of our rationality and given evidence.

As a side note, this reconstruction of ignorance is sometimes used to give a probabilistic accounting of suspension of judgment. For example, if an agent has to judge the probability of a coin landing heads, no value seems to express a suspension of judgment. The most natural candidate, $p(H) = 0.5$ is as much a judgment as any other value of p , not a suspension. Imprecise probabilities allow the agent to hold instead the entirely non-committal credal state $p \in [0, 1]$, which seems to be a proper reconstruction of full suspension. Even more, the framework allows the agent's credal state to be a smaller interval, expressing suspension over a narrower field of equipossible probabilities.

A second reason for imprecision has been suggested by Elkin and Wheeler (2018). They look at the problem of peer disagreement assuming individuals hold precise credal states. Peer disagreement is an obstinate problem, as the peer status imposes a requirement to take others' beliefs into account, while the further assumptions of the disagreement are meant to restrict any grounds for doing so.⁵ We will not go

⁵ See Kelly (2011) for a discussion.

too much into the details, as peer disagreement is not much of a concern in hermeneutical injustice, but take an important idea from this particular approach: Elkin & Wheeler suggest to resolve peer disagreement by constructing the convex closure of the individual credal states of the disagreeing parties, and adopt the resulting imprecise probability as the rational credal state of the group. This process can be transferred to scenarios where the agents do not consider each other as peers, potentially leading to different weights of the individual credal states in the aggregation process. But it nevertheless gives us an account of how we end up with imprecision in a social setting: If it is impossible, for instance due to constraints on evidence sharing, to converge on a shared, single credence, the collective credal state is expressible as an imprecise probability. This understanding importantly aligns with the use of imprecise probabilities to reconstruct shared interpretive resources. So, while individual agents may also be more adequately represented as holding indeterminate credal states, the crucial point is that they need to operate on imprecise probabilities representing shared resources when engaging with other epistemic agents.

So, to summarize, imprecise probability gives us a tool to represent credal states which are not fully determinate. With the basic conception set up, we turn to two more particular issues which will be important in the reconstruction of hermeneutical gaps: How agents can make rational decisions under imprecise probabilities, and how evidence may inevitably dilate an agent's credal state when it is already somewhat indeterminate.

2.2 Imprecise Decision-Making

Ultimately, we care about beliefs, concepts and the like because of their practical consequences. A common way of translating a probabilistically reconstructed credal state into action is by means of a betting model. (Leitgeb and Pettigrew, 2010) Let X be a random variable; a bet on X is a function which associates a payoff with every possible value X could take. For instance, consider X as the outcome of a single coin toss, where the coin can only land heads (H) or tails (T). A bet could then take the values $b(H) = 50$ and $b(T) = -50$. This instantiates a bet which costs 50 to acquire, and pays nothing on tails and 100 back on heads.

A few points of clarification: We did not specify a unit for the values of the bet, and generally, it should not be assumed this is equivalent to money. The payoff, whatever realizes it, is such that larger numbers are always proportionally preferred to smaller ones. There are limits to the plausibility of this assumption, e.g. if we were looking at payoffs going to infinity. However, in the model world we are looking at, it seems an innocuous idealization to assume such a unit.

Now we need to relate those bets, which are a stylized representation of risky actions, to credal states. Let us assume an agent who believes the coin is biased in favor of tails, e.g. $p(\text{Tails}) = 0.6$. Such an agent would not buy the bet we constructed above, because it has negative expectation given their credal state. On the other hand, the agent would be happy to sell such a bet, as it has positive expectation for them to do so. There is a credal state where the willingness to buy and sell uniquely meet, in our case at 0.5. Thus, we can relate a particular credal state with a disposition to bet, and thus, engage in action with risky outcomes related to the credal state.

Note, that in order to make this connection, we have to assume an agent rational in a fairly narrow sense: The agent's credal states must satisfy the axioms of probability, and they must act by maximizing expected payoffs. The standard formal device to support these conditions are constructions of combinations of bets which result in sure loss or sure loss in expectation, so called Dutch books (see Vineberg, 2022, for an overview). Violations of the axioms of probability are irrational, according to this line of argumentation, because they expose an agent to sure loss. Similar, though more controversial arguments apply to the prescriptions for evidence assimilation, in our case conditionalization. Optimization itself is in some contexts considered a problematic assumption, and we will not offer a full defense here. The assumption seems admissible in the current context as it drives the agent to believe and act in accordance with their ends, while there is no straightforward reason to settle for a weaker principle such as satisficing in the current context.

We remain agnostic as to whether this understanding of rationality is the best explication of the concept. But it covers an important aspect of rational action in the face of risky options. It ties an agent's dispositions for action to their belief, and whether one assumes rationality reduces to this kind of relationship or not, an agent who pays no mind to how their beliefs relate to their actions either does not hold those beliefs or is irrational.

So far, this only applies to classical probabilities. But we can with relative ease extend it to imprecise ones. Let us assume an agent who holds the credal state $p(\text{Tails}) \in [0.4, 0.6]$. This agent would buy a bet paying 100 if the coin comes up tails for up to 40. If they paid more, their credal state does not entail a non/negative expected outcome. Vice versa, the agent would sell such a bet for at least 60, as once again, if they sold it for less, their expectation could be negative according to their credal state. In general, the selling price for a bet with this structure depends on the upper probability, the buying price on the lower as defined above.

This is a marked difference to the classical case, which represents the decision-theoretic counterpart to suspension of judgment: There is now a subset of risky actions for which the agent refuses to take the certain loss nor wants to exchange

it for the uncertain gain. We will offer an interpretation of this rather technical fact in terms of hermeneutical gaps below.

This decision procedure is also suggested by Elkin and Wheeler (2018) in their approach to peer disagreement. In essence, they suggest a partial suspension of judgment, downstream of which, on the decision model we presented, is a refraining from certain risky actions. The resolution, or maybe better, management or negotiation, of disagreement in a social group can therefore lead to an area of ignorance that translates into an unwillingness or inability to act in certain ways – which we will interpret as a reconstruction of a hermeneutical lacuna. The link to action will then be crucial to determine if a particular gap induces injustice. But before we can turn to our interpretation, we need to lay out a very particular consequence of allowing for indeterminate credal states: Dilation.

2.3 Dilation

In a classical framework of graded belief, i.e. a reconstruction of degrees of belief combined with Bayesian conditionalization, more information is never epistemically detrimental (Pedersen and Wheeler, 2014). Disturbingly to some, this is no longer true in the world of imprecise probabilities. Here, so-called dilation can take place.

Definition 1 (Dilation) *Given two random variables X and Y and credal set \mathbb{P} , X dilates Y if regardless of what value X takes, learning it increases the uncertainty about Y in \mathbb{P} .*

By increasing uncertainty, we here mean that the credal set of Y prior to conditionalization on the outcome of X is contained in the posterior credal set for each value of X .

Putting it a bit more informally, in a case of dilation we actually lose knowledge by gathering evidence. Let us make this concrete, first with a rather artificial, but very clear example borrowed from Pedersen and Wheeler (2014).

Example 1 (Dilating Coin Toss) *An agent holds a credal state on the outcome of two coin tosses. They believe the first coin to be fair, but the second coin to be correlated to the first in some manner – but this correlation could be anything from perfect correlation to complete anti-correlation. So we have $p(T_1) = 0.5$ and $p(T_2|T_1) \in [0, 1]$. Now by learning the result of the second toss, regardless if it is heads or tails, the agent has to revise their credence in $p(T_1)$ to cover the whole unit interval. Hence, regardless of the outcome of the second coin toss, learning it will have the agent lose knowledge.*

Of course, the agent also gains knowledge about the second toss itself – the point is that overall knowledge does not monotonically increase with new information being learned.

From this we can construct an example similar in structure but a bit more evocative than coin tosses. This example also sets the stage for our application to psychiatric diagnosis later on.

Example 2 *Competing Theories* Let S, D be two events. S represents an observable phenomenon, D an underlying theoretical construct. There happen to be two competing theories on the relation between S and D , one suggesting that S is highly indicative of D , whereas the other suggests S to be irrelevant to D . The disagreement between the two theories cannot be resolved, and hence, the scientific community ends up with an indeterminate credal state regarding the conditional probabilities linking S and D . However, for independent reasons, there is a precise credence in S . In this configuration, an agent learning about D dilates their credence in S by virtue of having to take into account the two competing theories.

The case need not be so extreme; for instance, the dilation may not be from a unique distribution to every possible one, but just from $p(E) = 0.5$ to $p(E) \in [0.4, 0.6]$. The dilation effect need also not be the same across all outcomes of the dilating variable. As long as the inclusion condition holds for every one of them, the effect on the credal state for the dilated variable may vary.

We will use this possibility of indeterminate credal states to reconstruct a particularly tricky class of hermeneutical gaps. The possibility of dilation raises some alarms about the rational admissibility of such doxastic states. For our purposes, this is not a concern, as we do not rely on an assumption of full rationality on part of our agents for our argument. The interpretation as a hermeneutical gap may provide a different point of view: Namely, that some indeterminate credal states are rationally inadmissible precisely because they correspond to unjust hermeneutical gaps. This conjecture depends on the relation between epistemic justice and rationality, which to establish goes beyond the scope of the current paper.

But before we can turn to our deployment of the theoretical construct of dilation in the formal reconstruction, we need to lay out what the mapping of deficient interpretive resources onto the formal framework looks like.

3 Reconstructing Interpretive Scarcity

3.1 Hermeneutical Gaps as Imprecise Probabilities

With the formal framework established, we can turn to constructing a model of deficient interpretive resources. To illuminate the rather abstract process of model construction, we will use the interpretive resource of psychiatric diagnosis as a running example.

The case of personality disorders illuminates how centrally importance psychiatric diagnosis can be as an interpretive resource:

Definition 2 Personality Disorder *A personality disorder is an enduring pattern of inner experience and behavior that deviates markedly from the norms and expectations of the individual's culture, is pervasive and inflexible, has an onset in adolescence or early adulthood, is stable over time, and leads to distress or impairment. (See American Psychiatric Association et al., 2013, p. 734)*

This covers a variety of particular personality disorders. We do not need to go into the details of those particular disorders, but a potential example of a hermeneutically unjust diagnostic construct can be identified in the discussion of borderline personality disorder by Dorfman and Reynolds (2023), even though they frame the problem only in terms of testimonial injustice.⁶ For our purposes, a psychiatric diagnosis links a set of symptoms with a theoretical construct, where the symptoms are highly relevant to the patient and the diagnosis is supposed to cover a wide range of experiences across their life. In other words, deficiencies in the diagnostic construct would be systematic and persistent in their negative effect on making sense of significant experiences in the life of the diagnosed person. As will become important in the next section, a diagnosis is also practically linked to practices of treating, or in the case of personality disorders more accurately, managing the disorder.

There is some concern that the category of personality disorders is generally invalid.⁷ For the current discussion, it need not be decided if this is the case. It suffices to observe the breadth and width of experiences which is intended to be correlated, explained, understood and coped with by reference to this type of construct. If it works or not, it is clearly offered as an interpretive resource which is applied in a systematic and persistent manner to someone's experiences.

⁶ A case for the hermeneutical injustice of a diagnostic construct has also been made in the case of autism spectrum disorder Chapman and Carel (2022). This is not in the class of personality disorders, but similarly is taken to cover much of the diagnosed person's experiences.

⁷ See, for instance, Dorfman and Reynolds (2023) for a discussion.

With our running example set up, we turn to the construction of a model. We operate with the following general definition of hermeneutical injustice:

Definition 3 (Hermeneutical Injustice) *A social group exhibits hermeneutical injustice if members of a social type are persistently and systematically hindered in understanding and communicating a significant part of their experiences due to deficiencies in the shared interpretive resources.*⁸

Before we move to the reconstruction of the central notion of shared interpretive resources, it is worth pointing out a few features of this definition. First, it is intentionally written in the passive voice, as we agree with Fricker (cf. 2007, p. 154) that this form of injustice is structural rather than agentic. This does not imply it is not sometimes manifested or even reinforced by individual agents, but it is ultimately located in a collective space, not any particular agent's mind. Second, the definition implies the possibility of deficient interpretive resources which are not unjust. This would be the case, for instance, if the failure in understanding is randomly distributed across social types, or if the deficiency cannot be resolved at all at a given stage of epistemic progress. Especially the latter category is suspiciously vague, but we might think of a lack of understanding of a type of mental illness despite a society's best efforts – but nothing hinges, for our purpose, on this issue. Finally, the definition excludes incidental hermeneutical injustices. Paradigmatic cases of hermeneutical injustice are persistent and systematic, as the most significant interpretive resources themselves are not constructed ad hoc. As with the question of agentic hermeneutical injustice, ad hoc constructions of deficient interpretive resources are possible, but gain their larger meaning as instances of injustice in the wider context. This does not preclude incidental cases from occurring, and those ought to be recognized for the epistemic harm they cause.

The definition suggests the centrality of the notion of an interpretive resource, and an explication of what it means for it to be deficient. The notion of an interpretive resource does not have an explicit definition in the literature. But it is unquestionably a broad class (Medina, 2012). As such, a uniform formalization of the concept is implausible, and hence we focus on a particular kind of resource, that we consider important, but certainly not all-encompassing.

⁸ This definition is based on Fricker (see 2007, p. 154), but is adapted; we exchange the notion of obscuring by hindering to understand and communicate because we find the original term insufficiently clear. We also left out the notion of epistemic marginalization, as we consider it already contained in the rest of the definition. Other changes are merely aesthetic.

The kind of resource is constituted by a concept as it stands in inferential relations with experiences. Inference may not be the first one thinks of when analyzing understanding, but inferences play a major role in understanding.

Our focus is on inferences between a set of observations and a higher-level concept invoked to correlate, explain or predict those observations. In terms of our running example, a set of symptoms and a diagnosis. The probabilistic relation between symptoms and diagnosis is structurally similar to a common cause explanation (Spohn, 1994), and we draw on this structure to reflect the interpretive power of a diagnosis in its aspect as a tool for inference. This is captured in the following equations:⁹

Definition 4 Common Interpretation *Let S_1 , S_2 and D be three events. We call D a common interpretation of S_1 and S_2 if the following conditions hold:*

$$\begin{aligned} p(S_1 \cap S_2|D) &= p(S_1|D)p(S_2|D) \\ p(S_1 \cap S_2|\bar{D}) &= p(S_1|\bar{D})p(S_2|\bar{D}) \\ p(S_1|D) &> p(S_1|\bar{D}) \\ p(S_2|D) &> p(S_2|\bar{D}) \end{aligned}$$

Under these conditions, D provides an interpretation of both S_1 and S_2 . Vice versa, higher credence in D implies higher credences in S_1 and S_2 . In the following, we assume this describes an important aspect of the interpretive function of diagnosis (D) in the understanding of symptoms (S_1, S_2).

This model enables several important modes of understanding. We will focus on two such modes:

1: It allows one to make sense of the apparently random correlation of a set of events. Within our example, it offers an interpretation of a patient's inordinate number and extent of negative experiences. As the definition indicates, if the experiences support the diagnosis of a personality disorder, the patient can read their experiences through a new lens. This allows to understand one's experiences as less random, and hence more meaningful. Indeed, the struggle against randomness appears to be one of the central elements of sense-making.

2: The second mode runs in the reverse direction of inference: Rather than reasoning towards a higher-level concept or theory, an agent reasons downwards in the direction of particular experiences. This enables one to uncover experiences as meaningful, or even predict such experiences. The latter is maybe not straightforwardly

⁹ Note, that we do not assume the temporal order necessary for a causal relation. Further-more, as a categorical matter, a diagnosis cannot be the cause of symptoms.

taken as understanding. But our example illustrates how it is: For the patient, it is an element of their understanding of themselves to predict how they would experience certain events. They might even seek out such events to test the interpretative resource suggested to them in the form of a diagnosis.

Thus, we can see how inferences are constitutive of certain kinds of understanding, and how an important type of inferential relation can be captured in a simple probabilistic model.

But the attentive reader may have noticed that so far, we have not really used the imprecise part of the imprecise probability framework. It will be used to express what is deficient about a given interpretive resource. But before we formally do that, a word of clarification is in order. Much can be wrong with an interpretive resource in the sense of the inferential model laid out above. The credences may not be probabilistically coherent, they may not be consistent with further evidence in the wider network of belief or they might simply fail to cover in their underlying algebra the actually relevant events. We do not want to exclude the possibility that any or all of these problems also instantiate deficiencies relevant to the theory of hermeneutical injustice. But we will not take a position on this question, as we only purport to show that imprecision reconstructs an important aspect of the phenomenon and, to show the utility of the model, derive a novel observation. If the same can be done for those other defects, they were to be included in a more general formal reconstruction of defective interpretation.

An interpretive resource represented as a set of credal states allowing the interpretive inferences stated is thus deficient if and to the degree that the credences are imprecise. The immediate reason to identify deficiency with imprecision lies in the consequence it has for interpretive inferences as laid out above. The less precise the credences which represent an interpretive resource are, the more imprecise will any interpretations turn out. Here is a simple example of this phenomenon:

Example 3 Imprecise Diagnosis *As before, let S_1 , S_2 and D be three events representing symptoms and a diagnosis. But now, the following holds:*

$$\begin{aligned} p(S_1|D) &\in [a, b] \\ p(S_2|D) &\in [c, d] \end{aligned}$$

where $a, b, c, d \in [0, 1]$ and $b > a, d > c$. Analogously, the conditional probabilities on \bar{D} are also allowed to be imprecise. We can still assume that the upper probabilities c, d or even the lower a, b satisfy the four conditions stated in the previous example. Even in this most benevolent case, imprecision implies that learning about an event is less informative than in the precise case.

We will see in the following two sections how this imprecision is turned into more concrete problems. It bears repeating, though, that not every interpretive resource defective in this sense translates into an injustice. Again, the ignorance might be inevitable relative to the epistemic capacities in a given society, or the experiences could be so randomly scattered across social types that none of them is especially disadvantaged. Or, furthermore, the experiences may simply be not particularly significant. But if the other conditions of our definition are satisfied, the degree of imprecision is read as a measure of the degree of hermeneutical injustice.¹⁰

For our running example, the immediate consequence of imprecision is a wide range in the resulting credal state regarding D upon learning S_1 , S_2 or both. If the inference from a potential symptom to the underlying condition is highly imprecise, there will be a vast range of rationally admissible credences as to the status of the patient. As we will work out in the following section with the help of imprecise decision theory, this leads to downstream problems with treatment and support. But it is also in a more immediate sense reducing the value of the interpretive resource for the patient. Even if certainty cannot be expected, a fairly precise estimate is desirable to enable interpretation in inferential terms. But if the diagnosis is given with a wide interval of possible probabilities, what is one supposed to do with that? The interval may span the range from the diagnosis being highly unlikely to more likely than not. This is indeed a defect in the capacity of a diagnostic construct as a means of making sense of one's experiences. But this is only the most immediate problem. So let us turn to action.

3.2 From Symmetric Deficiency to Asymmetric Disadvantage

Deficiencies in the interpretive resources of a society, as Fricker describes them, affect both the marginalized and the non-marginalized. In her analysis of the development of the term and concept of sexual harassment, neither the harasser nor the harassed are able to make sense of what is happening (cf. Fricker, 2007, pp. 149ff.). But the diagnosis of an injustice is clearly asymmetric, which led Beeby (2011) to criticize the account as not genuinely a case of epistemic injustice. She argues that in purely epistemic terms, both parties are equally harmed by the hermeneutical gap, while the apparent injustice is a consequence of the social

¹⁰ This is a somewhat technical detail, but we do not assume a global measure over imprecise credal sets to determine which is, all things considered, more imprecise. While such a measure could be mathematically defined, it would miss out on the difference in the significance of subsets of credences. Therefore, we only allow the comparison of two credences defined on the same algebra as follows: Credal state A is more imprecise than B if for any element of the algebra, the credal set implied by B is contained in that by A .

background conditions in which the hermeneutical failure is situated. The injustice, then, would not properly be located in the epistemic domain.¹¹

This criticism is significant, as it points out the need to explain in which sense the basic epistemic symmetry results also in an epistemic asymmetry which can provide grounds to diagnose an injustice. As we will reconstruct in our model, what Beeby overlooks is that different epistemic roles and hence, likely epistemic actions, may be asymmetric even though underlying deficiencies are perfectly shared. To see this, consider again our previous example of a patient encountering a clinician looking for diagnosis.

Example 4 Betting on a Diagnosis *Let S_1, S_2, D and a, b, c, d be as in the pre-vious example. Consider two agents deciding to act on $p(D|S_1)$ which according to Bayes theorem is equal to*

$$\frac{p(S_1|D)}{p(S_1)} p(D)$$

The imprecise version is, under our assumptions, calculated by applying Bayes theorem to the prior upper and lower probabilities.¹² Interpreting the mathematical structure, let one agent be a patient being diagnosed, the other a clinician performing the diagnosis. We assume further that the agents agree on utility assignments for the various outcomes, e.g. a pharmacological treatment given a particular diagnosis. Still, they differ in their epistemic positioning vis-a-vis D . The clinician offers an interpretation of S_1 in terms of D when providing a diagnosis, or denies it in the form of \bar{D} . The patient chooses from the opposite perspective, having to decide whether to pick up this interpretation or reject it. In model terms, the clinician giving a diagnosis offers a bet to the patient, who is in the position of the buyer. But as $b > a$, there is a range of values for the diagnosis for which seller and buyer, clinician and patient, will not agree to an exchange, they fail to negotiate an interpretation.¹³

¹¹ There are also important concerns with the idea that hermeneutical gaps have to hold a whole society in their grip for epistemic injustice to occur. As Wylie (2013) points out, it is possible that marginalized groups indeed have the linguistic and conceptual structures to make sense of their experiences while also having to deal in those of the non-marginalized, but are still in important ways hindered by the shared – or rather, non-sharing of interpretive resources in parsing and communicating their experiences. But also, as Mills (2013) points out, it is possible that the ignorance of the non-marginalized is re-imported into particularized resources of marginalized groups.

¹² In general, the posterior distribution for the whole credal set has to be calculated and upper and lower probability arise according to their definition above.

¹³ The language of the model makes the interaction sound very competitive or even antagonistic. As can be gleaned from Dorfman and Reynolds (2023), psychiatric diagnosis is at least in some cases correctly characterized as non-cooperative, this is not an inherent feature of the process and the

Abstracting from the particulars of the example, the account suggested by the reconstruction can be laid out as follows: Two agents may have the same credal set regarding a set of events as well as the same valuations for outcomes, but differ due to their positioning as sellers and buyers of bets. This works well when we consider the communication of experiences subject to hermeneutical shortcomings, as one type of person typically has that experience, while another is typically the recipient of attempts to communicate it.¹⁴ The diagnosis example also illustrates how this manifests in sense-making itself: The clinician does not have the same stake as the patient in applying a particular diagnosis, and as described, their positions relative to the experience may also be on different ends of the spectrum.¹⁵

If we take seriously the criticism put forth by Beeby, it is important to point out that the injustice here is not purely due to unjust non-epistemic social background conditions; those are also likely to be in place, e.g. sexist prejudice towards female patients or classism common in the discipline of psychology (Rickett, 2020). Within the model, this can be represented by allowing for different valuations. Such differences would further exacerbate the divergence of the two agents in the model, so leaving out this feature does not threaten our argument. But there is also a genuinely epistemic asymmetry: One epistemic agent is in the position to make sense of *their* experience, while the other is asked to do this for someone else's. The experience, and hence the credal states associated with its interpretation, do not have the same relevance for agents of different social types. But relevance is an epistemic category, not exclusively a practical one. Therefore, our reconstruction maintains that there is indeed a genuine epistemic injustice resulting from a symmetrical hermeneutical gap.

3.3 Dispersion Through Dilation

In the previous section, we reconstructed an agreed-upon feature of the theory of hermeneutical injustice and applied it to discuss a line of criticism. The purpose of this exercise, beyond its subject-matter argument, was to show the ability of the formal framework to capture features of the informal theory in a useful way. Now, we want to derive a conjecture for a novel aspect of the theory: Dispersive interpretive deficiencies.

model does not materially imply such an understanding. It is perfectly compatible with viewing the failure as an unfortunate consequence of poor resources insufficient to enable cooperation between two well-meaning parties.

¹⁴ Note, that this does not generally turn the scenario into a case of testimonial injustice, as no deflating of credibility needs to take place.

¹⁵ Note that there are also cases where the stakes are reversed, because the patient has an interest not to accept a particular diagnosis as an interpretation of their experience.

Dilation, as laid out above, denotes a set of credal states such that learning the outcome for a random variable X renders an agent's credal state on another random variable Y less precise. In terms of the theory, an interpretive deficiency may have an agent become more ignorant on receiving evidence and processing it in a way otherwise considered rational, i. e. by conditionalization.¹⁶

Example 5 Dispersive Interpretation Assume, again, the two events S and D . Suppose further that a clinician has a precise estimate of the likelihood of S in a prospective patient due to available population-level information. But the relation between symptom and diagnosis is such that learning if D or $\neg D$ induces dilation in $p(S)$, in numbers e.g.

$$\begin{aligned} p(S) &= 0.1 \\ p(S|D) &\in \{0.1, 0.15\} \\ p(S|\bar{D}) &\in \{0.01, 0.1\} \end{aligned}$$

Thus, learning the diagnosis a prospective patient received would make the clinicians credal state about them experiencing a particular symptom less precise. This dispersion of the credal state renders the diagnosis a hindrance in the reasoning about and hence interpretation of the patient's symptom. With respect to S , it would be better not to know about D . Presumably, there are other good reasons to try to learn about D , but given the relation to S , this has the side effect of making it more difficult to make sense of and communicate S for those who suffer it.

The example should make it clear why we refer to this type of interpretive deficiency as dispersive: It widens the credal state of the epistemic agent, i.e. it disperses the indeterminacy over a wider range of credal states. We do not make, at this point, any claim as to how common this type of problem actually is. It is indeed rather difficult to determine in a given case if this is happening, as it requires a rather detailed knowledge of both actual and counterfactual beliefs. Even if we observe, for instance, that an agent's credal state became more indeterminate upon receiving evidence of a particular outcome, while it is easy to theoretically construct a comprehensive credal state, it is a well known problem to measure what someone would have believed if the events unfolded differently.

¹⁶ As we noted, we will not take a stand on the question if imprecise probabilities are themselves irrational. The point is that an agent, operating as rational as possible given they already hold an indeterminate credal state, is subject to the phenomenon of dilation and hence dispersive interpretive deficiency.

The example directs our attention further to the question if the indeterminate credal states are located in an individual mind, or rather reside in the collective space. For an individual, it seems difficult, if not unintelligible, to hold such starkly opposed views about the relation between *S* and *D*. The best way to make sense of such an individually indeterminate state is as the agent entertaining different theories and acting thereupon, rather than as straightforward indeterminate belief.

But within the context of shared interpretive resources, the obvious interpretation of the problematic imprecise probabilities understands them as the product of a social process of negotiating the positions of different agents into one shared resource. Under this interpretation, the individuals hold straight-forward credences, but in social interactions, have to draw upon the shared interpretive resources. But those, in accordance with the resolution of disagreement into a collective imprecise credence may without any further assumptions on individual credence, lead to the scenario described in the example.

The example also brings out a particular connection to testimonial injustice. If the patient testifies and, due to dispersive interpretive deficiency, this leaves their clinician more uncertain about a particular symptom, the interaction is easily mistaken for a case of testimonial injustice. However, it is distinct in two ways: First, *D* need not always be something to be learned from testimony. In the case of diagnosis, the clinician may construct it themselves from other symptoms. In different circumstances, the agent may learn the dilating information in any way evidence can be acquired. Second, the description does not entail a discounting of credibility, and hence, no paradigmatic testimonial injustice is committed.

But dispersive interpretive resources may still be a contributing factor to testimonial injustice. As we pointed out before, dilation implies that a piece of information may indeed be detrimental in purely epistemic terms. This means that an epistemic agent, faced with dilation, is incentivized not to learn the dilating information. Applied to testimony in the example, this provides a reason for the clinician to dismiss the patient's testimony about *D* to avoid the dilation of their credal state regarding *S*. Vice versa, a patient may have an incentive to withhold testimony not to dilate their audiences credal states.¹⁷ Thus, we can see dispersive interpretive resources as one of a number of possible mechanisms translating hermeneutical into testimonial injustice.

¹⁷ This phenomenon is close to what Dotson (2011) refers to as testimonial smothering.

4 Conclusion

In this paper, we reconstructed a type of interpretive deficiency in the framework of imprecise probabilities. We recovered the common observation that symmetric epistemic problems can induce asymmetrical downstream effects, even if the valuations of different subjects align. This is a consequence of different social positioning leading to different social types taking up distinct roles in attempts of sense-making and communication. Our result refutes the concerns that hermeneutical injustice may not be a genuine case of epistemic injustice. We used a decision-theoretic model with imprecise probabilities to analyze this phenomenon, and thereby also established a potential connection to testimonial injustice.

Our second main result is a theoretical accounting of a kind of hermeneutical injustice which, to our knowledge, has not been explicitly discussed. By following the implications of the theory of imprecise probabilities, we investigate a phenomenon we call interpretive dispersion. On the level of the model, imprecise probabilities allow for dilation, meaning that evidence on one variable may, regardless of the outcome, widen the uncertainty about a second variable. For the target of the effects of interpretive deficiencies on credal states, we understand this as a faulty interpretive resource rendering evidence on an issue inert or even epistemically detrimental in the sense of dispersing further an uncertain credal state rather than reducing uncertainty. We apply this to a case of testimony, where it may undermine a speaker without discounting their credibility. We conjecture that some prejudices establish an interpretive structure which is well described by dispersal: Whatever the subject of the prejudice says, this only raises more doubt on the content of their testimony. On a more philosophically basic level, this demonstrates the limits of the mere provision of further evidence. When the interpretive resources used to integrate new evidence are deficient in the sense we describe, this evidence cannot by itself remedy the faulty epistemic state. Fighting the injustice requires the deeper work of reforming or revolutionizing conceptual and theoretical structures.

To conclude, we want to once again be clear about the limitations of our investigation and sketch future directions. It should be clear that our account does not cover all forms of hermeneutical injustice noted in the literature. Some of them may not reduce to propositional content, others may, in the terms of our probabilistic approach, be properly located in the underlying algebra, rather than the credal states, and hence can only be properly analyzed in reference to a different algebra of events. Furthermore, we relied on the modest assumption that inference and correlation of experiences is at least an important part of understanding. However, these cognitive tasks are not a full reconstruction of the notion of understanding underlying the theory of hermeneutical injustice. In this further sense, we can only cover an aspect of the phenomenon.

For the future, we briefly discuss two directions we find particularly interesting. First, we believe it would be quite fruitful to embed the model in an agent-based model to simulate a more genuinely social dynamic. Current ABM of belief formation are built on classical probability models (Merdes et al., 2021; Holman and Bruner, 2015; Zollman, 2007; Weatherall et al., 2020), and would also benefit from an expansion of their expressive power. Second, reconstructing understanding in probabilistic terms deserves more attention. One could attempt, for instance, to combine an account of understanding in terms of grasping causal explanations with a probabilistic account of causal explanation to construct a set of credal states to capture a notion of understanding. We believe this notion of understanding to be too narrow for the purpose of hermeneutical justice, and hence would suggest a broader exploration what can and cannot be expressed in a probabilistic framework, imprecise or classical.

We hope that our analysis helps to encourage an optimistic outlook on the application of formal methods in the theory of epistemic justice. While great care has to be taken to not lose key insights from the informal discourse, formal reconstructions can clarify and aid theoretical speculation.

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Finding Truth Behind Backs and Through Grapevines: On the Epistemology and Ethics of Gossip and Rumor

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ABSTRACT. Stroll through any office party, social gathering, or school cafeteria, and you are likely to hear people engaging in what you would quickly and accurately label “gossip,” perhaps by noticing that someone who is not present is being discussed in a way that you imagine the person who is the subject of the discussion wouldn’t appreciate. You will often hear, in similar contexts, rumors being spread using a standard, “I heard that...” as a kind of disclaimer regarding the truth of the statement that was heard. Gossip has a “behind the back” quality that other types of conversation do not. A rumor, on the other hand, isn’t itself an activity, but a claim that gets passed from person to person with no one taking responsibility for the truth of the claim. “I heard that...” or even, “I’m not certain about this, but I heard...” are often said before someone transmits a rumor to another person. Taking something passed “through the grapevine” of multiple speakers as true has well-known perils.

This piece discusses the natures of rumor and gossip, how they function, and what their consequences are. Two main concerns are (a) the extent to which we have the epistemic justification to believe rumors and gossip, and (b) the ethical implications of spreading rumors and engaging in gossip. I’ll argue that, with respect to epistemological justification, gossip is on better footing than rumor. One of the reasons for this is that gossip often functions as a way of spreading truths that the subject of the gossip would not want spread. Rumors, on the other hand, are prefaced with a disclaimer that indicates that the claim being spread is not first-hand information, thus making its truth inherently questionable. Lastly, with respect to their ethical implications, I’ll argue that the “behind the back” quality of gossip makes it inherently unethical, but that spreading rumors is sometimes ethically justified, or even required, as when one hears of a dangerous situation and warns others “just in case.”

Keywords: rumor, gossip, truth, disclaimer, behind-the-back

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Introduction

Stroll through any office party, social gathering, or school cafeteria, and you are likely to hear people engaging in what you would quickly and accurately label “gossip,” perhaps by noticing that someone who is not present is being discussed in a way that you imagine the person who is the subject of the gossip wouldn’t appreciate. You will often hear, in similar contexts, rumors being spread using a standard, “I heard that...” as a kind of disclaimer regarding the truth of the statement that was heard. Gossip has a “behind the back” quality that other types of conversation do not. A rumor, on the other hand, is a claim that gets passed from person to person with no one taking responsibility for the truth of the claim. “I heard that...” or even, “I’m not certain about this, but I heard...” are often said before someone transmits a rumor to another person. Taking something passed “through the grapevine” of multiple speakers as true has well-known perils. Below is a comparative analysis of gossip and rumor as two ways for finding truth. “Finding truth” in this context is not meant to conflate epistemological and semantic notions but rather highlight that, when rumors are spread and gossip takes place, standards for ethical and epistemological justification shift. Neither gossiping nor spreading rumor is a totally acceptable method for passing along, or obtaining, truth, yet the reasons for this differ. I will conclude that, with respect to epistemological justification, gossip is on better footing than rumor. One of the reasons for this is that gossip often functions as a way of spreading claims that the subject of the gossip would not want to be spread. These claims may nevertheless be true and there may be good evidence to show this. Rumors, on the other hand, are prefaced with a disclaimer that indicates that the claim being spread is not first-hand information, thus making the rumor’s truth inherently questionable. Lastly, with respect to their ethical implications, I’ll conclude that the “behind the back” quality of gossip makes it inherently unethical, but that spreading rumors is sometimes ethically justified, or even required, as when one hears of a dangerous situation and warns others “just in case.” Once I have shown gossip to be primarily suspect in terms of morality, and rumor to be primarily suspect in terms of its epistemic justification, I, lastly, suggest ways that the well-known dangers of engaging in these two forms of communication might be minimized.

Gossip and Rumor as Speech Acts and as Claims

It will be helpful to begin by distinguishing the speech acts accomplished by gossiping and spreading rumors, as well as the claims that are made through gossip and rumor. The chart below illustrates this.

Table 1. Gossip and Rumor-Spread as Speech Acts and Claims

| | Speech Act | Claim |
|--------|--|---|
| Gossip | Roughly, the act of making a claim about a person in which the speaker is disinclined to speak with the subject of the gossip present. | Piece of Gossip: Claim about subject of gossiping made by the speaker |
| Rumor | The repetition of a claim from person to person with no person taking "epistemic responsibility" for the claim. | Rumor: Claim which is passed from person to person. |

Gossip

Starting with speech acts, when we look at the activity of gossiping, we'll see that there are certain rules underlying what counts as an act of gossiping. I have discussed this previously in an essay on gossip in the *Journal of Social Philosophy* (Cuonzo 2008). Briefly, the activity of gossiping is constrained by certain conditions. For example, gossip cannot be about inanimate objects. I can gossip about how much someone paid for a cup, how much a person drank from a cup, or why someone stole a cup, but not the cup itself. Even when encountering an offensive image or sentiment on a cup, it is the person who would buy or create such a cup that would be the subject of the gossip, not the cup itself. That this is so indicates a central feature of the activity of gossiping, namely, that there is a person who is the subject of the gossip whose awareness of the activity the participants in gossip would like to avoid. In that 2008 paper, I gave the following definition of gossip:

Where A, B, and C refer to distinct persons,
In uttering p, A gossips to B about C if, and only if, (i) A believes that C would not like A to reveal the information contained in p to B; (ii) A would be disinclined to utter p to B with C present; (iii) A believes that uttering p will be pleasurable to A and/or B; and (iv) p contains information about C.

There's a lot to unpack here. Let me first indicate that I have something more specific in mind than a definition offered by Kelsey McKinney in a recent popular and entertaining book on gossip, *You Didn't Hear This From Me* (2025). McKinney defines gossip as "one person talking to another about someone who isn't present" (2). This is too broad a definition to be meaningful. We can speak about people who are not present without gossiping. I can, for example, send a message from one person to another in which I discuss what the sender of the message wants me to convey about the sender to the hearer. For example, Karen may want me to tell Jamie that she is sorry about what happened the previous day. In conveying Karen's message, I'm not gossiping about Karen, but fulfilling a request. This, to my mind, is not gossip.

Simplifying my old definition a bit, I believe there are at least three features that are central to gossip. (i) A utters to B a claim about C (this conforms to McKinney's definition); (ii) A would be disinclined to utter p with C present. This gives gossip its "behind-the back" quality and indicates a kind of dishonesty, or at the very least, a lack of transparency on the part of the speaker and hearer; and (iii) A believes that A's utterance will produce pleasure in A and/or B. This last element is needed to separate gossip from other activities that would simply be private communications about third parties.

There is a very special kind of pleasure that gossip brings. It was once described as "Belgian Chocolate for the Universal Mind" in a Ph.D. dissertation (DeBacker, Ghent, 2005) and McKinney evokes it when describing the feeling when someone leans towards someone and says in a hushed tone, "You're not going to believe this...". Robin Dunbar and others argue that the evolutionary role of gossip was as a means of substitute "grooming" in order to form alliances (1996). Rather than devoting long hours to forming alliances through grooming individuals, our evolutionary ancestors developed language to facilitate alliances and maintain their place in the social hierarchy, according to this view. It makes sense, then, that gossip provides a special pleasure associated with social connection between speaker and hearer. Though it is hard to describe this pleasure clearly, recent studies provide a more nuanced view of the nature and biological underpinnings of the pleasure of gossip. Brondino et al (2017), for example, show that the speech act of gossiping is associated with increased levels of oxytocin levels in the brain, indicating a rise in feelings of trust and social bonding, while Rudnicki et al (2023) don't find that there is a decrease in the stress-related hormone cortisol, indicating that the speech act seems not to reduce stress levels, though they acknowledge that those who gossip a good deal tend to have lower cortisol levels. Given Dunbar's theory, it makes sense that a pleasure associated with social connection is brought about by gossip, even though this may not result in reduced stress levels.

This pleasurable connection, though, also provides grounds for loosening social connections with the individual who is the subject of the gossip. The speaker is being deceptive, not of the hearer, but of the subject in the fact that the speaker wants to keep the speaker's claims about the subject hidden. The speaker (A) would not share the claim with the hearer (B) with the subject (C) present. Therefore, while perhaps justified when it is the only means to convey important information, gossip is inherently morally questionable. This follows from (ii), the behind-the-back nature of the communication.

Some philosophical analyses of gossip, such as the articles in *Good Gossip* (Goodman et al 1994) attempt to ethically justify gossip on grounds that it is often associated with those with less power. For example, graduate students may warn

each other against being alone with a certain professor. The line of argument contends that gossip in such cases protects those with less power from the more powerful and is therefore morally acceptable. I concur about this particular case only because of the limited options the graduate students have to share information without negative consequences. That is, it is *only* justified because of the limited options of the speaker and hearer. Like all cases where justification for avoiding a small wrong is outweighed by the negative consequences of not engaging in the wrong, gossip may be justified given the circumstances. This, however, does nothing to change the inherent nature of gossip as ethically questionable.

I submit that the speaker of the gossip can and often does have direct evidence for the claim being made. For example, if A, B, and C are all coworkers, A might have seen C doing something untoward, like getting high and taking off all their clothes. A gossips to B when A recounts C's actions to B but would not do so if C were present at the time of the speech act. Notice A has seen with A's own eyes the untoward action. The evidence is not indirect, but rather secret. A might even have taken a cellphone picture of the C engaged in the activity. So, while morally questionable, gossip is not inherently suspect epistemologically. Indeed, the best gossips have reliable information about their subjects.

Rumor

A rumor, on the other hand, by definition lacks direct evidence. Consider the following as a rough definition of *rumor*: *A claim that is passed from person to person without the speaker taking "epistemic responsibility" for the claim, that is, without providing clear evidence other than the testimony of someone else.* It's the evidential basis of rumor that is its main problem. This isn't to say that people don't spread rumors through malice. They do, of course. And this also isn't to say that gossip and spreading rumors can't occur at the same time, as when someone spreads a rumor about someone, that is, spreads a claim about someone prefaced with "I heard that..." and also gossips, that is, makes the statement despite being disinclined to spread the rumor with the subject present.

It is not a precondition for spreading rumor that there is some kind of malice involved. Indeed, there are many instances in which we might be morally obliged to spread a rumor. Say, for example, Pat is about to enter the building where Pat teaches, and someone comes up to Pat and says, "I really don't know if this is true, but someone just told me that he heard that there is an active shooter in the building." This brings up the issue of how reliable the testimony of others is, so let's assume that the claim is being passed on by people Pat doesn't know. While Pat is trying to figure out what is going on, Pat notices a colleague who is walking toward

the building on her way to teach. Pat might, out of concern for the colleague, ask her to consider this possibility, even though Pat has no evidence for the claim other than the random person's saying it. I submit that Pat's spreading of the rumor is not merely permissible, but obligatory.

In addition to cases like Pat's, an examination of the two central features of rumor indicates that there nothing inherently immoral about spreading a rumor.

First Central Concept of Rumor: Spread

The first central feature of rumor is spread, that is, the activity of passing on the claim. Spread has been measured as the number of persons receiving and repeating the claim, and the speed at which this passing and repetition occurs. Spread can occur rapidly or slowly. Some mathematicians have modeled the spread of rumors based on epidemiological models of the spread of disease. Taking rumor to be "a disease of the mind," the idea is to model how a rumor "infects" someone and how that person could pass it on, or not (Nekovee et al, 2007). In the Nekovee et al model, for example, the model considers a population of N individuals and, like models that subdivide the populations into those who spread a disease, become exposed, and become immune, they divide the population into rumor spreaders, ignorants, and rumor stiflers. Contact between the individuals takes place in a network $G = (V, E)$, in which V denotes the vertices of the network, and E denotes the edges of the network. Two rules govern the contacts between individuals.

- Whenever a spreader contacts an ignorant, the ignorant becomes a spreader at a rate λ .
- When a spreader contacts another spreader or a stifier the initiating spreader becomes a stifier at a rate α .

In the above, the first rule models the tendency of individuals to accept a rumor only with a certain probability which, loosely speaking, depends on the urgency or credibility of a rumor. The second rule, on the other hand, models the tendency of individuals to lose interest in spreading a rumor when they learn, through contacts with others, that the rumor has become stale news or is false.

The modeling of rumor spread using a similar structure to epidemiological models invites certain criticisms. One is that treating rumor spread as a "disease of the mind" doesn't allow for the epistemic value that rumors have. People want to know the rumors. They take an interest in them, as we'll see below, perhaps based on their own interests. They may seek them out, as opposed to those who can be infected with disease. Additionally, there are some issues with the parameters of the present model. The first rule, "Whenever a spreader contacts an ignorant, the ignorant becomes an spreader at a rate λ ," is meant to model "the tendency of

individuals to accept a rumour only with a certain probability which, loosely speaking, depends on the urgency or credibility of a rumour" (Nekovee et al 2007). However, the credibility and tendency to accept are not necessarily related. As has been discussed much in the psychological literature of rumor spread, tendency to spread is often a function of the hearer's previously held beliefs rather than the credibility of the rumor (cf. Sunstein 14-19).

Two earlier researchers didn't speak of "spread" but rather the "strength" of a rumor, though strength was indicative of how fast and wide a rumor would spread. Allport and Postman (1948), while working on quelling rumors during WWII, held in their basic law of rumor that the "strength" of rumor, or how likely it was to spread quickly and to many persons, was determined by (a) the importance of the topic to those involved and (b) the ambiguity of the evidence. The example involving Pat and the rumor about the shooter is an example of a strong rumor. Pat's rumor is important as there is great danger if there is an active shooter in the building, and the evidence for the claim is ambiguous. However, the Allport/Postman account invites the objection that rumors are often spread despite having little importance for the parties engaged in spreading the rumors. For example, rumors about celebrities often have little to no impact on the spreaders of the rumors. Yet, they are often spread quite quickly and quite far. Perhaps the notion of "importance" can be substituted with a more general term like "interest." While the latest rumor about a celebrity's life may not be important in the sense of altering the rumor-spreaders' lives, the interest taken in the rumors certainly leads to quicker and greater spread. Both the epidemiological models and the basic law of rumor are flawed, however both do emphasize the centrality of spread to the nature of rumor. And in neither is there anything to indicate that spreading the rumor need be done maliciously or with any attempt on the part of the speakers to harm the hearers.

Second Central Concept of Rumor: The Disclaimer

The second central concept is the epistemic disclaimer. The activity isn't to necessarily speak behind someone's back, though this might happen, but rather to pass a claim from person to person without taking responsibility for having direct evidence. Whether directly stated or implied, there is always a disclaimer with respect to the truth of rumors. Typical ones include, "I heard that..." "I read that..." "So and so said that..." "A blog post says that..." And so on. The passing of the buck with respect to evidence is indicative that the claim is coming from the speaker without there being any direct evidence provided. Notice that here, too, there is nothing inherently unethical about the spreading of the claims. Indeed the disclaimer is itself an action that indicates a certain transparency on the part of the speaker. The disclaimer indicates that the speaker is upfront about the speaker's lack of evidence.

Conclusions about Gossip and Rumor

Getting back to the chart distinguishing gossip and rumor in terms of their speech acts and the nature of their claims, the morality of the speech act is questionable for gossip, but not rumor, however the epistemological issues are more serious for rumor than gossip.

Table 2. Conclusions About Gossip and Rumor

| | Speech Act | Claim |
|--------|---|--|
| Gossip | Roughly, the act of making claim about a person in which the speaker is disinclined to speak with the person present. INHERENTLY MORALLY QUESTIONABLE | Piece of Gossip: Claim about subject of gossiping made by the speaker. NOT INHERENTLY EPISTEMICALLY QUESTIONABLE |
| Rumor | The repetition of rumor from person to person with no person taking "epistemic responsibility" for the claim. NOT INHERENTLY MORALLY QUESTIONABLE | Rumor: Claim which is passed from person to person. INHERENTLY EPISTEMICALLY QUESTIONABLE |

To sum up, the activity of rumor spread involves the chain of conveyance, hence the ubiquitous metaphor of hearing things "through the grapevine." Notice that there is nothing inherently morally suspect in a chain of conveyance. What is suspect, though, is the evidence for the claim. This is why I believe that rumor's main issue is not a moral one, though rumors can do great harm, but rather an epistemological one. Gossip, on the other hand, is primarily a moral problem, due to inherent deception, not, ironically, of the hearer, but of the person who is the subject of the gossip.

Strategies for Preventing the Negative Aspects of Gossip and Rumor-Spread

The account just given can provide some guidelines for avoiding the negative consequences that result from gossip and rumor-spread. These suggestions are offered in the spirit of how to avoid both the inferential and ethical pitfalls that make these two phenomena so prevalent. Just as informal fallacies like *ad misericordiam* (appeal to pity) result from the way human beings are motivated by forces that go beyond logic proper, gossip and spreading rumor have their roots beyond purely logical inference.

Since a central feature of gossip is its behind-the-back quality, one way to avoid gossip is for the subject of the gossip, that is, C in the definition, to be present regularly and maintain awareness of what is being said and by whom. This is obviously not foolproof. I had a colleague who heard I was working on gossip, and I gave her that advice. She was the subject of gossip and wasn't around much to

address the issue and provide counterevidence. So, my suggestion was to make her presence felt more regularly. Also, if we'd like to self-regulate our use of gossip, we might ask ourselves if we'd be inclined to say this if the subject of our claims were present. Social psychological studies of gossip have indicated that gossip is often a means of bonding at the expense of the subject and often meant to lower the subject's social status in a group (Dunbar 2005). Thus, it is more common among colleagues and in circumstances where there are hierarchies, whether social (as in high school) or in other situations, such as work. That this is so provides some way of anticipating when gossip is more likely to occur and to be on guard.

And since rumor has been shown to be inherently weak in terms of evidence, the easiest way to address the problems raised by their spread is to keep this in mind. For example, taking degrees of belief as a tool here, rumors should always have low initial degrees of credence until evidence is provided. Taking us away from straightforward philosophy, it has been shown repeatedly that people are more likely to believe rumors that validate previously held beliefs, no matter how unlikely the rumor is (Sunstein 2014, 14-19). I've spent some time at the WWII Rumor Project archive at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, USA, looking at documentation about rumors during that period. One common theme was that rumors tend to be believed and spread by those with particular biases. As a result, rumors often were about groups that were already the subject of discrimination and bias. The same rumor was often used multiple times and interchanged groups. For example, one rumor took the form "The X are making tons of money on the war," where X referred to any group that the hearers were predisposed against: the Jews, the Capitalists, and so on. Another common theme was, "The X are working for the enemy," where the X were black Americans, immigrants, and so on. To self-regulate, people must be particularly aware that they are more likely to believe rumors that confirm their own biases. The analogy with the informal fallacies here is particularly important. Study of informal fallacies like bifurcation (either/or fallacy) is meant to illustrate how human beings can fall prey to believing that an either/or claim (for example, "You're either for me or against me") does not admit of other options (for example, you're neutral). Study of rumors and their spread shows that one's own preconceived ideas make one more vulnerable to believing rumors without sufficient evidence.

Conclusions

In sum, gossip is an inherently moral problem derived from its behind-the-back quality and is best addressed through transparency. While we may find truth in gossiping, the means through which we obtain it is morally suspect. This is so even

when, due to lack of options, we are justified in gossiping about more powerful people, such as in the case of the sexual harasser mentioned earlier. Rumor, on the other hand, is an inherently epistemological issue and is best addressed via treating with skepticism claims that are far removed from any direct evidence. However, there may be occasions, like the active shooter example, when we must acknowledge the lack of evidence for the truth of the claim but alter our behavior "just in case." Both have their pitfalls, yet both admit of cases when they are useful despite these pitfalls.

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Separating Metaphysical Issues

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ABSTRACT. In this paper, I introduce two important distinctions that, when taken seriously, help clarify the dialectic behind metaphysical debates and respond to the objection from incredulity. In particular, I argue that the principle of parsimony in metaphysical theorising should be applied more cautiously.

Keywords: Parsimony; Ontology; Indispensability; Ontological Commitment; Quantifier Commitment

1. Introduction

Debates regarding the meaningfulness of metaphysical disputes are widespread. For example, Takashi Yagisawa (2025) recently analysed the debate between modal realists and modal actualists. He argues that this debate is philosophically substantive and thus allows for serious, faultless disagreement. However, his position comes with an unwelcome consequence: it is highly unparsimonious. In this paper, I argue that although Yagisawa's view entails significant metaphysical costs, it can be refined into a more viable metaphysical theory. In Section 2, I outline Yagisawa's key claims regarding metaphysical methodology. In Sections 3–6, I argue that while the assumptions he relies on are necessary, they are insufficient by themselves to support his conclusion. I introduce two crucial distinctions that, when properly considered, help clarify Yagisawa's proposal and address the objection from incredulity. Finally, I conclude by suggesting that the principle of parsimony in metaphysical theorizing should be applied with greater caution.

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2. An outline of Yagisawa's Proposal

Yagisawa examines the debate through the lens of three pivotal assumptions, A1–A3:

- A1. It is useful to relativise the notion of truth for many philosophical purposes; a sentence is true or false at a truth-relativiser.
- A2. The framework of worlds, which includes both possible and impossible worlds, provides strong candidate truth-relativisers for explicating the truth conditions of many important types of sentences.
- A3. Ontological matters should be understood as matters pertaining to the domain of discourse associated with quantification.

A1 is widely regarded as an uncontroversial consequence of the framework, which asserts that the meaningfulness of, for example, $\diamond P$ implies a commitment to entities featuring as truth-relativisers. While there is ongoing debate regarding the existence, nature, and epistemic accessibility of these entities, the assumption that propositions require a truth-relativiser is hardly a novel one in philosophy. A2 refines this further by identifying truth-relativisers with possible and impossible worlds. This clarification of A1 is philosophically more contentious, as possible and impossible worlds play a controversial role in determining the truth conditions of modal propositions. Finally, A3 places metaphysical debates within the context of world discourse, suggesting that quantification over the domains of worlds can reveal the nature of metaphysical questions. These three fundamental philosophical assumptions concerning truth-relativisers culminate in Yagisawa's pivotal principle:

(Non-Vacuous Suppositional Content Realisation Principle):

For any non-vacuous supposition-based argument of the form, 'Suppose that P . Then Q ', some t-index verifies P , i.e. P is true with respect to some t-index, and the argument succeeds only if some t-index that verifies P verifies Q . (Yagisawa, 2025, p. 4)

In this context, the t-index serves as a shorthand for truth-relativisers, referring broadly to modal space and, more specifically, to possible and impossible worlds.

Importantly, the three assumptions outlined above, when combined with the application of the Non-Vacuous Suppositional Content Realisation Principle (henceforth SCR), extend beyond mere logical and semantic considerations. Adhering to these assumptions requires substantial metaphysical commitments, rather than just linguistic competence or surface-level understanding. This means that engaging in

serious metaphysical discourse triggers ‘a potentially endless series of ever-expanding ontological commitments.’ (Yagisawa 2025, p. 2).

A natural reaction to this set of assumptions, followed by the principle, is immediate: it seems incredible, metaphysically unparsimonious, and even internally incoherent. One simple reason for this is that following the assumptions in debates about incompatible metaphysical theories leads to insurmountable metaphysical commitments. Specifically, the debate, when framed in terms of worlds, extends beyond them and culminates in a more comprehensive understanding of truth-relativisers – modal spaces. Yagisawa demonstrates this result as follows:

An actualist may begin a *reductio ad absurdum* argument against Lewisian modal realism, for example, by supposing that possible worlds are spatiotemporally unified concrete wholes. Given the Non-Vacuous Suppositional Content Realisation Principle, the content of this supposition is realized by some t-index, so possible worlds are spatiotemporally unified concrete wholes at some t-index. Let *i* be such a t-index. Since the actualist thinks of \mathfrak{M} as containing maximally consistent propositions, the actualist does not think that *i* is \mathfrak{M} , hence the actualist is committed to some modal space alternative to \mathfrak{M} . Thus, simply by making the supposition for *reductio*, the actualist is committed to a modal space other than what the actualist takes to be the actual modal space. This is so, whether the *reductio* argument succeeds or not. (Yagisawa 2025, p.11)

From a methodological perspective, accepting modal spaces enhances the expressive power of world semantics but raises significant concerns about parsimony. This is because A2 explicitly introduces worlds as entities functioning as truth-relativisers. When combined with A3, this view incurs substantial ontological commitments. Namely, adequately capturing metaphysical debates requires the domain of possible and impossible worlds to be sufficiently expansive to accommodate any metaphysical claim. This line of reasoning ultimately leads to a dilemma about the nature of modality – one that is closely tied to the very nature of worlds themselves¹. I will examine this dilemma in the following section.

¹ An anonymous reviewer raises an important point here. Specifically, Yagisawa’s criticism can be resisted by fictionalists, sceptics about modality, or proponents of a permissive account of supposition, according to which the limits of the supposer’s commitments are less strict than in other methods and, importantly, are metaphysically harmless. I take this point seriously, but I will raise some metaphysical issues in Section 3.

3. The Dilemma

The dilemma is as follows: to accommodate metaphysical discourse, we must either adopt a unified theory of worlds or embrace what might be termed *ontological pluralism*. The first horn of the dilemma holds that a unified account – such as modal realism – can ground modal claims about metaphysically incompatible aspects of reality, including those captured by ersatzist frameworks. However, as Vander Laan observes, ‘[T]he Achilles’ heel of a concretist theory of impossible worlds is the fact that there are certain things which concrete worlds cannot represent inaccurately...’ (Vander Laan, 1997, p. 607). On the other hand, many intuitively compelling modal claims remain inadequately represented within *ersatzist* frameworks, owing to the expressive limitations of world-making language (Lewis, 1986, §3). One such limitation concerns the treatment of *alien individuals* and *alien properties* – that is, individuals that do not exist in the actual world and properties uninstantiated within it. While ersatzist theories attempt to accommodate such possibilities, they have been argued to offer only a partial and constrained characterisation. Given these shortcomings, the representational adequacy of any unified ontology – whether grounded in modal realism or constructed through modal ersatzism – becomes a matter of legitimate philosophical concern.

Ontological pluralism, roughly, is the view that an adequate account of reality requires multiple quantifiers that cannot be understood as ranging over a single, unified domain. At first glance, embracing ontological pluralism appears to avoid the descriptive limitations of a unified ontology. However, it does so at the cost of significantly expanding one’s ontological commitments. Given the acceptance of *A3*, the application of the SCR yields a plurality of modal spaces, each corresponding to distinct kinds of metaphysical commitments. Better put, the ontological pluralist is compelled to endorse various incompatible ontological theories, thereby disregarding Occam’s Razor and rendering the position metaphysically extravagant.

The two horns of the dilemma present a difficult choice: either one commits to a unified theory of possible worlds, which faces certain representational limitations, or one embraces ontological pluralism, which involves an extravagant and potentially unwieldy ontological commitment. Given these challenges, a pressing question arises: can a middle ground be found that preserves the strengths of both views while avoiding their respective pitfalls? Some philosophers have attempted to refine modal realism or ersatzism to address these concerns (Yagisawa, 1988), while others have explored hybrid approaches that incorporate elements of ontological pluralism without endorsing its more radical commitments (Berto, 2010). There is, however, another way to reframe the debate. In what follows, I argue that the debate need not

be regarded with such suspicion, provided we clarify the thesis in a more modest form. In particular, two distinctions – often conflated in the literature – should be kept separate: the nature/extent distinction and the distinction between *ontological* and *quantifier* commitment. I will examine each in turn.

4. The Nature and the Extent Question: Separation 1

To begin with the first distinction, philosophers frequently talk past one another when discussing the accuracy of analysis. Using modality – specifically, possibility – as an example, it is crucial to distinguish between two separate questions: What possibility is? and What possibility there is? Drawing on the exchange between (Divers, 2013), (Efid & Stoneham, 2008), and (Cameron, 2012), we can articulate this distinction – henceforth *SE1* – as follows:

- A. The nature question and the extent question should be distinguished and either
- A*. The proper office of an analysis of modality is to answer the nature question, or
- A**. The proper office of an analysis of modality is to answer the nature question as well as to answer the extent question.

Proponents of A* maintain that the extent question is irrelevant to providing an adequate analysis of possibility. Whatever the extent of the space of worlds may be, they have it – there are no prior constraints on the nature of worlds. In other words, metaphysicians need not establish a tight correspondence between the worlds that exist, on the one hand, and what we (intuitively) take to be possible, on the other (Cameron, 2012, p. 6). More broadly, there is no requirement that an account of the nature of worlds must entail their extent. These are, on this view, methodologically and explanatorily independent questions – and only the former is relevant to a proper analysis of modality. While it is not to say that the extent question is unimportant, it does not figure into the analysis of modality *per se*.

In contrast, proponents of A** argue that any adequate analysis of possibility must consider both the extent and the nature of possibility. Divers presents several reasons why these two questions should not be treated separately. One reason arises from the definitional schema of possibility, (P):

- (P) It is possible that *P* if and only if there exists a possible world, *w*, such that at *w*, *P*.

As it stands, (P) is neither an explicit schema about the nature of possible worlds nor about their extent. However, when one fills in the role of ‘possible world’ with, for example, the modal realist’s conception, the question of extent becomes strongly linked to the question of nature. Divers argues for this connection as follows:

For possibility is defined, in [P], as unrestricted existence. But that something or other unrestrictedly exists is an inevitable commitment of a Lewisian-Quinean metaphysical-base sentence given its logical-form. So a special feature of the case of possibility is that there is no option of going down the classic ‘error-theoretic’ route of accepting the definition but then claiming further that nothing in the metaphysical base provides for the definition being satisfied. One cannot consistently combine this definition of possibility with the commitment that nothing is (really) possible (Divers, 2013, p.191)

Here, ‘error-theoretic’ should be understood in a metaphysical rather than an epistemic sense. Thus, if one accepts A^{**} , they are also asserting that no two metaphysically incompatible commitments can satisfy one’s definition of possibility. In other words, it is inappropriate to claim that a variety of metaphysical frameworks can perform equally well in the accurate analysis of possibility. This means that once we have settled the nature question, we ipso facto settle the procedure that identifies the extent question: the two are inseparable, so to speak.

A further reason for insisting on the inseparability of the two questions is the need to align with pre-theoretical modal intuitions. Even if we agree that various unorthodox views on the extent of possibility, along with postulates about the number of worlds, are internally consistent with modal realism, this does not ensure that they ‘function together as the players of relevant roles... to deliver an analysis of possibility that is remotely successful by Lewisian criteria’ (Divers, 2013, p. 192). Specifically, these criteria determine whether to expand the commitments, contract the modal opinions, or do both, in order to achieve the best balance between economy and conservativeness. Thus, what proponents of A^* overlook are the criteria that, only when the nature and extent questions are considered together, correctly specify the roles that possible worlds play in the analysis.

Although *SE1* raises several issues, some observations suggest that non-separatism better captures the motivation behind the SCR. The extent question pertains to the content of metaphysical theories, rather than merely defining possibility. Since separating these stands in tension with A1–A3, proponents of the principle should acknowledge that a systematic approach provides a more informative framework. This suggests that a non-separatist interpretation is not merely preferable, but essential for preserving the adequacy of the analysis.

5. Ontological Commitment and Quantifier Commitment: Separation 2

Another important distinction, often overlooked in the literature, concerns the so-called *indispensability argument*. While the argument gained prominence primarily in the philosophy of mathematics, its applicability can easily be extended to metaphysics as well. In the former context, the argument proceeds as follows:

- (P1) We ought to be ontologically committed to all and only those entities that are indispensable to our best theories of the world.
- (P2) Mathematical entities are indispensable to our best theories of the world.

Therefore:

- (C) We ought to be ontologically committed to the existence of mathematical entities (Colyvan, 1998).

In the latter case, the same reasoning applied to mathematical entities can be extended to metaphysical entities. Just as the argument for ontological commitment to mathematical entities follows from their indispensability to our best theories of the world, a similar case can be made for metaphysical entities. If metaphysical entities are deemed indispensable to our best theories, then by the same reasoning, we ought to be ontologically committed to their existence. The core idea is that, just as mathematical entities are integral to the structure of our scientific and theoretical frameworks, metaphysical entities play a crucial role in our broader understanding of reality. Therefore, the argument for ontological commitment to metaphysical entities mirrors the argument for mathematical entities.

Here, the entities in question differ across competing metaphysical frameworks. These may include concrete possibilia (Lewis, 1986), states of affairs (Armstrong, 1989), propositions (Adams, 1974), or properties (Stalnaker, 1976). The crucial point is that, given the SCR and the validity of the indispensability argument, the resulting metaphysical debate yields highly unparsimonious consequences.

At first glance, the above arguments appear to concern the existence of entities of certain kinds. However, Azzouni (2004) complicates this issue. He introduces the so-called separation thesis (henceforth *SE2*), which distinguishes quantifier commitment from ontological commitment. According to this distinction, the entities a true theory quantifies over do not necessarily reflect its ontological commitments. As Azzouni explains, even the most well-supported theories do not necessarily provide insight into the actual existence of the entities they posit. Truth in a theoretical sense does not equate to ontological reality. For instance, there is a crucial difference

between being quantifier-committed to the existence of possible worlds and being ontologically committed to their existence. While the indispensability argument may justify the former, the question of whether these possible worlds truly exist remains separate. In short, quantifier commitment does not imply ontological commitment.

A crucial aspect of *SE2* is its challenge to the ‘no choice’ problem, which is typically framed as a conditional: If a theory you accept as true states that certain entities (*Fs*) exist, then you must believe in their existence (Colyvan, 2005). *SE2*, however, disputes this by arguing that one can acknowledge a theory’s usefulness or empirical adequacy without endorsing the ontological reality of its proposed entities. That is to say, simply quantifying over entities does not necessarily imply an ontological commitment to their existence. Instead, the answers to ontological questions remain socially relative, pragmatically burdened, and, unfortunately, virtually impossible to settle (Bueno & Shalkowski, 2004, p. 101). Specifically, one can quantify over possible worlds without committing to their metaphysical reality. This perspective allows for a more flexible approach to theoretical commitments, offering a potential solution to the ‘no choice’ problem. This, in essence, is *SE2*.

6. Balancing *SE1* and *SE2*

Where do *SE1* and *SE2* lead us? One takeaway is that the objection concerning the violation of parsimony, which arises from the three assumptions above and the SCR, should be considered only after addressing the importance of both the nature and extent questions. The second takeaway is that the indispensability argument, which determines our commitments, also has a separatist interpretation. One might therefore wonder which combinations of the separatist’s duals best capture the practice of metaphysics, while remaining uncontroversial with respect to parsimony as a theoretical virtue.

First, consider A^* and the ontological reading of *SE2*. The ontological reading of *SE2*, in this context, commits one to the existence of entities of the respective kind – whether these are possibilities, states of affairs, or some other metaphysical entities. This commitment raises significant concerns about the ontological implications of such a position. Although the analysis remains deliberately silent on the specific extent of these commitments – i.e., how many entities are involved – the position still suffers from a fundamental issue: it leads to an (ideologically) unparsimonious metaphysical framework.

Alternatively, the dual A^* and the quantifier interpretation of *SE2* take a more modest stance. They commit their proponents to the existence of various kinds of possible worlds but say little about the entities that fulfill the roles of these worlds. An analogy can be drawn along the following lines:

Suppose that our best theories of fictional discourse, as well as our practices with fiction, require the quantification over fictional characters. Perhaps the best way of making sense of the Sherlock Holmes stories is by quantifying over a detective who solved difficult cases in brilliant ways. Clearly, we incur a quantifier commitment here. But we would immediately deny the claim that we are ontologically committed to Sherlock Holmes! The natural response would be to acknowledge that even if we quantify over fictional characters, we have no reason to believe that they exist (Bueno & Shalkowski, 2004, p. 100)

To put it another way, simply quantifying over entities does not necessarily entail an ontological commitment to their existence. Similarly, when it comes to possible worlds, one can quantify over them without committing to their metaphysical reality. This approach offers a more flexible and pragmatic interpretation of modal discourse, sidestepping the heavy gical burdens associated with more robust realist perspectives. The question however remains: how the SCR is properly justified?

The most problematic position, purportedly represented by the SCR, is one that simultaneously endorses A^{**} and adopts the ontological interpretation of $SE2$. This position poses a significant issue because, as I see it, it aligns with the original concern about parsimony – the principle that, simply put, theories should avoid unnecessary complexity. The core problem lies in the fact that this view forces its proponents to accept an extensive range of ontological commitments, each corresponding to a different metaphysical framework and its extent. This not only undermines theoretical simplicity but also raises concerns about the coherence and explanatory power of the overall philosophical stance.

However, one might consider an alternative approach – namely, the combination of A^{**} and the quantifier interpretation of $SE2$. This perspective enables a crucial distinction: rather than committing to the ontological reality of the entities posited by various metaphysical theories, one can engage with these theories purely at the level of quantification. Put differently, one can entertain, even for the purposes of a *reductio ad absurdum*, a range of competing metaphysical frameworks and all the consequences they entail, without necessarily accepting the existence of the entities they introduce. As a result, this approach provides a way to navigate metaphysical discourse while adhering more closely to the principle of parsimony, avoiding the inflation of ontological commitments beyond what is, according to Occam's razor, necessary.

I believe that the last dual provides the most charitable reading of the SCR. It strikes a balance between the expressive motivations of the principle and the metaphysical boundaries it implies, even without further articulation. This approach not only preserves the theoretical flexibility necessary for robust philosophical inquiry

but also mitigates the risk of ontological overcommitment. By maintaining a distinction between quantification and existence, one can engage rigorously with competing metaphysical frameworks without being compelled to adopt a specific ontological stance. As a result, this interpretation of the principle allows a more measured and precise engagement with metaphysical discourse, while respecting the constraints of parsimony and conceptual economy².

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the conditions for serious disagreement in metaphysics initially led to unwelcome commitments. However, it is disputable what these commitments (really) are and how they should be interpreted within different philosophical frameworks. Some argue that these commitments impose rigid ontological constraints, while a more charitable reading allows for a more flexible and evolving discourse. Specifically, taking *SE1* and *SE2* seriously demonstrates that, although the nature of metaphysical disagreement remains an open question, the violation of parsimony as a serious consequence requires an additional argument.

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² Still, one might raise two concerns: a tension between *A3* and *SE2*, arguing that *A3* requires ontological, not just quantifier, commitment, full stop; and the worry that the proposal is tailored to address only one very specific type of metaphysical difficulty. Regarding the former, fortunately, the proposal can accommodate Yagisawa's account of existence, according to which 'what exists is what is in the domain' (Yagisawa, 2010, p. 51). This prioritisation of the domain over what exists within it helps resolve the tension. As for the latter, one might interpret the proposal as a guide for any metaphysical theory – simply leave the blank spaces in *SE1* and *SE2*, plug in whatever theory one holds, and find the best combination to serve all the required theoretical purposes.

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Unity Makes Strength. Transcendental Intersubjectivity, Technics, and the Institution of Objectivity: Husserl, Fink, and Merleau-Ponty

Riccardo VALENTI* 

ABSTRACT. In this paper, I defend the claim that objectivity, in classical phenomenology, is best read as an instituted invariant: not a static given but the diachronic achievement of cooperative validation within transcendental intersubjectivity, mediated by technics—above all, writing and inscription—that ensure the iterability, transmissibility, and public critique of sense. The essay unfolds in five movements. The first revisits Husserl’s critique of the mathematization of essences, showing how the very ideality of meaning depends on technical exteriorizations—above all writing—which sustain intergenerational communication and open the space for a non-reductive account of objectivity. The second turns to Fink’s analysis of objectivation and mundanization, redefining science as a form of supra-individual habituality. The third expands on Merleau-Ponty’s notion of expressive technicity, in which linguistic and artistic expression institutes fields of objectivity through indirect language and style. A fourth section develops a comparative synthesis—sociogenesis, diachrony, technics—and formulates criteria for instituted objectivity (addressability, iterability, transmissibility, responsivity). The conclusion bridges classical phenomenology and contemporary debates on digital technics, arguing that what endures is not what withdraws from history, but what remains fit to be repeated, challenged, and renewed within it.

Keywords: phenomenological objectivity; transcendental intersubjectivity; technics and inscription; institution and diachrony; expressive formation.

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I. Husserl: Writing, Ideality, and the Communalization of Inquiry

The question of objectivity enters Husserl's thought at a moment of deep disquiet¹. Indeed, what the *Crisis of the European Sciences* names is not merely a historical downturn in research, but a spiritual fracture in the very meaning of science: the triumph of formal rationality over the *life-world* that first made it intelligible. The success of mathematical physics, achieved through the abstraction of quantifiable properties, produced an unforeseen and detrimental loss—the forgetting of the world of experience from which idealization had arisen². What had been a living relation between cognition and world actually ossified into a purely technical calculus, indifferent to its own sense. The paradox of modernity is thus that the very progress of scientific reason conceals a deep crisis of objectivity: the detachment of truth from the conditions of its manifestation, a paradox already embodied in Galileo's double gesture—the discovery of a mathematically ideal nature and, at the same time, the covering-over of the lifeworld from which such idealization arises³. From within this fracture, the problem of objectivity re-emerges as a question of how meaning endures. How can knowledge remain valid for everyone when its procedures estrange it from the world of lived experience? What makes an ideal truth more than a private conviction yet more than a social convention? Phenomenology's wager is that this question cannot be resolved by invoking an external reality "out there," nor by reducing reason to empirical psychology. The origin of *geometrical* objectivity must instead be sought in the intersubjective life

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² Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), §9.

³ See Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis*, §§9–12. Here, Husserl presents Galileo as both "discoverer and coverer" (*Entdecker und Verhüller*) of nature's sense: his mathematization of the world discloses a new mode of ideal objectivity, yet simultaneously conceals the experiential ground (*Lebenswelt*) from which such idealization arises. The Galilean gesture is therefore not an error but a constitutive ambiguity of modern reason—its founding act also inaugurates a forgetting. For Husserl, the task of phenomenology is precisely to recover this forgotten origin, not by rejecting the scientific attitude, but by making it self-reflexive: science must continuously re-discover the sense of its own constitution, lest it reduce truth to technical success and the human community of inquiry to mere instrumentality. See also Patrick A. Heelan, *Space-Perception and the Philosophy of Science* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), ch. 6 and Dominique Pradelle, 2012. *Généalogie de la raison - Essai sur l'historicité du sujet transcendantal de Kant à Heidegger*.

of meaning—in the ways sense is instituted, shared, and renewed across generations of investigators⁴.

Within this horizon, Husserl's late reflection on writing and inscription acquires decisive importance. Against the backdrop of the *Crisis*, writing becomes the missing mediation between finite acts of intuition and the enduring life of ideal objects⁵. The *Origin of Geometry*, appended to the *Crisis*, is not a nostalgic tribute to mathematical purity but a critical meditation on the mathematization of essences⁶. Here, geometry functions as a limit case through which Husserl exposes the technical condition of ideality itself: what can be written can be programmatically *iterated*; what can be iterated can be always checked; what can be checked can be legitimately *handed down* and reactivated⁷. Indeed, the "identity" of a theorem or proof thus

⁴ See on this Dan Zahavi, *Husserl and Transcendental Intersubjectivity* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2001). Moreover, this "return to the life-world" does not mark a weakening of reason but its strength: an acknowledgment that rational objectivity must constantly test and renew itself within the horizon of lived experience. The phenomenological a priori is not formal but material—it is the *Lebensweltliche Bodenständigkeit*, the rootedness of inquiry in the world of possible verification. For Husserl, such rootedness secures the very normativity of reason as a self-correcting process, not a withdrawal into subjectivity. See Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis*, §§33–34.

⁵ Husserl explicitly insists on the constitutive role of writing (*Schriftlichkeit*) in the *Origin of Geometry*, where "the written linguistic expression makes communication possible without limit, in the infinite openness of the community of investigators" (*Crisis*, p. 357). It is "through the fixed expression, through the enduring linguistic form, that what was originally meant and intuited can be reactivated by others" (*ibid.*, p. 358). Writing is thus no mere external aid but a transformation in the mode of being of ideal objects: what is inscribed "can be handed down from one generation to the next" (*ibid.*, p. 359), allowing sense to survive beyond the originating act. On the phenomenological implications of *Schriftlichkeit* as a technical a priori of reason, see Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's "Origin of Geometry": An Introduction*, trans. John P. Leavey Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), pp. 73–76; and Dominique Pradelle, *Intuition et idéalités. Phénoménologie des objets mathématiques* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2020), pp. 112–118. In this sense, writing does not externalize thought but institutes its public temporality: it is the medium through which reason becomes capable of self-critique, continuity, and renewal—the ethos of objectivity itself.

⁶ Dominique Pradelle, *Intuition et idéalités*, pp. 51–55.

⁷ Husserl, *Crisis*, p. 355. *The Cartesian Meditations* (1931) already prepare this shift from the solitary ego to the intersubjective community that alone makes objectivity possible. In the Fifth Meditation, Husserl shows that transcendental subjectivity is not an isolated monad but a community of monads (*Monadengemeinschaft*) whose mutual pairing (*Paarung*) grounds the constitution of a shared world (see Hua I, §§42–63). This intersubjective co-intentionality—the possibility that different subjects can mean the same object—is what ultimately founds geometry as a universal science. The geometrical object, unlike a merely empirical one, endures through acts of communal validation that presuppose a horizon of possible reactivation by others. What the *Origin of Geometry* later radicalizes is the recognition that such intersubjectivity is historically mediated through writing. Inscription does not create geometrical ideality but allows its continual re-institution: it stabilizes the conditions under which ideal sense can circulate, be reactivated, and corrected within a community of investigators. In this way, geometry

depends not on metaphysical sameness or the persistence of ink, but on a structure of invariance under reactivation. The proof is the same only insofar as it can be re-performed by any competent *reader*, following the inscribed articulations—definitions, lemmas, diagrams—that expose the chain of reasoning to public correction. Husserl's terms *communalization* and *infinitezation* must therefore be read phenomenologically: inscription does not merely record results but institutes a horizon of task, within which each achievement calls for repetition, refinement, or refutation⁸. Husserl himself captures this movement through the pair *Überlieferung* (handing down) and *Wiederbelebung* (re-activation)⁹. Accordingly, these are not metaphors for historical continuity but names for the phenomenological structure of sense's persistence through time. What is handed down are not fixed concepts but operative articulations—rules of construction, proofs, notations—that can be redoable by any subject properly initiated into their logic. In this renewed context, for Husserl, tradition is not passive reception but the actual possibility of re-living¹⁰.

Accordingly, Derrida's *Introduction to the Origin of Geometry* makes explicit what is only implicit in Husserl: iterability is not a threat to ideality but its very condition¹¹. The Euclidean diagram, far from a pictorial aid, is a script of action—draw, extend, bisect—whose marks render the path of reasoning both visible and

functions as a limit case of intersubjective ideality—an exemplary formation in which intuition, expression, and verification converge. The written trace ensures that the work of reason, born in communication, remains open to its renewal. See Edmund Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*, Husserliana I, ed. S. Strasser (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1950), §§42–63.

⁸ In this horizon, the possibility of error is not a failure but an intrinsic moment of the historical life of reason. For Husserl, objectivity remains an open task in which truth and error belong to the same dynamic of correction and renewal. Fink would later describe this structure as the methodical finitude of transcendental life, the necessity that sense be endlessly revised in and through experience. In Enzo Paci's existential reading of phenomenology, this becomes the very possibility of the possibility of history: error as the condition of learning, responsibility, and human openness. See Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis*, §§70–73; Eugen Fink, *Sixth Cartesian Meditation: The Idea of a Transcendental Theory of Method*, trans. Ronald Bruzina (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), §§11–13; and Enzo Paci, *Funzione delle scienze e significato dell'uomo* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1963), pp. 81–85.

⁹ The terms *Überlieferung* and *Wiederbelebung* are introduced by Husserl in *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, Husserliana VI, ed. Walter Biemel (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1954), Beilage III and Appendix VI, pp. 367–373. *Überlieferung* designates the “handing down” of meaning through written and institutional sedimentations, while *Wiederbelebung* names the act of “reactivation” (*Wiedererweckung*) by which a successor reawakens the sense originally intended. These concepts articulate Husserl's late phenomenology of history, in which ideality endures only through its possible renewal in living consciousness. See also Husserl, *The Crisis*, pp. 354–359; and Dodd, *Crisis and Reflection*, pp. 93–97.

¹⁰ Renaud Barbaras, *Introduction à la philosophie de Husserl* (Paris: Vrin, 2015), p. 143.

¹¹ Dodd, *Crisis and Reflection*, pp. 92–95.

contestable. Disagreement and critique are possible precisely because the trace stabilizes what is to be re-done¹². The ideal object is identical only insofar as it can be repeated in other contexts; its historicity is not the negation but the realization of its truth. Iterability binds sameness and difference, grounding both stability and revisability as co-essential to objectivity. This reframing anticipates the radical step that Eugen Fink will take: if writing already transforms intuition into method, Fink will show that this transformation is not accidental but constitutive of the very form of transcendental life. The “crisis of objectivity” thus becomes, in his hands, a question of how reason institutionalizes itself, how the infinite task of verification takes shape in concrete communities, practices, and traditions. Later phenomenologists—from Merleau-Ponty to Stiegler—will inherit this gesture, extending Husserl’s insight into the domain of expression and technics, where the instituted invariant of sense becomes the very measure of historical responsibility¹³.

II. Fink: Objectivation, Method, and the Worldliness of Reason

If Husserl’s late work reveals the technical conditions of ideality, Fink’s *Sixth Cartesian Meditation* radicalizes this discovery by reinterpreting phenomenology itself as a methodical *institution* of sense¹⁴. Indeed, what Husserl had thematized through the interplay of inscription and reactivation becomes, in Fink, a full-fledged theory of the constitution of objectivity as *objectivation* (*Objektivierung*)—a process that is neither merely cognitive nor merely historical, but the very way transcendental life attains self-articulation¹⁵. Accordingly, Fink’s departure from Husserl is less a

¹² Derrida, *Edmund Husserl’s Origin of Geometry*, p. 92.

¹³ See Anthony J. Steinbock, *Home and Beyond: Generative Phenomenology after Husserl* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995).

¹⁴ Indeed, the term *Stiftung* (institution) is phenomenologically central. In Husserl and Fink it names the act through which meaning attains historical endurance—an institution not of authority but of sense, whereby an originary event becomes a norm for further renewal. Merleau-Ponty will later reinterpret this notion as the “institution of meaning” (*institution du sens*), mostly emphasizing its bodily and expressive dimensions (*L’institution. La passivité, course notes, Collège de France, 1954–1955*, ed. D. Darmaillacq et al., Paris: Belin, 2003), while Castoriadis will expand it into the idea of the “social imaginary institution,” the collective creation of meaning (*L’institution imaginaire de la société*, Paris: Seuil, 1975). A fuller comparison follows below; here the reference is only schematic, indicating how Fink’s conception of *Stiftung* already prefigures the intertwining of history and sense.

¹⁵ Eugen Fink, *Sixth Cartesian Meditation: The Idea of a Transcendental Theory of Method*, trans. Ronald Bruzina (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), §2. Moreover, the notion of *Objektivierung* carries a productive ambiguity. For Fink, objectivation is both the act through which sense becomes communicable and the process by which it risks fixation. It marks, as Husserl had already seen in the *Crisis* (§73), the tension between sedimentation and reactivation: the need for stability that may turn into

rupture than a transformation of emphasis. Where Husserl had still spoken of ideality as a correlate of intersubjective praxis, Fink deepens this in the movement of method itself—the reflective self-doubling of the transcendental field—and the true origin of objectivity. The subject, as he writes, “is not a point of origin but a movement of grounding” (*ein Bewegungsgrund*), and method is the form in which this movement gains stability¹⁶. Objectivity, in this sense, is the “worldly” face of transcendental life: not an external product, but the sedimented trace of the world’s self-disclosure in finite consciousness. Against the charge of “idealism,” Fink insists that objectivation does not separate thought from world, but rather worlds thought. The act of objectifying transforms both the object and the one who constitutes it. In this transformation, method itself becomes a historical institution, an inheritance of sense comparable to Husserl’s *Überlieferung* and *Wiederbelebung*, but now internal to the very dynamism of the transcendental¹⁷.

rigidity. Fink radicalizes this by showing that every constitution of objectivity entails a moment of *alienation*—a necessary exteriorization of meaning—which is at once the possibility and the peril of reason’s history. Merleau-Ponty will later inherit this dialectic in his reflections on expression and institution (*Phénoménologie de la perception*, Paris: Gallimard, 1945, pp. 196–198), and Derrida will echo it in his reading of *iterability* as the joint of preservation and deformation.

¹⁶ Fink formulates this idea in the *Sechste Cartesianische Meditation*, §5: “*Das transzendente Ich ist nicht Ursprungspunkt, sondern Bewegungsgrund der Konstitution*” (“the transcendental I is not a point of origin but a ground in motion for constitution”). See Eugen Fink, *Sechste Cartesianische Meditation: Die Idee einer transzendentalen Methodenlehre*, in *Nachlass Ms. E III 7*, fols. 15r–17v, Eugen-Fink-Archiv, Universitätsbibliothek Freiburg i.Br.; cited from the English translation in *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*, p. 41. Here, Fink’s formulation captures his effort to reconceive transcendental subjectivity as a generative movement (*Bewegung des Sinns*), rather than as a fixed origin—an idea that will underpin his later cosmological interpretation of phenomenology.

¹⁷ Fink, *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*, §11; see also Husserl, *Die Krisis*, pp. 367–373. Fink repeatedly stresses that the transcendental method acquires reality only through its inscription. As he writes, “*Die Methode ist kein bloßes Tun, sondern eine Einschreibung der Sinnbewegung in die Dauer der Geschichte*” (“Method is not a mere doing but an inscription of the movement of sense into the duration of history”), *Nachlass Ms. E III 8*, fol. 10r, Eugen-Fink-Archiv, Universitätsbibliothek Freiburg i.Br. Elsewhere he notes that “*die Schrift der Philosophie*” is not an accidental medium but the “*Gestalt, in der sich das transzendente Leben faßlich wird*”—the form through which transcendental life becomes graspable to itself (*ibid.*, fol. 9v). Writing, for Fink, is thus not a supplement to thought but the very space where method attains visibility and historicity: “The transcendental field can only be made accessible through a work of inscription that institutes the continuity of questioning” (*Sixth Cartesian Meditation*, p. 46). In this sense, *Schrift* and *Einschreibung* name a constitutive tension of phenomenology: every act of objectivation requires an exteriorization that at once stabilizes and risks the living flow of sense. Fink thereby extends Husserl’s insight from the *Origin of Geometry*—that ideality endures only through iterability—into a full methodology of inscription, where the written trace is both a product and a condition of transcendental reflection. On the continuity and displacement between Husserl’s *Schriftlichkeit* and Fink’s *Einschreibung*, see Pradelle, *Intuition et idéalités*, pp. 115–118.

I argue Bruzina rightly calls this process the “second birth” of phenomenology¹⁸. Indeed, what Fink here discovers is that the transcendental subject cannot be conceived as a timeless witness; rather, it must be understood as what would be later defined as a finite field of play (*Spiel*), in which experience, reflection, and institutional form are reciprocally constituted¹⁹. Indeed, the world, far from being a neutral backdrop, is the living *arena* of this play, namely, the site where objectivity appears through acts that are always already shared, corrected, and transmitted. Fink’s insistence that “the world is not a sum of things but the unity of play” (*die Welt ist nicht Summe von Dingen, sondern Einheit des Spiels*) clarifies that reason’s universality is not anterior to history but born from it²⁰. This conception of objectivity as play transforms the very sense of transcendental philosophy. The historical life of reason, already opened by Husserl’s concern for *Schriftlichkeit*, now appears as a cosmic practice of sense—a mode of self-ordering through which humanity institutes a world. Every scientific or artistic articulation is, in this perspective, an act of mundanization (*Mundanisierung*). By mundanization, Fink labels a way of re-embedding transcendental activity into the temporal and social thickness of existence²¹. On his account, the phenomenology of the world thus becomes a phenomenology of the *institutions of reason*—not only of how sense is constituted, but of how it endures through the sedimented practices of language, education, and, finally, culture.

Indeed, such a reading anticipates later developments that would take the institutional aspect of objectivity as their point of departure. Accordingly, Bernet interprets this as the moment when phenomenology becomes self-critically historical,

¹⁸ Ronald Bruzina, “Introduction”, in Fink, *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*, pp. xxii–xxiii.

¹⁹ The concept of *Spiel* (play) develops in Fink from a methodological to a cosmological principle. In the *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*, play names the dynamic field of constitution, where subject and world emerge through reciprocal movement. Later, in the *Nachlass* notes for *Spiel als Weltsymbol* (1930s–1940s), this becomes an ontological motif: the world itself “plays,” that is, unfolds as a finite totality of appearing and withdrawal. In *Grundphänomene des menschlichen Daseins*, Fink integrates this theme into his notion of the *kosmologische Differenz*—the difference between being and the world—treating play as the symbol of the world’s self-showing and concealment. The continuity is thematic far more than terminological: *Spiel* remains the figure of reason’s self-movement and finitude, the expression of a transcendental life that is never closed upon itself. See Eugen Fink, *Spiel als Weltsymbol*, in *Eugen Fink Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 7, ed. Franz-Anton Schwarz (Freiburg/München: Karl Alber, 2010); Eugen Fink, *Grundphänomene des menschlichen Daseins* (Freiburg/München: Karl Alber, 1979); and Bruzina, *Eugen Fink*, pp. 315–320.

²⁰ Eugen Fink, “Nachlass zur Phänomenologie des Spiels,” Freiburg i. Br.: Fink-Archiv, Ms. E III 10, fol. 23r.

²¹ Eugen Fink, “Das Problem der Phänomenologie Edmund Husserls,” in *Studien zur Phänomenologie 1930–1939*, Husserliana: Dokumente III/2, ed. H. Ebeling et al. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1988), pp. 179–200.

aware of its own conditions of possibility²²; Mensch reads it as a proto-hermeneutic gesture, opening the path to Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty²³. Yet what is essential in Fink is that this historicization of the transcendental does not dissolve its normativity, for it rather grounds it. By showing that every constitution of objectivity already implies the possibility of its correction, Fink transforms Husserl's "infinite task" into a method of renewal: a world-forming, *dialogical* and *diachronic rationality* that remains open to revision because it is grounded in finitude itself. In this sense, Fink provides the second moment of the triad: if Husserl had uncovered the technicity of ideality, Fink discloses the institutional and world-forming dimension of method. Objectivity is no longer the residue of a founding act, but the ongoing enactment of a shared horizon of sense. The transcendental, here, is not opposed to the world; it is the world's own effort to become intelligible. The next section will turn to Merleau-Ponty, in whom this dialectic of institution and expression finds its most embodied form, linking the objectivity of thought to the style and gesture of existence itself.

III. Merleau-Ponty: Expression, Institution, and the Flesh of Objectivity

If Husserl had exposed the technical conditions of ideality and Fink had transformed method into a historical institution, Merleau-Ponty gives these themes a new ontological density. The problem of objectivity, for him, no longer concerns only the transmission of sense or the methodology of its constitution, but the embodied field in which sense and world interweave. What emerges in Merleau-Ponty's late philosophy is an understanding of objectivity as flesh (*chair*): a texture of interrelation where expression, institution, and perception are inseparable²⁴. Already in *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty rejects the notion that perception offers a neutral access to things. To perceive is already to inhabit a horizon of meanings sedimented through language, gesture, and shared praxis. Here, the world is never given "all at once" but unfolds as a horizon of visibility, structured by what he calls "operative intentionality" (*intentionnalité opérante*)²⁵. In his lectures at the Collège de France Merleau-Ponty redefines Husserl's term *Stiftung* as appropriate institution du sens: the event by which a meaning is inaugurated within experience, initiating a history of its own reactivation²⁵. Accordingly, every institution is both event and sedimentation: the establishment of a norm that must

²² See Rudolf Bernet, *La vie du sujet* (Paris: PUF, 1994), pp. 205-215.

²³ James Mensch, *Postfoundational Phenomenology: Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Derrida* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), pp. 58–62.

²⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 139.

²⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, pp. 248–250.

be continually re-lived. “Instituting acts,” he writes, “do not close history; they open it”²⁶. This insight extends Husserl’s idea of *Überlieferung* and *Wiederbelebung* by situating them in the chiasm of body and world.

It is no longer only the written mark that survives but the gesture, the expressive form through which meaning circulates between generations²⁷. Yet, this epistemic and ontological shift reaches its mature form in *Le Visible et l’invisible*. Here, Merleau-Ponty abandons the language of consciousness and replaces it with that of flesh—a reversibility of seeing and being-seen that grounds both perception and thought. Objectivity becomes the fold of visibility, the intertwining (*entrelacs*) where subject and object exchange their roles. The visible world, he writes, “is not what I think, but what I live through”²⁸. Far from relativizing truth, this chiasmic ontology actually *restores* to objectivity its living yet distant source: a sense of belonging to a world that precedes us yet is continually re-instituted through our expressive acts. It is in this light that Merleau-Ponty’s writings on language and art—*La prose du monde* and *Langage indirect et les voix du silence*—acquire decisive significance. For him, artistic creation exemplifies the very logic of phenomenological institution, because it inaugurates new structures of visibility while remaining faithful to the opacity of the sensible. The painter, like the philosopher, institutes meaning not by representing but by revealing; the painting is “a thing among things” that opens the space of their mutual appearance. In the indirect voice of language, as in painting, truth does not impose itself but comes to speech obliquely, through the style of expression that renews our contact with being²⁹.

Artistic and linguistic expression thus continue Husserl’s and Fink’s investigations on technics and inscription, revealing objectivity as an unfinished dialogue between sedimented visibility and creative gesture. Merleau-Ponty’s conception reconfigures the Husserlian–Finkian trajectory: if Husserl located objectivity in inscription and Fink in methodical institution, Merleau-Ponty locates it in expression as incarnation. The

²⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *L’institution. La passivité*, p. 58.

²⁷ Ivi, pp. 57–60. The continuity between Husserl’s *Stiftung* and Merleau-Ponty’s institution du sens lies in their shared understanding of sense as a temporal genesis that must be both instituted and reactivated. Whereas Husserl conceived institution as the transmission of an ideal meaning, Merleau-Ponty interprets it as the embodied opening of a history, where sense is founded through expressive gestures—linguistic, perceptual, and artistic. This continuity also marks a transformation: institution now implies not only a historical a priori but an aesthetic one, anticipating *La prose du monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), where art becomes the paradigm of a living objectivity, a *logos visible* that constantly reinstitutes meaning. See also Claude Lefort. “Le corps, la chair et le monde vivant.” In *Sur une colonne absente. Écrits autour de Merleau-Ponty*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), pp. 139–165.

²⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l’invisible*, p. 182.

²⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *La prose du monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), pp. 12–18; and *Signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), “Le langage indirect et les voix du silence,” pp. 49–82.

world institutes itself through us, and we, in turn, are instituted by it. In this reciprocal process, every objectivation is a gesture of embodiment, every perception an act of inheritance. Objectivity becomes the continuity of sense through visibility—the flesh of history, where what has been instituted can still be transformed³⁰. Merleau-Ponty therefore offers the third term in the triad: technics (Husserl), institution (Fink), and expression (Merleau-Ponty) converge into an ontology of interrelation. The stability of objectivity is not the stillness of form but the tense equilibrium of an expressive order constantly renewed by perception, dialogue, and artistic creation. It is through this living equilibrium that phenomenology discovers its most concrete universality: one that does not negate finitude but assumes it as the very medium of truth.

IV. Iterability and Inheritance: From Writing to Technics

If the first three movements of this study—Husserl’s inscription, Fink’s institution, and Merleau-Ponty’s *stylistic* expression—have traced the genesis of objectivity within the field of intersubjective life, the fourth must confront its temporal and technical condition. For it is not enough that meaning be instituted and reactivated; it must also survive the passing of its originators, persisting in forms that can be reclaimed and reinterpreted. How, then, does sense endure without becoming static? What allows objectivity to be both transmissible and revisable? It is here that phenomenology, at its limits, meets its deconstructive and post-phenomenological continuations in Derrida and Stiegler. Jacques Derrida’s 1962 *Introduction to Husserl’s Origin of Geometry* remains the most faithful and the most radical reading of Husserl’s insight into writing. Derrida’s claim is not that writing undermines phenomenology, but that phenomenology discovers itself in writing. The act of inscription (*écriture*) makes explicit what phenomenology had always presupposed: that sense, to be ideal, must be iterable—that is, repeatable beyond its originary context³¹.

Iterability, as Derrida famously remarks, is a structure of both continuity and alterability: the written trace properly ensures the survival of meaning but exposes it to difference, misunderstanding, and transformation. Yet, this “contamination” is not a defect of reason but the very movement of its historicity. Objectivity, therefore,

³⁰ See on this Renaud Barbaras, *Le tournant de l’expérience. Recherches sur la philosophie de Merleau-Ponty* (Paris: Vrin, 1991); Emmanuel de Saint Aubert, *Vers une ontologie indirecte. Sources et enjeux critiques de l’appel à l’ontologie chez Merleau-Ponty* (Paris: Vrin, 2004), and Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2011)

³¹ Derrida, *Edmund Husserl’s ‘Origin of Geometry’*; pp. 54–57.

is not a fixed correspondence between subject and object but the ongoing *readability* and *verifiability* of sense within a horizon of potentially infinite re-inscription. In this sense, Derrida can be seen as carrying forward the logic of Husserl's *Überlieferung* and *Wiederbelebung* while making explicit their technological dimension. Writing (*écriture*), as the paradigmatic exteriorization of sense, becomes the condition of possibility for all forms of ideal objectivity—from geometry to law, from art to ethics. "The written," he notes, "is not an accident of speech, but its condition of transmissibility"³². To write is to project meaning into an iterable medium that allows others, in other times, to take up the same sense otherwise. Derrida's logic of *différance* thus radicalizes Husserl's *Crisis* thesis: history and ideality do not merely coexist; they are structurally inseparable³³. Bernard Stiegler inherits this problematic but translates it into the epochal language of technics. In *Technics and Time 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, he proposes that the "fault" of the human is precisely the necessity of exteriorization: our memory is always already technical³⁴.

Stiegler's reading of Husserl, Heidegger, and Derrida converges on the thesis that all retention—indeed, all temporal continuity—is supported by tertiary retention, that is, material memory stored in technical systems. From writing and photography to digital archives, these supports are not neutral containers but protentional structures that shape what can be remembered and foreseen. Technics, in this sense, is the *epiphylogenetic* dimension of history: the process through which humanity inherits itself by means of external traces³⁵. This reconceptualization has decisive implications for the phenomenology of objectivity. If every act of knowing depends upon technical inheritance, then objectivity itself is a function of care—of the maintenance, critique, and renewal of the supports through which meaning persists. The "truth" of an inscription is not simply in what it states but in the conditions of its re-readability. Stiegler calls this the "economy of attention": an ethics of inheritance that binds epistemology to responsibility³⁶. Objectivity becomes not a timeless form but a time-bound practice of preservation and transformation, a way of living with and through technics. What unites Derrida and Stiegler, despite

³² Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), p. 25.

³³ Ivi, pp. 23-28.

³⁴ Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth & George Collins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 3–10.

³⁵ Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time 2: Disorientation*, trans. Stephen Barker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 17–20; see also Richard Beardsworth, *Derrida and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1996).

³⁶ John Peters, "Digital Memory and the Future of Phenomenology," *Theory, Culture & Society* 34, no. 7–8 (2017): 23–45; Bernard Stiegler, *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, trans. Stephen Barker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), pp. 1–7.

their differences, is a shared re-reading of phenomenology in diachronic terms. Derrida's iterability and Stiegler's grammatisation describe the same structure from two perspectives: one semiotic, the other technical. Both uncover the non-coincidence that constitutes meaning—the interval between intention and inscription, between writing and reading, between act and memory. In this interval lies the possibility of renewal. Objectivity survives only by being re-exposed to difference. To inherit is to transform.

From a phenomenological standpoint, this does not annul the project of grounding meaning; it reframes grounding as re-grounding (*Nachstiftung*), the continual reinstitution of sense across historical and technical media. The very survival of rational inquiry depends upon this openness: as Husserl foresaw, scientific reason must not conceal but constantly rediscover its origins in the life-world. Derrida and Stiegler make explicit that this rediscovery can occur only through technics, through the written and the digital as the living organs of tradition. In this respect, the fault that defines the human—its dependence on external supports—is also its possibility of transcendence. The exteriorization of memory is not the loss of authenticity but its extension; it is what allows a finite being to participate in the infinite task of truth. The phenomenological project thus finds its ethical culmination in the care for inheritance: the responsibility to sustain the technical and cultural conditions through which objectivity remains alive³⁷.

V. Responsibility and Re-Institution: The Ethics of Objectivity

At the end of this itinerary, objectivity no longer appears as the mirror of a pre-given world but as the historical achievement of a community of sense—a fragile yet solid equilibrium between stability and transformation, fidelity, *treason* and renewal. From Husserl's discovery of inscription to Fink's analysis of constitution, from Merleau-Ponty's expressive reversibility to Derrida's iterability and Stiegler's technicity, what emerges is a single, diachronic insight: truth lives only through its

³⁷ Indeed, Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics offers a complementary perspective on this problem of inheritance. In *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1960), Gadamer conceives *Überlieferung* (tradition) as a dialogical continuity, a living medium of understanding in which sense is renewed through interpretation rather than through external inscription. While Derrida and Stiegler insist on the technical materiality of inheritance, Gadamer recalls that such mediation presupposes an event of understanding (*Verstehen*) that re-appropriates the past in the present. The two perspectives are not opposed but reciprocal: hermeneutical transmission names the subjective dimension of what Stiegler calls tertiary retention, just as technical exteriorization provides the objective correlate of Gadamer's "effective history" (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). See also Jean Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

inheritance. Objectivity is not a property of objects but a practice of re-institution, the perpetual work of confirming, correcting, and transmitting what has been received. To understand this, one must return to the paradox of modern reason already diagnosed by Husserl in the *Crisis*: the very progress of science threatens to obscure its own origin in the life-world. When objectivity forgets its genesis in the communicative acts of finite subjects, it becomes an idol—an opaque authority that conceals the labor of meaning beneath it. Phenomenology's task, from the *Cartesian Meditations* onward, has been to retrace the transcendental movement by which reason renews itself from within history. Writing, institution, expression, and technics are not external supplements but forms of self-critique through which reason guards against its own dogmatism³⁸. This dynamic gives rise to what may be called an ethics of objectivity. In its deepest sense, ethics here does not refer to norms of conduct but to the responsibility inherent in any act of sense-giving. Every inscription, every formulation, carries the obligation to remain readable and revisable by others—to open itself to verification and reinterpretation.

The intersubjective constitution of truth is therefore not only epistemic but also moral: it requires the cultivation of shared attention, the patience of reactivation, and the humility of correction. As Enzo Paci noted in his reflections on the “good error,” error is not a defect of reason but its condition of growth: the moment when the finitude of thought reveals the infinite task of re-understanding³⁹. Bernard Stiegler, reinterpreting this theme, shows that the survival of rational life depends on how we care for our technical supports. To neglect the systems that preserve collective memory—whether written, digital, or institutional—is to endanger the continuity of critique itself. His notion of pharmacology captures the double bind of technics: it is both a poison and a cure, depending on whether we use it to automate or to cultivate reflection⁴⁰. Responsibility, then, lies in recognizing the *pharmakon* as a condition of human becoming—the exteriority through which we inherit, transform, and re-institute our common world. Gadamer's hermeneutics converges with this insight from another direction. For Gadamer, understanding (*Verstehen*) is always an event within effective history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*): to understand is to participate in the self-renewal of a tradition.

³⁸ Husserl, *Die Krisis*, §§7–9; Natalie Depraz, “La rationalité en crise: Husserl et la tâche éthique de la phénoménologie,” *Alter* 14 (2006): 43–59.

³⁹ See Paci, *Funzione delle scienze e significato dell'uomo*, pp. 171–175, and Cirolla, Andrea. 2015. « La parola che nasce. Paci lettore di Rilke. » *Rivista di estetica* 58: 147–165.

⁴⁰ Bernard Stiegler, *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, trans. Stephen Barker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), pp. 6–9.

The task is not to dissolve mediation but to inhabit it reflectively—to acknowledge that every act of comprehension is also a transformation. In this respect, the hermeneutical fusion of horizons complements the phenomenological re-grounding of sense: both describe how truth emerges in dialogue, through temporal distance and the risk of misunderstanding. The ethics of objectivity, therefore, is not the preservation of invariance but the responsibility for diachrony: to keep open the spaces where meaning can still be questioned and renewed. Each generation receives not a stable corpus but a field of unresolved tensions, and it is precisely by confronting them that it becomes capable of knowledge. To inherit phenomenologically is to assume the burden of transmission—the care for what exceeds one’s own present, for those who will come after. Such care defines the ethos of phenomenology itself: a practice of attention to what endures through transformation, a life in common oriented toward the future perfect, the “has-will-have-been” of truth⁴¹.

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⁴¹ See Bernhard Waldenfels, *Antwortregister* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994); Jacques Derrida, *L’animal que donc je suis* (Paris: Galilée, 2006); Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time 3: Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise*, trans. Stephen Barker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), pp. 201–207; Natalie Depraz, *Attention et vigilance. À la croisée de la phénoménologie et des sciences cognitives* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2014), pp. 245–260.

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Epistemic Vindication, Truthlikeness and Credence: Defending the Unified Approach

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ABSTRACT. There are two main approaches used to evaluate someone's epistemic accuracy. On one hand, we have the approach that evaluates the truthlikeness of some propositions and orders them by their closeness to truth. On the other hand, we can look at someone's probability assignments and then calculate the accuracy using the Brier score. Recently, Oddie tried to show that these two methods are in tension, because a measure that obeys probabilism will fail to hold Proximity. I argue that the Unified Approach can be saved and, moreover, has some important advantages over the isolated Truthlikeness.

Keywords: truthlikeness, probabilism, Brier score, credence, epistemic accuracy

1 Introduction

It seems plausible to say that when we can't know the truth, we are epistemically better off sticking close to it. However, it is not always clear what it means to miss the truth but to stay close to it. Narrowly missing the truth can mean, for example, being confident in P when P is true instead of being certain that P is true. Finding out that P is true when my credence in P was 0.9 is worse than if my credence were 1, but far better than 0.5. We can also look at other beliefs that are content-wise close to the truth. Believing that the number of planets is 10 (when there are 8 planets) is far better than believing there are 20 planets. This is not all that can be said about closeness to truth. Not all truths are equal, and likewise, not all falsehoods are equal. A stronger truth, namely, one that narrows down the space

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of possibilities, is preferable to a weaker one. Indeed, tautologies are the least valuable truths.¹ For falsehoods it may seem *prima facie* plausible that the stronger falsehoods are worse than weaker ones. Saying, for example, that there are between 9 and 1000 planets is arguably worse than saying there are 9 planets, although both are false.² Finally, some falsehoods may be better than some truths.

If Bob's height is 1.75m and I estimate it is 1.751m, it may be closer to the truth than saying it is between 0 and 1000m.

Both these approaches, the credal (probabilistic) and the propositional, contribute to the notion of epistemic accuracy, yet the ways we formalize them are different. Furthermore, probabilistic accuracy is more straightforward, since it's a function of the difference between the estimation of X and the truth value of X . Meanwhile, it's much less clear how we should think about truthlikeness from the propositional perspective.

At this stage, there is a rather vast amount of literature around truthlikeness and likewise around credences. However, these two approaches are kept separate in most cases. Attempts to bring them together [1, 6] by finding a formula that would represent an adequate epistemic loss for both probabilistic and propositional inaccuracies have been criticized more recently by Oddie [7]. I aim to show,

firstly, that purely propositional approaches have serious limitations and secondly, that Oddie's recent criticism of the unification doesn't work if we do some small changes to the probabilistic framework. I claim that we have reasons to give up on Proximity, which would render his proof toothless for reasons that Will discuss in the final section. Furthermore, I propose Basicity, which also blocks a step in Oddie's proof.

In the next section, I will talk about the likeness approach to truthlikeness, offering a very short exposition of the main approaches in the literature. Since I want to defend using the Briar score for measuring both probabilistic and content-

¹ It may seem intuitive, though, that firstly, not all tautologies are equal and secondly, that some tautologies may be more valuable than some truths. For example, the law of non-contradiction can be seen as less valuable than, let's say, the law of large numbers or the fundamental theorem of calculus; likewise, a belief in the external world can be seen as less valuable than believing the fundamental theorem of calculus. Here I will not address this issue. Firstly, I assume logical omniscience for the rational agent. She will be more confident in any (obscure) mathematically proven result than in the existence of the external world. Secondly, my focus is on estimating the truth in an exhaustive set S of mutually exclusive propositions, where any estimation will be a disjunction of members of S . Here, the only tautology will be on a par with just asserting S .

² It is not very clear, though, if it is the case that weaker falsehoods are always worse. As I will say later, it's not clear whether a weaker false claim is further from the truth than a stronger one, if the minimum distance from the truth is the same for both.

wise truthlikeness, I will keep my attention on likeness because it allows us to compare atomic sentences between themselves. The third section will provide some examples that will test our intuitions about which falsehoods are closer to the truth. What I hope to show is that there is no single criterion for truthlikeness, no general formula that would do justice to all, or even most of the examples. All examples involve quantitative estimates. Cases involving the similarity between atomic sentences that are purely qualitative are outside of the scope of this paper, although I believe a unified (probabilistic and content-wise) solution can be achieved there, too. The fourth section explores some of the purely content-based, non-probabilistic formulas designed to measure the truthlikeness of quantitative atomic sentences. Each of them has important shortcomings that will be revealed. The fifth section will go through the Brier score, which is used for measuring probabilistic errors, and some criteria for the adequacy of such measuring scores. In the sixth section I will present Oddie's proof that using the Brier score for combining the probabilistic and content-based approaches fails because of inconsistencies between the criteria from section 5. I will show how the proof can be blocked by some restrictions over which kind of propositions can enter the Brier score. The last section will present some final remarks and potential changes to section 5's criteria that will further weaken Oddie's proof.

2 Truthlikeness: the likeness approach

There are three main ways to approach truthlikeness.

Content: Truthlikeness is determined by the content of the proposition. Despite the name, this is a syntactic approach developed by Popper [8], in which a true theory is closer to truth than another true theory when it is logically stronger. The truth content of a false theory is closer to the truth than the whole theory, due to its falsity content. It is a consequence of Popper's account that, given that increasing the truth content of a theory also increases its falsity content, if the falsity content brings a theory further from the truth, then all false theories are equally far from the truth. By comparing only their truth contents, a false theory is closer to the truth than another false theory when its truth content is larger (i.e. contains more true propositions; every theory contains at least some true propositions, namely the tautologies). Finally, another consequence is that no false theory can be closer to the truth than a true theory, no matter how weak the true one is and how much stronger the false one. Thus, any falsity will be farther from the truth than any tautology. There were many refinements of the content approach, but it is limited by not being able to compare the semantic contents of propositions: all we can do is to look at the logical strength and the size of the truth content.

Consequence: Because of the trivialization result of Tichy and Miller [11, 3], as I said above, whenever we add a true consequence to a false theory, we also add a false consequence. If we add a truth T to a false theory H , and H is closed under entailment, then we also add the conjunction of T and a false sentence in H , which will be false. This means that we can't increase the truth content of a false theory without increasing its falsity content, and by a similar reasoning we can't increase the falsity content without increasing the truth content (for a more detailed exposition, check the proof by Tichy and Miller). The consequence approach tries to pick a class of relevant consequences to avoid the situation in which all false theories are equally far from the truth. Many proposals have been made, but we still remain with the challenge that every false theory will be worse than any tautology. A solution was proposed by Schurz and Weingartner [10] that involves adding weights on relevant truths. Choosing weights is also part of my proposal, with the advantage of integrating probabilistic accuracy.

Likeness: This is the account of truthlikeness that I will be focused on from now. The advantage over the content approach is that it allows us to assign distances between propositions. It is also not of a purely syntactic nature: we can order atomic sentences, not just theories (by looking at the number of true and false components), and it is suitable for quantitative estimates of similarity, when the atomic sentences involve numbers. Thus, we can compare theories like 'Bob is 1.75m tall and has written three books' and 'Bob is 1.76m tall and has written four books' not just by the number of true propositions they have, but by how close to the truth each conjunct is (let's say Bob is 1.74m tall and has written two books - both theories are false, each containing two false atomic sentences, but the first one is closer to the truth).

Also, we are not talking here about closeness to 'the' truth (maybe capitalized), but closeness to contextual truths. In this regard we will not be able to compare the truthlikeness of propositions or theories in general, like asking whether the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics is more truthlike than Darwinian evolution or correctly guessing that Bob's height is 1.75m. The situations I am talking about are framework-dependent. Specifically, we have a set S of propositions to pick from, where S is exhaustive (so it contains the truth), and our hypotheses will be disjunctions over S .³

³ We may add the condition that only some propositions can be part of S . For example, we may want to keep S discrete.

3 Truthlikeness intuitions

Now let's look at some examples:

- 1) How many planets are in the solar system? (true answer: 8)
 - 1.1. There are 10 planets in the solar system.
 - 1.2. There are 7 planets in the solar system.
 - 1.3. There are 9 planets in the solar system.
- 2) How old is Bob? (true answer: 30)
 - 2.1. Bob is between 28 and 35.
 - 2.2. Bob is between 29 and 31.
- 3) How many people are in the house? (true answer: 10)
 - 3.1. There are more than 12.
 - 3.2. There are more than 13.
 - 3.3. There are fewer than 8.
 - 3.4. There are fewer than 8 or more than 10.
- 4) How many states are in the US? (true answer: 50)
 - 4.1. There are 49 states.
 - 4.2. There are 48 or 49 states.
 - 4.3. There are 51 states.
- 5) How many dollars did Bob get from his mother? (true answer: 8)
 - 5.1. Bob has 16 dollars.
 - 5.2. Bob has 4 dollars.
 - 5.3. Bob has 9 dollars
- 6) How many dollars did Bob get from his mother? (true answer: 100)
 - 6.1. Bob has 99 dollars.
 - 6.2. Bob has 50 dollars
 - 6.3. Bob has 200 dollars.
- 7) How many legs are there in the house (everyone is able-bodied)? (true answer: 90)
 - 7.1. There are 91 legs.
 - 7.2. There are 94 legs.
- 8) In which year did the event celebrated as Romania's national day occur? (true answer: 1918)
 - 8.1. 1859
 - 8.2. 1929

Now let's find some plausible orderings. For 1), 1.1 is farthest from the truth, while 1.2 and 1.3 are equally truthlike. Here we can say that the absolute distance gives us the ordering: the smaller the difference, the more truthlike the proposed answer is.

For 2), 2.1 is farther from the truth than 2.2. While both of them are true, 2.2 is logically stronger, since it contains fewer disjuncts.

For 3) it is less obvious how we should order the answers. 3.1 and 3.3 look, *prima facie*, equally close to the truth, because their closest values are at the same distance from 10. This would perhaps be the case if the range of answers were infinite in both directions, but we can't have anything less than 0 in this case. 3.3 seems logically stronger than 3.1. 3.4 seems to be the worst: even though it gets as close to 10 as 3.1 and 3.3, it is logically weaker than both of them.

For 4), 4.1 and 4.3 are equally truthlike, being at a distance of 1 from 50. But how do we compare them to 4.2? We may be tempted to say they are closer to truth than 4.2 because they are logically stronger, and 4.2 has no advantage, since its closest value is also at a distance of 1 from 50.⁴

For 5), it may be plausible to say that 5.1 and 5.2 are on par, because they have fractional similarity. '32 dollars', when the true answer is 16, would be as bad as 16 is when the answer is 8. It is not easy to figure out how to compare them to 5.3.

For 6) the interesting question is whether 6.1 is closer to the truth than 5.3 was for 5), given that we are talking about larger numbers in 6). Arguably, it would be more impressive to be right when the numbers are very large (the larger, the more impressive), although it may be due to our psychological difficulty with thinking about larger numbers. Being wrong by 1 looks far more impressive when we are estimating a number with three or four digits than a single-digit number.

For 7), it's clear that the background knowledge that able-bodied humans have two legs makes 7.2 much closer to the truth than 91, even though the absolute difference is smaller for 7.1.

For 8), although 1929 is closer in time to 1918, it is plausible to think that someone would be more accurate in guessing 1859, which is another important year in Romanian history (the union of Wallachia and Moldova happened at January 24th 1859, and could have been picked as the national day - at least, a more plausible proposal than any day in 1929, when nothing historically important, on that scale, happened).

⁴ It is also interesting to ask whether 4.2 would be closer to truth if 4.1 and 4.3 would answer with 48 and 52, respectively.

4 The propositional account

Kuipers [2], in his 2024 paper, gives his own range of examples, then tries to find some distance and similarity measures to accommodate them. My criticism is twofold. Firstly, he sets some limiting conditions, like accepting only quantitative theses with positive real numbers, which by default render some of his measures useless for cases in which S has propositions positing negative numbers. Secondly, he seems to use the examples as an exhaustive list of cases that have to be accounted for⁵, which doesn't seem to cover a large number of cases.

Kuipers [2] offers some generally accepted constraints on truthlikeness measures.

Normalized Range: $0 \leq d(x, y) \leq 1$ and $0 \leq s(x, y) \leq 1$, where $d(x, y)$ is the distance between x and y and $s(x, y) = 1 - d(x, y)$ is the similarity between x and y .

Triangle Inequality: $d(x, z) \leq d(x, y) + d(y, z)$ in order for the distance to be metric.

Unique Target: $TL(x) = 1$ if $x = t$, where $TL(x)$ is the truthlikeness of x , and t is the true proposition.

Symmetry: $d(x, y) = d(y, x)$ and $s(x, y) = s(y, x)$.

Conceptual Continuity: $TL(x, t) = 1 - d(x, t)$.

He examines the measures proposed by Tichy-Oddie and Niiniluoto, together with his own:

i) The Tichy-Oddie formula [5, 12]:

$$TL_{TO}(X, t) = 1 - \left(\frac{\sum_{x \in X} d(x, t)}{c(X)} \right) = 1 - d_{av}(X, t) = TL_{av}(X, t, c(X))$$

Where $c(S)$ is the cardinality of S . Its main problem is that logical strength and truthlikeness are not positively correlated, because the part that accounts for distance from truth is calculated as the average distance.

ii) Niiniluoto's measure [4]:

$$TL_N(X, t) = 1 - \left[\gamma d_{\min}(X, t) + \gamma' \left(\frac{\sum_{x \in X} d(x, t)}{\sum_{x \in U} d(x, t)} \right) \right] = 1 - [\gamma d_{\min}(X, t) + \gamma' d_{av}(X, t) s^*(X, U)] d_{av}(U, t)$$

Where $0 \leq \gamma, \gamma' \leq 1$. As it can be verified, it lacks Conceptual Continuity, because it can't be reduced to $1 - d(x, t)$.

⁵ He doesn't explicitly say that his list of examples, used to provide intuition, is exhaustive, but he evaluates his 5 proposed measures using the examples without providing grounds for more flexibility. For example, none of his measures would give a satisfying answer to the 'number of legs' question.

Kuipers' proposals are:

iii) The minimum distance truthlikeness, which takes the distance from the closest member of X to t (which is 0 if X is true):

$$TL_{min}(X, t) = (1 - d_{min}(X, t)) \times s^*(c(X), c(\{t\})) = \frac{1 - d_{min}(X, t)}{c(X)} = \frac{s_{max}(X, t)}{c(X)}$$

iv) The average distance truthlikeness, which takes the average distance from each member of X to t :

$$TL_{av}(X, t) = (1 - d_{av}(X, t)) \times s^*(c(X), c(\{t\})) = \frac{1 - d_{av}(X, t)}{c(X)} = \frac{s_{av}(X, t)}{c(X)}$$

v) The weighted distance truthlikeness:

$$TL_w(X, t) = wTL_{min}(X, t) + (1 - w)TL_{av}(X, t)$$

The minimum distance truthlikeness doesn't distinguish between disjunctions of equal logical strength where the minimum distance is the same for both, but the average or maximum distances are different. So, for example, "Bob's age is 13, 14, or 15" is as close to the truth (16) as "Bob's age is 17, 20, or 30". The average and weighted measures are not sensitive to the size of X .

Besides these truthlikeness measures Kuipers proposes some distance measures:

$$d_{nad}(x, y) = \frac{|x - y|}{|x - y| + 1}$$

This is the normalized average distance and is invariant on translation, meaning it returns the same distance for the same numerical intervals between numbers, however large. It varies on ratios, meaning it returns different distances for the same ratios (like those between 8 and 16 or 16 and 32).

$$d^*(x, y) = \frac{\max(x, y) - \min(x, y)}{\max(x, y)} f$$

Unlike the 'standard' distance measure above, the fractional distance is invariant on scale and varies on translation, accommodating the intuition that similar scale differences should be equally truthlike, while similar absolute differences between small or large numbers should receive different distance scores.

As I said above, these distance measure are not adequate for sets containing negative numbers and don't address peculiar cases like in my examples 7) and 9).

5 The credal account

We can see probabilities, or degrees of belief, as estimations of truth values. Ideally, we would be able to fully assent to all true propositions, deny all falsities, and also suspend judgment where there is no fact of the matter. However, the world is far from ideal. In many cases, we don't know which propositions are true, so we can only take more or less educated guesses. In such a scenario, risking to assign only categorical truth values can lead us to fully accept falsities and fully deny truths. If we want to avoid this scenario we can use probabilities to estimate the truth of a proposition.

Here is the formula of the Brier Score:

$$\text{Brier}(\mathbf{X}, \mathbf{P}) = \sum_{i=1}^n \lambda_i (\mathbf{X}_i - \mathbf{P}_i)^2 \quad (1)$$

where \mathbf{X} is a partition of a set of exhaustive and mutually exclusive propositions, \mathbf{P} is a distribution of real numbers, and λ is a set of weights. We observe that when the sum of the squared errors is larger, in order to minimize the Brier score, our estimations need to be as close as possible to the actual truth values.

One of the best features of the Brier score is that it supports Dutch Book arguments. That means that if we want to lower the expected value of the Brier score as much as possible, we must comply with the probability laws. Otherwise, if we choose a probability assignment that violates the probability laws, there will always be another assignment that obeys them and will return a lower score (that is, a lower loss), no matter which proposition is true. A score that satisfies these criteria is called a proper score. So, the Brier scoring is proper [9].

The Brier score has some properties that make up the 'Core' of probabilism according to Oddie. Then, he argues, any measure that adequately captures probabilism and, thus, satisfies the 'Core' (such as Brier), will violate some important properties of truthlikeness, rendering the combination of the two approaches unfruitful. The properties of the 'Core' are the following:

Truth Directedness: For any distance function $d(v, p)$, where p is a probability and $v \in \{0, 1\}$, d is strictly increasing if $v = 0$ and strictly decreasing if $v = 1$. That is, the distance increases as the probability diverges from the truth value.

Symmetry: for any distance function $d(v, p)$, $d(1, p) = d(0, 1 - p)$. This means that misidentifying a truth by a degree is punished the same way as misidentifying a falsehood by the same degree.

Boundedness: For any distance function d , $d = 0$ if and only if $|v - p| = 0$, and $d = 1$ if and only if $|v - p| = 1$.

Additivity: $Loss(P^i) = \sum_j \lambda_j d(X_j, P_j)$, meaning that the total loss is a weighted sum of the local losses. Note that Brier is just a particular type of Loss.

Admissibility: For all j , $\lambda_j \geq 0$, $\sum_i \lambda_i = 1$ and $\lambda_{Taut} < 1$. The sum of the weights has to be 1, all weights have to be non-negative and the weight of the tautology has to be smaller than 1. As I will show later, this last criterion will be dropped.

Strong Propriety: For any probability assignments P and Q, $E(Loss_P(P)) < E(Loss_P(Q))$, where $Loss_P(Q) = \sum_i P_i d(X_i, Q_i)$. That is, P's estimation of the loss associated with Q is the formula that results from P giving the weights of the loss associated with Q. Also, P is its own best estimator, minimizing its expected loss. Additionally, to the 'Core', we have Weak Proximity, Strict Proximity, and Substitution. These are the criteria of the propositional approach to accuracy that can be transferred to the credal approach. Let X_i be the true proposition in a partition X, such that we can order the members of X by their proximity to the truth.

Weak Proximity: Let $X_C \subseteq X$ be the set of the propositions in X closest to the Truth. $X_C^{-T} \subseteq X^{-T}$ denote the subset of the false propositions in X that are closest to the truth. If $X_k >^i X_j$, then $X_k \geq^i X_k \vee X_j$. This is saying that restricting a disjunction to the members closest to the truth cannot increase the inaccuracy.

Substitution: Let D be a disjunction formed out of members of X, and $D^{k/j}$ is the same disjunction where X_j is replaced by X_k . Then if $X_k >^i X_j$, then $D^{k/j} >^i D$ and if $X_k =^i X_j$, then $D^{k/j} =^i D$. This means that if we replace a member of a disjunction with another member closer to the truth, we decrease the inaccuracy of the disjunction.

Strong Proximity: results from Weak Proximity and Substitution. Now let $X_k \geq^i X_k \vee X_j$. If $X_j >^i X_h$, then by Substitution $(X_k \vee X_j) > (X_k \vee X_h)$. By Substitution and Weak Proximity, $X_k >^i X_k \vee X_h$.

We have to add that if $D^k \geq^i D^j$, then $Loss(D^k, P^k) \leq Loss(D^j, P^j)$, where P^i is the probability assignment that gives equal positive probabilities to the members of D^i and 0 to the others (or, as Oddie prefers, it assigns equal positive probabilities to propositions compatible with D^i and 0 to the others; These are not equivalent, as I will show in a short time).

Now, an important question is how we choose the weights. If we keep the weights uniform, we will be unable to account for truthlikeness. It is possible for two agents to assign the same probabilities to the true proposition and different probabilities to the false ones, but following the same distribution. Consider the example of Bob's age. Let P be the following assignment: [28: 0.1, 29: 0.2, 30: 0.4, 31: 0.2, 32: 0.1] and let Q be [28: 0.2, 29: 0.1, 30: 0.4, 31: 0.1, 32: 0.2].

Since Bob is 30, if the weights are uniform, P and Q will return equal losses. If we want to incorporate truthlikeness into our account we have to explain why an agent choosing P will be better vindicated than the one choosing Q. One natural way of differentiating between them is to use non-uniform weightings. One way of doing that is choosing world-independent weights, namely a set of weights that applies across all scenarios, no matter which proposition is true. However, this wouldn't help us, since it wouldn't be clear how to assign the weights based on closeness. Indeed, closeness to truth can only be taken into account if the truth is determined. Since the Loss score is construed as the agent's accuracy assessment, its value is determined at the Vindication Time, namely only after the truth is known. Only then can the agent judge how closely she probabilistically estimated the truth. I claim this also applies to truthlikeness. Only after the truth is known, can the agent see which propositions were contentwise closer to the truth. Thus, I propose the criterion of Vindication for world-dependent weights:

Vindication: The weights λ are determined in the light of the discovered truth. Thus, for every X_i in X , we will have a weighting λ_i that will also minimize the Loss. Note that there are two different minimizations, the probabilistic and the content-centered one.

6 Oddie's Incompatibility Proof

Oddie also proposes a criterion of admissibility for world-dependent weights: if $X_k =^i X_j$, then $\lambda_k =^i \lambda_j$ and if $X_k >^i X_j$, then $\lambda_k >^i \lambda_j$. The motivation given by Oddie is that drastically underestimating the probability of a proposition closer to the truth should be punished more severely than underestimating the probability of a proposition farther from the truth. However, we can also say that overestimating the probability of a proposition further from the truth should be punished more severely than overestimating the probability of a proposition closer to the truth. And given symmetry, overestimation and underestimation are both represented as distances, where no one type of error necessarily brings a larger cost. Hence I only accept the first part of Oddie's admissibility criterion: if $X_k =^i X_j$, then $\lambda_k =^i \lambda_j$.

Oddie proves that given world-dependent weighting, if we accept Propriety then we are forced to reject Strict Proximity. He proposes an example where X_1 is true, X_2 and X_3 are equally close to X_1 and X_4 is farther from X_1 than both X_2 and X_3 ⁶. He then builds composed propositions:

⁶ He offers the example where there are two propositions, h (hot) and r (rainy), and four conjunctions, X1: h & r, X2: h & -r, X3: -h & r and X4: -h & -r. The distance between any two conjunctions is given by the number of common conjuncts. We can also construct X5, which is X1 V X2 and so on.

$$\begin{aligned}
X_5 &= X_1 \vee X_2 \\
X_6 &= X_1 \vee X_3 \\
X_7 &= X_1 \vee X_4 \\
X_8 &= X_2 \vee X_3 \\
X_9 &= X_2 \vee X_4 \\
X_{10} &= X_3 \vee X_4 \\
X_{11} &= X_1 \vee X_2 \vee X_3 \\
X_{12} &= X_1 \vee X_2 \vee X_4 \\
X_{13} &= X_1 \vee X_3 \vee X_4 \\
X_{14} &= X_2 \vee X_3 \vee X_4 \\
X_{15} &= X_1 \vee X_2 \vee X_3 \vee X_4
\end{aligned}$$

Oddie includes, in the Loss formulas, the local losses of each disjunction that can be formed (not just the basic X_1 , X_2 , X_3 , and X_4). Thus, he computes the losses in the following manner:

$$\begin{aligned}
\text{Loss}(X_2) &= \lambda_1 + \lambda_2 + \lambda_6 + \lambda_7 + \lambda_8 + \lambda_9 + \lambda_{13} + \lambda_{14} \\
\text{Loss}(X_8) &= \lambda_1 + \dot{\lambda}_2 + \dot{\lambda}_3 + \dot{\lambda}_5 + \dot{\lambda}_6 + \dot{\lambda}_7 + \dot{\lambda}_8 + \dot{\lambda}_9 + \dot{\lambda}_{10} + \dot{\lambda}_{12} + \dot{\lambda}_{13} + \lambda_{14}
\end{aligned}$$

It can be proven that if $p = 0.5$, then the distance $i = d(v, p) < 0.5$ for any proper score that satisfies the 'Core'[7]. Then, by the admissibility of world-dependent weighting, $\lambda_2 = \lambda_3$, $\lambda_5 = \lambda_6$, $\lambda_9 = \lambda_{10}$, and $\lambda_{12} = \lambda_{13}$. By Weak Proximity, since $X_2 >^1 (X_2 \vee X_3)$, which is equivalent to $X_2 >^1 X_8$, then $\text{Loss}(P^2) \leq \text{Loss}(P^8)$. But this gives the following result: $(1 - 2i)\lambda_2 + (1 - 2i)\lambda_5 + (1 - 2i)\lambda_9 + (1 - 2i)\lambda_{12} \leq 0$, which is possible only when $\lambda_2 = \lambda_3 = \lambda_5 = \lambda_6 = \lambda_9 = \lambda_{10} = \lambda_{12} = \lambda_{13} = 0$, because $i < 0.5$ and all weights are non-negative. But by Substitution, $(X_1 \vee X_2) >^1 (X_2 \vee X_4)$, so $X^6 >^1 X^9$. But, by world-dependent admissibility (as Oddie defined it), $\lambda_5 > \lambda_9$, which contradicts the previous result.

I think the proof can be blocked if we relax the world-dependent admissibility criterion and if we restrict what propositions can enter the Loss formula. I propose Basicity:

Basicity: $\sum_i v(X_i) = 1$. This means that the members of the sum have to be disjoint.

As we can see, Basicity blocks the last step of the proof. Moreover, if we choose a truthlikeness ordering we can impose restrictions on the weights. By checking the restrictions imposed by every ordering we want to accept, we can check if they are mutually compatible.

So, by accepting Basicity, the losses are computed as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Loss}(X_1) &= 0 \\
 \text{Loss}(X_2) &= \lambda_1 + \lambda_2 \\
 \text{Loss}(X_3) &= \lambda_1 + \lambda_3 \\
 \text{Loss}(X_4) &= \lambda_1 + \lambda_4 \\
 \text{Loss}(X_5) &= i\lambda_1 + i\lambda_2 \\
 \text{Loss}(X_6) &= i\lambda_1 + i\lambda_3 \\
 \text{Loss}(X_7) &= i\lambda_1 + i\lambda_4 \\
 \text{Loss}(X_8) &= \lambda_1 + i\lambda_2 + i\lambda_3 \\
 \text{Loss}(X_9) &= \lambda_1 + i\lambda_2 + i\lambda_4 \\
 \text{Loss}(X_{10}) &= \lambda_1 + i\lambda_3 + i\lambda_4 \\
 \text{Loss}(X_{11}) &= j\lambda_1 + k\lambda_2 + k\lambda_3 \\
 \text{Loss}(X_{12}) &= j\lambda_1 + k\lambda_2 + k\lambda_4 \\
 \text{Loss}(X_{13}) &= j\lambda_1 + k\lambda_3 + k\lambda_4 \\
 \text{Loss}(X_{14}) &= \lambda_1 + k\lambda_2 + k\lambda_3 + k\lambda_4 \\
 \text{Loss}(X_{15}) &= i\lambda_1 + m\lambda_2 + m\lambda_3 + m\lambda_4
 \end{aligned}$$

Let Loss_i designate $\text{Loss}(X_i)$. By my lights, presupposing a translation-invariant truthlikeness metric and accepting the 'Core', we want these orderings to hold:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Loss}_1 < \text{Loss}_2 = \text{Loss}_3 < \text{Loss}_4 & \quad \text{Loss}_1 < \text{Loss}_5 = \text{Loss}_6 < \text{Loss}_7 & \quad \text{Loss}_2 < \\
 \text{Loss}_8 < \text{Loss}_9 = \text{Loss}_{10} & \quad \text{Loss}_{11} < \text{Loss}_{12} = \text{Loss}_{13} < \text{Loss}_{14}
 \end{aligned}$$

As we can easily check, these relations hold as long as $\lambda_2 = \lambda_3 = 0 < \lambda_4$, given that for any X_j with $j \geq 5$, the probabilities are divided equally between the members of the disjunction. Thus, if $\text{Loss} = \text{Brier}$, $i = 0.25$.

7 Final Remarks

The Unified Approach has some obvious advantages. In addition to allowing credences to inform our assessment of someone's epistemic accuracy, it offers a more flexible account of truthlikeness. By using the weights to retroactively evaluate our closeness to the truth we can satisfy more easily the examples that I gave earlier. If we only try to find some unique measure to capture all our intuitions about truthlikeness, we are doomed to fail. The other solution would be to find many separate measures, for every different intuition we form each time we see new examples. The more elegant solution, in my opinion, is to approach these

differences by changing the weights in the Loss score (Brier, let's say). We can tweak the weights to privilege any similarity ordering we want and, furthermore, we know how to do that once we establish the desired ordering, as I've shown in the previous section.

Oddie's proof also suffers from one additional problem, although I acknowledge that this one heavily depends on our intuitions about particular cases. For example, it's not always obvious that seemingly plausible constraints like Strict Proximity hold. Let's return to the 'number of legs' case, where there are 90 legs in the building. Now let's imagine that all persons in the building but one have two legs and the remaining person either has two legs or has just one leg. In this case, we can say that $X_{91} >^{90} X_{92}$, so $(X_{90} \vee X_{91}) >^{90} (X_{90} \vee X_{92})$. On the other hand, both guesses imply that there are 45 persons with two legs and an additional person which has one leg according to Guess 1 and two legs according to Guess

2. Given the scenario, it's not clear whether the simple absolute distance metric should imply Strict Proximity here.

We can now ask whether the introduction of Basicity is not too restrictive. I think it's not. We can't introduce into the Brier score propositions whose probabilities sum to a number higher than one. This merely implies that if I think X_1 is true, or has a higher probability, I will not also put a probability on a disjunction containing X_1 . But this doesn't mean I can't compare the claims X_1 or a disjunction containing it. Let's say I think X_1 is true, when in fact X_2 is true. I can put a bet on X_1 and introduce it into the Brier score with the probability 0.9. Then the score will compute my loss. I can then put another bet on $X_1 \vee X_2$, which means I put 0.45 on X_1 and 0.45 on X_2 , and then compute the loss, thus seeing which returns a smaller loss. Interesting cases are those of the type 'There are more than 8 planets in the Solar System', which are infinite disjunctions. A bet on such a disjunction can assume unequal probabilities on its members, to obey the probability laws (additivity!). This may not represent someone's belief, who is indifferent as to how exactly many planets there are, and who only believes there are more than eight. Such a person would presumably have probabilistically incoherent beliefs and would be the victim of a Dutch Book argument (or, in de pragmatized terms, their epistemic loss is guaranteed). However, these difficulties and others similar also affect the measures I presented in the fourth section, so the unified approach keeps its advantage. Finally, its main appeal resides in the intuition that precision can be seen on different axes: content-similarity and probabilistic closeness are a core component by which we appreciate how close to the truth a belief is.

Future work on this topic would involve finding adequate metrics for non-numerical truthlikeness and, on the other hand, should cover non-discrete probability assignments for non-discrete scenarios.

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From the Reasons of Myth to the Myth of Reason: Europe in a Verbo-visual Investigation

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ABSTRACT. This article explores the construction of Europe’s image through the interplay of myth, iconography and cartography, demonstrating how these visual and narrative devices contribute to the formation of the European collective imaginary. Starting from the paradoxes of cartographic representation, I try to analyse the evolution of Europa/e from a mythical figure to a political and geographical allegory, highlighting the role of images in defining identity and political-cultural hierarchies. Far from being opposed to myth, modern rationality thus appears to be founded upon and constantly anchored to the processes of mythologisation that underpin its claim to universality. Finally, through modern and contemporary artistic examples that contribute to a critical reconfiguration of the image of Europe, I suggest the adoption of a de-teleological perspective open to the redefinition of its cultural and geopolitical status.

Keywords: Myth; Reason; Imaginary; Iconography; Cartography

0. Introduction

In order to explore the relationship between idea, imagination and reality in which the name Europe operates, this article aims to offer a historical and artistic overview – spanning literature, visual arts and cartography – that ponders on the creation of the image of Europe, or rather its constitution as an image. I believe, in fact, that this is important not only because the image of “Europe” reflects and

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celebrates the transformations and aspirations of a particular area geographic and geopolitical but, more precisely, because it actively contributes to its constitution. The *image* is the essential tool of the construction of the collective imaginary. Its *picture*, therefore, is to be understood as the *device* through which *Europe imagines* itself; it is the instrument through which it gives itself to be seen. My aim is then to show how the geopolitical and cultural idea of Europe is rooted in a specific narrative and in cohesive and legitimizing images that establish its mythical foundation, and how this imaginary affects, even at present, Europe's perception of itself and the goals it sets for itself.

1. Of the paradoxes of maps

To open this verbo-visual exploration, I will begin by considering two paradoxes of cartography—briefly outlining them before setting them aside, to be revisited later.

Let us start with the first. Borges' famous short story on mapping the Empire contains, in perfect Borgesian style, one of the most semiotic paradoxes ever. The short story, written in 1935 and included under the title *Del rigor en la ciencia* in the collection *Historia universal de la infamia*, tells of an extraordinary time when exceptional Cartographers from an unspecified empire produced a 1:1 scale map, that is, a map of such perfection that it reproduced the territories in their exact extent: a map paradoxical, coextensive with the entire territory of the empire. Umberto Eco, in *Dell'impossibilità di costruire la carta dell'impero 1 a 1* (*On the Impossibility of Constructing the 1:1 Map of the Empire*), dwells with irony on the logical implications of Borges' fiction, laying out the paradoxes to which such a representation would lead. Among these, one is particularly noteworthy, as it recalls the Russell–Frege paradox:

Dal momento in cui la mappa è installata ricoprendo tutto il territorio (sia essa stesa o sospesa), il territorio dell'impero è caratterizzato dal fatto di essere un territorio integralmente ricoperto da una mappa. Di questa caratteristica la mappa non rende ragione. A meno che sulla mappa non fosse collocata un'altra mappa che rappresenta il territorio più la mappa sottostante. Ma il processo sarebbe infinito (argomento del terzo uomo). In ogni caso, se il processo si arresta, si dà una mappa finale che rappresenta tutte le mappe frapposte tra sé e il territorio ma non rappresenta se stessa. (...) Di qui i seguenti due corollari:

1. Ogni mappa uno a uno riproduce il territorio sempre infedelmente.
2. Nel momento in cui realizza la mappa, l'impero diventa irrappresentabile¹.

¹ U. Eco, *Dell'impossibilità di costruire la carta dell'impero 1 a 1*, in Id., *Il secondo diario minimo*. Milano: Bompiani, 1992, pp. 157–163. Here is my translation into English: "From the moment the map is installed covering the whole territory (whether lying or hanging), the territory of the empire

However, this is not the only paradox into which the art of cartography can fall. There exists, in addition, a *projective paradox*, which we might call the *point-of-view paradox*.

Contrary to Borges' narrative, the cartographic representation of Europe, and indeed the history of European cartography, does not operate in the direction of *scale extension* but rather of *scale projection*. This projection varies according to the chosen cartographic model, since the relationship between the size of territories on the map and their real extent changes depending on the projection adopted. Among the most significant are two well-known models: the *planispheric projection* proposed by Gerardus Mercator for marine navigation², and the later projection developed in 1963 by Canadian cartographer Arthur H. Robinson, published in 1988 by *National Geographic*.

The first, also called *hexagonal* or *conformal*, constructs parallels and meridians through a Cartesian grid of orthogonal lines, ensuring precision in shapes and directions but progressively elongating the depicted areas as one moves from the equator toward the poles. The second projection, by contrast, minimizes such distortions by distributing them across the various geopolitical areas; in doing so, however, it sacrifices strict adherence to the classical conventions of cartographic representation concerning equivalence, equidistance, and isogony. In other words, it relinquishes mathematical accuracy for visual balance.

Naturally, no "true" projection exists. A perfectly accurate one would require a simultaneous point of view encompassing the entire spherical surface of the globe. That is, it should correspond to the impossible tabular plane drawing of a paradoxical *global viewpoint*³.

What happens to Europe under these two mapping systems? In Robinson's projection, the European continent appears overall compressed, its visual centrality diminished. In Mercator's, by contrast, Europe occupies a longitudinally larger area than Africa or South America. This disproportion, though seemingly innocuous, cannot be dismissed as without consequence for Europe's perception of itself.

is characterized by the fact that it is a territory integrally covered by a map. Of this characteristic the map does not account for it. Unless another map was placed on the map that represents the territory plus the map below. But the process would be endless (third man's argument). In any case, if the process stops, it gives a final map that represents all the maps between itself and the territory but does not represent itself. We call this map Normal Map (...) Hence the following two corollaries:

1. Each one-to-one map always reproduces the territory unfaithfully.
2. The moment it realizes the map, the empire becomes unrepresentable".

² We refer to the Flemish geographer and cartographer Gerardus Mercator: *Nova et aucta orbis terrae descriptio ad usum navigantium emendate accommodata*, 1569.

³ G. Boffi, *Per altri atlanti*, Orthotes, 2014, p. 136.

The question thus becomes: which distortion should one adopt? And, implicitly, within which narrative does each map operate? For the map is never a neutral depiction: it is always both *description* and *narrative*, both a measuring tool and a device for constructing narratives.

2. Europe: towards a geographical designation

A first step toward understanding the visual construction of Europe requires us to clarify the very notion of “Europe” as a geographical designation. This means identifying when and how the term begins to acquire meaning as a spatial and political entity, and how that meaning becomes visible—literally *represented*—in the history of images and maps. In fact, the narrative of *Europa* and *Europe* takes shape and gains coherence through the interplay of myth, cartography, and art. In order to explore this original intertwining of images and narratives, we will start from Greek mythology, or rather from the reasons behind the myth to which the name Europa refers and through which originally “imagines” (becomes an image) itself.

The name of Europa first appears in myth with Homer and Hesiod (*Theogony*, 7th century BCE) associated with the story of the Phoenician princess of Tyre kidnapped by Zeus who, in the guise of magnificent white bull, drags her with him across the sea to Crete⁴.

The etymology of the name Europa is rather uncertain. While some hypotheses trace the name to its geographic matrix, whereby the term “*erek*” would mean “west”, others trace the name to its mythical-cultural meaning, whereby it would be related to “face” or “broad face”, in reference to the Minoan lunar goddess Ellotis (Europa), thus to the full moon. From this perspective, Europa can be traced to the Cretan festivals called Ellotie, fertility rites celebrating the union of the lunar goddess with the bull-Zeus, associated with the name Asterios, or god of the stars⁵.

Consistent with the geographical connotations of her name, the composition of Europa’s family in the myth—specifically her brothers Phoenix, Cilix, and Cadmus—appears to reflect a corresponding geographical etymology. Such an interpretation would suggest the memory of ancient ethnic movements directed toward the Aegean-Anatolian sphere, and more precisely toward Crete and the Greek mainland. Within this framework, the myth may be understood as encoding the oppositional polarity

⁴ Although linked to Greek culture, the mythical story of Europa, centred on the union between the female and bull elements, represents a truly complex mythological archetype that finds some resonance in Palaeolithic art. Furthermore, three children were born from the union between Zeus and Europa: Sarpedon, Adamantus and Minos. It is with the latter that the archetypal story of the union between women and bulls will continue; from the union between his wife Pasiphaë and a bull sent by Poseidon, as is well known, the mythical Minotaur will be born.

⁵ See F. Calabi, *Il sogno di Europa e il ratto di Zeus*, in “Materiali di Estetica”, n. 6. 2: 2019, p. 8.

between “east” and “west,” embodied respectively in the foundations attributed to Cadmus and his lineage on the eastern side, and to Europa on the western⁶.

In the name “Europa”, therefore, we can recognize on the one hand a religious-cultural component, on the other hand a mythical core to which is associated, however, a fluctuating geographical location, which changes according to the texts.

At times, Europa’s geographical location is described with a certain precision, as in Homer’s *Hymn to Apollo*, where she is associated with the territories north of the Aegean Sea, and thus with mainland Greece. In other instances, however, her placement is more general and ambiguous, as in Hesiod, where it derives from a simple contrast between Europa—mythical daughter of Oceanus and Tethys—and another Oceanid named Asia. Finally, there are cases in which her geographical position becomes altogether indeterminate, and Europa appears both as a mythical figure and as a land to be sought. This is the case in the account of the Alexandrian author Moschus (2nd century CE), who narrates the abduction of Europa and specifies that her father, Agenor, commanded her brothers to set out in search of her and not to return until they had found her. Having failed in their goal, the brothers stayed in other places and founded respectively: Thebes (Greece), Cilicia (southeastern Turkey) and Phoenicia (Lebanon). In this version, therefore, Europa is not found, and it is precisely the highly symbolic search for her that establishes her.

From these premises, we can focus on some crucial aspects. First, the myth seems to have to do with ethnic migratory flows and the foundation of the Cretan (Minoan) civilisation, which had a decisive influence on Greek civilisation. Secondly, the geographical location of Europa is deeply ambiguous, if not impossible. Finally, Europa is a female geographical figure, a woman-land often contrasted with Asia.

In addition to the progressive shift from heroine to geographic designation, there is the shift from mythical figure to political concept, which finds a decisive moment in the Middle Ages, both in an anti-Pagan and anti-Arab function, thus founded on religious glue. In this historical phase, it is no accident that we witness a profound transformation of the image of Europe and the name, to which is preferred, very significantly, that of *Christianity*. This is perhaps the first moment of profound geographical and geopolitical definition for Europe.

3. Europe as a feminine allegory

The iconographic evolution of the myth of Europa, across sculpture, decoration, painting, and cartography, bears clear witness to these transformations leading to

⁶ G. Facchetti, D. Cermesoni, O. Khalaf, *Il mito di Europa e il mito dell’Europa*, in “De Europa”, Special Issue, 2021, p. 23.

its conceptualisation and, in fact, constitutes the principal medium through which this change is articulated.

If pre-Hellenic iconography depicts the priestess of the moon galloping triumphantly over the solar bull, as revealed by an ornate glass plaque, the seventh century B.C. with a *pithos* preserved at the Biliotèque National in Paris marks the first depiction of the myth, coeval with the literary production of Hesiod. From here on there are numerous depictions with minor variations. In the Metope of the Acropolis of Selinunte, for example, Europa is depicted with the bull and not on it. In addition, she is girded with a veil puffed up by the wind⁷.

In medieval times, Europa is transformed from a maiden kidnapped by a bull-god – established since the 7th Century b.C. – to a woman harnessed as a warrior. Or, even more interestingly, she changes gender and becomes Japheth (son of Noah and progenitor of the European peoples). Of course, this change goes hand in hand with what was pointed out earlier with respect to the naming of the continent, which changes from Europe to Christianity. In this phase, the undoubtedly most important figure is Charlemagne who, moreover, is hailed as "*rex pater Europae*", whose triumph emerges in contrast to Arab expansion. To what extent the Holy Roman Empire was "Roman" and not already *in nuce* "European" is a great subject for debate. However, what is important to note is that, despite the unraveling that would follow Charlemagne's death, the European continent, whose partitioning among his grandsons already shows a rather recognizable configuration for us of the pre-national territories, Europe would, all things considered, find greater unity by virtue of religion acting as the real glue.

The sixteenth century is extraordinarily rich. From a historical point of view, it is a century ravaged by wars of religion and in which stands the very important figure of Charles V, a figure to be understood as the real starting point of a truly European history animated by a project of establishing a universal Christian monarchy. It is also so for the stabilization of the iconographic code of Europa and its relation to cartographic art. Indeed, this phase witnesses the definitive entry of a Europa-allegory into maps. An allegorization unthinkable without the passage through the numerous *Commentaries* to the work the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid⁸, such as the *Ovidius moralizatus*, which betray the need to reconcile myth with moral and religious dictates, that is, to make it compatible with Holy Scripture. In fact, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which literally act as a hinge between Greek and Latin cultures,

⁷ See F. Calabi, *Il sogno di Europa e il ratto di Zeus*, p. 13, image 5.

⁸ Among them: *Ovidius moralizatus*; *Allegoriae super Ovidii Metamorphosin* by Arnulf of Orleans (12th century), the *Insegnamenta super Ovidium Metamorphoseos* by John of Garlandia (13th century), the *Expositio and Allegoriae librorum Ovidii Metamorphoseos* by John of Virgil (early 14th century); 1557 *La Metamorphose d'Ovide figurée*.

sanction the triumphant entry of the myth of Europa into the Renaissance and fix its iconography, particularly with respect to the position of Europa, who looks back toward the shore and is depicted riding the bull, that is, being carried by the animal.

Like Europe, other continents are also increasingly personified by female figures at this stage, which are three, of course, in the period leading up to the colonization of the American continent and in which the link between continent and female figure is, in the aftermath of the brief medieval period, definitely re-established⁹.

This association between female figure and continent, certainly dictated by an initial kinship between mythical figure and geographical designation, is much deeper than it might appear at first glance. Take, for example, the very concept of a “somatopic map”, the most famous of which also appeared in Sebastian Münster’s *Cosmography* (1550-1554): *Europa in forma virginis* drawn in 1537 by John (“Bucius”) Putsch. In this map, *soma* and *topos* end up coinciding. This is an extremely significant identification as it tells us three things simultaneously: it establishes a complex link between female body and land, perhaps in part by ascribing to the land the value of “potential space of conquest”; the anatomical and biopolitical hierarchy of the body, dictated by specific philosophical and moral values, is transposed to the geopolitical plane and is validated as a geopolitical hierarchy within Europe and outside it; it sanctions an important passage through the identification between head/reason, crown and expansion.

In this map, Europe is not represented as a mythical maiden, but as a continent in the allegorical form of a woman-queen, whose head seems to me to have relevance on the philosophical level as well. It is *Ratio* in its dual philosophical-political connotation that is implicitly exalted in this representation. This is perhaps one of the most relevant passages in the path that I would call, anticipating some aspects that we will take up later, of mythicization of reason. Or, if you prefer, it is one of the most refined tools of the European “mythological machine”¹⁰. In fact, here Europe is depicted in the silhouette of a queen, in which the strategic position of the various countries can be seen in different anatomical parts.

With Africa on the left and Asia at the bottom, thus with an orientation of the “global” chessboard turned 90 degrees, Europe is depicted with Spain, the protagonist of the colonial affair, at the head, literally, and the northeastern countries, including Greece on the edge of the skirt (Greece being lost to Ottoman hands at that time) and Russia at the foot. This “periphery” of the body, as well as periphery of the map that refers to the subjugation of the more “humble” areas of the body to the

⁹ After all, just like continents, cities too are personified by female characters, often resorting to the figure of the turreted woman. Maps are descriptive-narrative texts that resort to personifying even landscapes. Mountains, for example, are rendered allegorically through the depiction of wild hermits.

¹⁰ See: F. Jesi, *Il tempo della festa*, Nottetempo Ed., 2019.

head, is very important because it represents in the most incisive way something that will be increasingly evident in the following centuries; namely the fact that this area, or frontier, has a “*defensive*” character. It is a defensive border as opposed to the reigning head, which constitutes, instead, an “*expansive*” border.

This link between cartography and anatomy, moreover, is far from coincidental. From the 16th century, as Giuliana Bruno in her *Atlante delle emozioni* reconstructs, atlases began to frequently use the same figurative codes used to depict bodies in anatomy books. Geography and anatomy, particularly with Vesalius, imagine the body in the same way, establishing reversible relationships. *Geography anatomized* is in fact the title of one of the texts of the time. Thus, anatomical illustrations also become real maps, where at the edges of the frames of the anatomical drawings stripes are drawn, a kind of tabular grid in every way analogous to those in use in cartography¹¹.

The process of Europa’s transformation from myth to allegory, enabled by the literary proliferation of the *Metamorphoses*, its *Commentaries* – as well as Boccaccio’s *De mulieribus claris*, who considered the mythical maiden Europa a *woman worthy of giving her name to a continent* –, fosters the presence of female figures, between the 16th and 18th centuries, in the field of geography representation. Indeed, the masculine figure of Atlas, who holds the globe on his shoulders and offers it to view, is associated with a series of female figures, or “powerful women” who inhabit maps¹². Not only, then, allegories of the continents, each with a specific iconography, but also women depicted in the act of “delineating” a knowledge that seems to be more than just cartographic. Tools such as compasses and easels are often associated with these figures (e.g., 1622: Atlas by Willem Blaeu or 1611: World Map by Jodocus Hondius, which shows a woman pointing a compass at a globe and surrounded by an array of knowledge tools). These are aspects that also characterize seventeenth-century Dutch portraits, in which a woman often appears, in the center, leaning on the globe (often, moreover, a symbol of vanity).

Among these examples, there is one of particular importance for the fortune the text will enjoy. It is Cesare Ripa’s *Iconologia* (1593). Here it is Geography itself that is a woman measuring the globe and pointing a compass toward the sky. Interesting that in his *Iconology*, Theory itself becomes a map. Theory, a figure associated by the Greeks with vision and contemplation, here is depicted in architectural form and redefined in geographical terms. She is a young woman looking up, holding her joined hands with an open compass with its points toward Heaven, is dressed in blue, and is depicted in the act of descending from the top of a ladder.

¹¹ See: G. Bruno, *Atlante delle emozioni. In viaggio tra arte, architettura e cinema*, Joahn & Levi, 2015, p. 256.

¹² *Ibid.*

In the description of Theory provided by Cesare Ripa, writes Giuliana Bruno, the geographical ascent takes haptic form. The compass, literally stuck in the woman's head, becomes a cognitive prosthesis. *This epistemic headset* is quite spacious, as the compass is wide open to the world. Similar to a set of hands and receivers, it figuratively transforms into her antennae, her spatial sensors¹³.

Within this allegory of Theory entwined with Geography, one may discern a passage of exceptional significance. A profound correspondence unfolds between reason as a cognitive and contemplative power – *theoria* (*théorein*) as its specific exercise – and the practice of “drawing the world”. This represents one of the moments of greatest expansion of the head–reason, of that “expansive frontier” that *Europa in forma virginis* seems to anticipate. It is the compass stuck in the head: the compass as a cognitive prosthesis.

Further on, with Jan Barend Elwe's Atlas we find a female geographical allegory. Atlas, the male mythical figure holding the globe is relegated to the background and the figuration of geographic knowledge is dominated by two women who seem to be literally creating geography. One standing holds a compass over the globe while her other hand skims its surface. She is painting a map, or charting the globe–“drawing the world”. The earth here is not feminized but, on the contrary, the female figure appears to be the subject of a decisive act of mapping. The other woman, in the foreground of the image, sits in front of the globe and is drawing. Once again the link between spatial knowledge and female figures is enshrined. Here, moreover, the act of figuration itself is also portrayed.

Although these female figures do not strictly represent Europa, it is perhaps possible to recognise a connection between the progressive stabilisation of the code of the European aristocratic woman that emerges in these figures and the personification of Europa. In fact, not only is there a correspondence between these allegorical figures (which literally determine the code of European women¹⁴) and the allegory of Europa in the codes adopted, but it is even possible to identify behind each allegorical female figure a sort of Europa, who is continually forged and claimed thanks to them.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

¹⁴ Giuliana Bruno highlights this connection between mapping and designing the code of European women. As she observes in her Atlas, through the work of mapping, a real act of “modelling” was taking place, whereby the decoration of maps became a way of “designing” difference and inscribing it in the geographical terrain. Moreover, it is interesting to note the transposition of the figurative codes in a circularity that fully restores the deep semantic relationship between different spheres, such that, “if the cartographer resorted to the figurative codes of the costume books to describe the body-sexual, the costume book in turn borrowed from geography and travel culture to ‘model’ the body. See: G. Bruno, *Atlante delle emozioni*, p. 257.

Parallel to its iconographic evolution in cartography, the allegorical figure of Europa also underwent decisive transformations in the fine arts, to be considered literally at the service of the geopolitical and identity construction of Europe. In particular, its image changed radically from the 16th century onwards and from a kidnapped maiden she is often transformed into a sovereign or matron. This transition marks the triumph of Europa and Eurocentrism: the female figure now takes on a very strong political connotation. Therefore, some of these elements present in the myth are also replaced.

This is a transformation already present in Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, in which we see a Europe, described as the "first and principal part of the world", endowed with tools, such as: owl; temple (as a symbol of "perfect and most true religion"); cornucopia and horse instead of bull.

The replacement of the symbolic animal from the bull (symbol of energy, fertility and sacrifice) to the horse is very important because it introduces a real iconographic phase¹⁵. It is worth noting that this replacement can be interpreted as a transition towards the exaltation of Europe's military power. (After all, as historian Daniel R. Headrick pointed out in *The Dominance of the West: Technology, Environment, Imperialism*, the horse was the first technology of war). We find Europe represented with the horse in Francesco Trevisani's preparatory paintings (1709) for the mosaics in the vestibule of the chapel of the baptistery of St. Peter's, for example, where she is enriched with a series of symbols that combine temporal and religious power (such as the papal tiara, tabernacle, arms, sceptre and crown).

In the context of this iconographic transformation, however, often only the position of the female figure changes¹⁶. From sitting on the bull's rump and looking toward the shore, which in Greek myth refers to the passivity of Europa as a victim of Zeus's ransom, she is found at the bull's side. But the bull has also changed; it is now a tame, well-fed animal, often with its horns adorned with garlands. In Veronese's painting "The Rape of Europa" (1580), for example, Europa is depicted next to an adorned bull and displays all the richness and refinement of the fabrics of her clothes. In the background, a pyramid, symbol of wisdom, can also be glimpsed. Sometimes, however, she is found in a triumphant position, seated on a cloud. This is what Tiepolo depicts in a famous fresco whose spatial organization all converges on the part dedicated to her. Of course, there are also different representations, such as that of

¹⁵ This period also consolidated the iconography of the other continents, which were also associated with a symbolic animal: Europe-bull (or horse)-was joined by Africa, associated with the elephant or crocodile, Asia associated with the camel, and America associated with the alligator.

¹⁶ In selecting some of the iconographic references presented in this article, I was inspired by the notes from the seminar given by: Y. Guaiana, *Europa tra mito e realtà: Europa: mito, semantica e caratteri geografici*, Università degli Studi di Milano – Bicocca, 2008.

Rubens who, in *The Consequences of War*, depicts Europa as a woman mourning the loss of her children. The question that arises, however, is how incisive these isolated representations are in the construction of the European imaginary. Or, again, Europa is depicted in a semi-reclining, languid position, much like a river goddess. A true *pathos formel*, to use the term adopted by Aby Warburg in his psycho-historical exploration. It is no coincidence, in this sense, that it is possible to discern a reversibility between the figure of Europa and that of the River. In fact, the allegory of Europa, on some occasions, abandons the female figure to be replaced by that of the River, or river deity. This is the case with the fountain in Piazza Navona in Rome, where we have the representation of the four continents through the rivers that symbolise them: the Danube for Europe, the Rio de la Plata for the Americas, the Ganges for Asia and the Nile for Africa. It is therefore not surprising that behind the Danube there is a horse, as if leaping out of the rock.

From this reconstruction of the iconographic evolution of *Europa*, a complex process of transformation clearly emerges. First, the figure of Europa undergoes a gradual metamorphosis from maiden to matron, a passage that reflects not only a change in iconographic conventions but also a shift in symbolic meaning. Alongside this, the relationship between Europa and the symbolic animal evolves: the wild bull of the ancient myth is progressively domesticated, at times replaced by the horse or by a tamed bull, both signs of a reason that subdues and governs instinct.

This evolution also entails a broader iconographic reconfiguration in which Europa is often depicted in association with new symbolic elements – such as the pyramid or the refinement of clothing – or is concealed behind the many female figures who populate the visual and conceptual domain of geography. In this way, Europa herself comes to embody an “image of thought”: an allegory of scientific reason increasingly defined in opposition to the mythical or “savage” thought that, during the age of the Conquest, is projected onto the Other beyond Europa.

Finally, this iconography makes visible the significant dyad of *war and knowledge*, a tension that underlies the very process by which the image of Europa becomes both an instrument and a symbol of intellectual and territorial domination.

4. The European imaginary between contrastive and historicist logic

These transformations constitute a fundamental mechanism in the construction of a European political identity and cultural imaginary. In fact, despite the persistence of internal conflicts between states, the continent begins to unify around a nascent idea of Europe—held together by subtle symbolic and conceptual bonds that serve as its cohesive force.

From a historical point of view, from the sixteenth century onward it is the moral-religious question that strengthens European cultural identity both in contrast to the American continent (recall the controversy between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Sepúlveda about indigenous people)¹⁷, and, later, against Russia and Asia. Europe, in this sense, is formed in the semantically different space between *expansive border* (spreading westward from the geographic frontier fixed by the oceanic coast) and *defensive border* (mobile and ambiguous border that underwent numerous transformations and had, as geopolitical focus the Ural mountain range, while as cultural focus the Russian question in its uncertain European or Asian definition)¹⁸.

This position “between” America and Asia will change over time but without much alteration in political and cultural perceptions toward the eastern border. Europe will even be threatened as much by the political-economic growth of the U.S. as by that of Russia, but if in the West the confrontation is played out, rather, on the terrain of the discussion about the relations of political filiation (see Tocqueville’s essay *Democracy in America*), in the East it is played out, on the other hand, in that of the clash with models that are difficult to reconcile with the European ones that are thought on the basis of the Greco-Roman one.

Indeed, the European continent, which is highly fragmented (geographically and politically) and has no real *Kernland*, seems to base, therefore, its cultural identity on a *contrastive logic* (of constructing otherness) but also, at the same time, on a *historicist logic*.

Hence Europe’s “civilizing mission” anchored on the *Progress-Civilization* dyad (particularly with the Enlightenment), on the opposition between the savage and the modern and, by virtue of this opposition, on the polarization between myth and *logos* as the foundation of modern Reason¹⁹.

However, the “modern” expulsion of the mythical element from the domain of reason, which utilises and reinforces the fundamental separation between *mythos* and *logos*, seems to me to need reinterpretation. In particular, it should be re-examined

¹⁷ In this sense, defining (by contrast) its own moral and educational standards leads to a process of *secularization of the idea of Europe*. Facchetti, G., Cermesoni, D., Khalaf, O., *Il mito di Europa e il mito dell’Europa*, in “De Europa”, Special Issue, 2021, p. 8.

¹⁸ Y. Guaiana, *Europa tra mito e realtà: Europa: mito, semantica e caratteri geografici*, Università degli Studi di Milano – Bicocca, 2008, Seminar notes: *Europa tra mito e realtà: Europa: mito, semantica e caratteri geografici*.

¹⁹ I believe it is also appropriate to emphasise the importance that will have, particularly with idealism, the historiographic category of “Greekness” as the historical presupposition and mythical-foundational horizon of Europe. Incidentally, it should be noted that “Greekness” as a category is realized on a twofold operation: improper attribution of the oppositional barbarian-civilized pair to classical Greece, and of the “Western” character to Greek culture (also contested by not a few historians, who are more willing to see the Greeks as Eastern).

in light of a process of *mythologisation of reason* that has characterised and continues to characterise modernity, and which legitimises itself precisely in this act of presumed purification from the mythical component of thought.

The illusion of this purification of reason perhaps sanctions the birth act of the modern age, which, however, proves to make use of “mythical” formulations or narratives that serve precisely to legitimize it. One thinks of the narrative connected with the theme of the “savage” that properly inaugurates “modern” thought by placing it in the “historicist” or historical-teleological perspective of “civilization”, that is, by establishing a *spatialized timeline* in which contemporary peoples would paradoxically stand backward in the linear path of Reason²⁰. The mythical formulation of the savage does not exclusively sanction the otherness of peoples – peoples therefore “non-European”, in a logic based on the argument of an “identity by negation” which, at the same time, opens up a whole exploration of the anthropological presuppositions (good savage, *homo lupus*, etc.) of political community-making –, but also the otherness of Reason which is thus established in its exclusion and exclusivity, and which *from a historical concept becomes spatialized*, contributing to the formation of the very “idea” of Europe. In this same perspective, consider also how much the myth of the Golden Age affects the mythical representation of democracy²¹, which will be established, in the aftermath of World War II, as the only form of government that Reason can really validate.

After all, as Wunenburger points out by taking up some of Pascal’s “Pensées”, without an imaginary horizon, social life, that is, norms and institutions, are extremely fragile and appear arbitrary. This justification occurs properly through “myths”, particularly through myths of origin that legitimize institutions and history, and fix their fate. The resulting imaginary, then, performs the function of “practical institutive orientation”²². Among the “mythogenetic” elements observed by Wunenburger relating to the origin myths of cities should be mentioned: the filiation of the urban space from the world of the gods, which invests the space with sacredness; the fact that the foundation takes the form of a sacred rite and thus implies the establishment of a *mundus* that attests to the “urban” adventure in the non-natural and transformative character that it cannot have unless integrated into a sacred symbolism; finally, the birth of the city in connection with a violence assimilated and overcome, an inaugural violence that allows a new order to overcome the defeated disorder. Although this

²⁰ Amoroso, P., *Il mito della Ragione e il posto dell'Europa. Dalla crisi della Civilisation alla necessità di nuovi paradigmi*, in M. Iofrida, *La crisi dell'Occidente. Verso una nuova civilisation?*, Mucchi Editore, 2023, pp. 99-114.

²¹ See: J.J. Wunenburger, *Une utopie de la raison. Essai sur la politique moderne*, La Table ronde, 2002; see J.J. Wunenburger, *L'immaginario*, p. 78.

²² *Ibid.*

discourse is related to the city, I believe it can be reread in a broader perspective. The presence and exaltation of the myth of Europa, which refers precisely to an affair of original violence (though not fratricidal as in the more classical model of this myth but of kidnapping and violation of the female body), occurs from precise historical stages and, in its union with other mythical elements (myths of the future, utopia), serves precisely for the constitution of a collective imaginary within which Europe can attempt to constitute itself as a political-cultural unity.

The autonomy of rationality, after all, has been repeatedly questioned, particularly in the wake of the reversal of logical-philosophical absolutizations inaugurated by Nietzsche. If a certain “historicist” tradition had denounced the imaginary as responsible for “anchoring reason in a prescientific state”, epistemologies such as Michel Cazenave’s or Gilbert Durand’s have had the merit of reevaluating the role of the imaginary in the formation of scientific knowledge (geographical, physical, historical, etc.) or of studying its structures, showing how rationality itself is to be understood within a broader and deeper logic that governs both images (symbols and myths) and concepts. From this perspective, the imaginary is to be understood not as a compensatory function of what science fails to come to explain, like the myth as presented by Plato, i.e., as a “second-level discourse”, albeit a fundamental one, but as a heuristic and poetic framework within which rationality necessarily moves, albeit in the claim or promise of a definitive distinction²³. Similarly, Levi-Strauss observed how magical (or mythical) thinking is not at all to be understood in a timeline as a pre-scientific dimension, but rather as a complex system independent of that which constructs science. This its function of “cognitive orientation”, as Wunenburger notes, which consists in offering techniques of symbolic and analogical thinking (myth, symbol, metaphor, design), which interfere at various levels with cognitive processes²⁴ and which, therefore, interpenetrate with the techniques precipitous to “rational” thinking.

In this perspective, it is possible to interpret the very image of Europe that we find in visual art and cartography as an essential tool of the European “mythological machine”²⁵. A “machine” that is far from inactive and that still makes use, more or less consciously, of that image fixed by modern iconography.

5. Europe: from cartographic art to cartography in art

This mythical representation of Europa and Europe undergoes a radical resemantization in twentieth-century art, which, working in parallel on myth and cartography, aspires to a problematization and even a reconfiguration of the imaginary.

²³ J.J. Wunenburger, *L'immaginario*, Il Nuovo Melangolo, 2008, p. 75.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ F. Jesi, *Il tempo della festa*, edited by A. Cavalletti, Milan, Ed. Nottetempo, 2019, p. 67.

This already occurs in the context of the struggle between Nazifascism and antagonistic forces. With Max Beckman, for example, we return to see a bull represented in its animal strength, where, however, animality is understood as an active moral category in defining human and the enemy. The bull, in fact, is brown and recalls the color of the Nazi uniform, while the woman, presumably a German woman, is seen as a victim of his brutality.

Max Ernst, however, returns to the theme of Europe in two paintings with the same title but very different from each other. It is "Europe after the Rain I" and "Europe after the Rain II". The first depicts a continent that is unrecognizable, except in the Mediterranean area, because it has been devastated by a universal flood that evidently refers back to the upheavals that occurred in the early decades of the twentieth century. The image support is a plaster relief that limits the viewer's spatial and visual perception of the image. Despite all the distortions that the image of Europe shows, the geographical inclusion of the entire (then) Soviet Union supports the viewer's recognition of the continent. Likewise, the Mediterranean, in which, however, the "Italian boot" and the Iberian Peninsula have disappeared; in their place, new imaginary boundary lines are intercepted here and there, suggesting the creation of new geopolitical areas. The Black Sea, on the other hand, is shifted from east to west, as if Europe had been bent along the north-south axis. To the alienating impression and disquiet aroused by such a transformation, however, is added a sign of life given by the subtle trace of maritime routes. The second work on the theme, on the other hand, presents the myth of Europa in a context of ambiguous, undone forms in which, however, it is possible to recognize Europa from the bull that emerges from a kind of temple, also dissolved.

Another interesting work is the one Tim Ulrichs does in a 1972 photomontage in which "Europe on the bull" is literally depicted. In fact, there appears a white spotted ox on which the map of Europe is reproduced, showing the territory from the Atlantic to the Urals (remember that it is 1972 and we are in the midst of the Cold War) but in which Turkey is missing.

This mixing of two representative domains that leads with increasing frequency in the twentieth century from the art of cartography to cartography in art responds to different needs. If in the 1960s and 1970s there is a need to work in the direction of the construction of a European political and cultural unity, currently the presence of cartography in art is dictated, rather, and by critical instances against the policies adopted and the need to make art a space for the reconfiguration of the European political and cultural imaginary.

Among the most famous examples is Michelangelo Pistoletto's table, a work-installation entitled *Love difference - Mediterranean Sea*, which features a table with the sea the Mediterranean in the center and all around chairs of different colors. After all, this table that is a meeting place of cultures is, at the same time, a decision-making seat that refers back to European policies on immigration and international relations.

Another significant example are Alighiero Boetti's famous maps in which not only Europe but the entire planisphere appears and in which different countries are recognized through the flags that identify them. It is particularly their making that is of interest, as these map-works are tapestries that Boetti has made by Afghan weavers. These weavers are, in a sense, the cartographers of this map who, with their personal style, add an unpredictable and utterly subjective element to the objectivity and scientificity of the map. Europe emerges as a kaleidoscope of colors, moreover woven "from the outside" of the artisan hands of Afghan weavers. They are works, among other things, that attest to the historical transition from the phase before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. They are, therefore, map-works that aspire to stage differences and establish, or more appropriately, claim a very close kinship between the art of weaving and the art of narration.

In this way, Boetti reinvents and reimagines the scene, showing that "mettere al mondo il mondo" (bring the world into being), as the artist liked to say, is "a game that can still be played"²⁶.

6. "A game that can still be played": conclusions in form of image and paradoxes

With this reflection, I sought to show how the iconography of Europe is structured and what underlies the image that Europe has of itself. I am convinced that the European collective imaginary continues to include these narratives and images, which still play an active role. It seems to me, in fact, that particularly in these recent years, Europe has been coming to terms with an image of itself that still corresponds to that of the matron on horseback found in modern iconography, an exaltation of Reason (unique and universal) built upon the expulsion of the mythical-narrative component. Yet this image appears increasingly unable to contend with a changed global geopolitical situation and the challenges it poses.

The European imaginary seems rooted in, and even inclined to take refuge within, a dimension that is in some ways mythical and narrative, yet one that is not perceived as such, precisely because it constructs the image of Europe, its cultural unity and identity, on the exaltation (or mythologisation) of reason through the purging of narrative and mythic elements from thought. In this sense, examining its iconographic apparatus – understood as an essential instrument in this construction – can foster awareness and perhaps suggest new (iconographic and philosophical) postures. To this end, rather than proposing new images, it seems more meaningful to return to the iconographic path already travelled.

²⁶ G. Boffi, *Per altri atlanti*, p. 137.

There is a particularly effective image – or rather, a striking posture – within the iconography of the myth of Europa to which it is worth returning, this time with the intention of re-semanticising it, of shifting its meaning. In one of the earliest iconographic phases, Europa is often depicted seated on the back of the bull, looking back toward the shore. This gesture can be read not as an expression of nostalgia, conservatism, or a return to an original *arché*, but rather as a symbolic act of reorientation – a backward glance that signals a change in perspective.

The gaze toward the shore may thus be understood as a look at the past that opens the possibility of thinking differently about reason itself, and, by extension, about mythical thought, no longer as its opposite or as a pre-scientific form, but as a complementary mode of understanding. This symbolic gesture therefore becomes an exercise: a sustained practice of analysis and interpretation of mythical narratives, past and present, always intertwined with cultural and geopolitical perspectives. In this sense, the image of Europa turning her gaze toward the shore could be taken as a figure of de-teleologisation: a gesture that invites us to rethink Europe beyond any mythical or fatalistic horizon. It may also suggest a redefinition of Europe as a geo-historical space rather than a “political-military bloc”, definitively distancing it from the traditional representation of the continent as a matron on horseback.

Once this first conclusion has been outlined through a symbolic image, conceived as a visual reconfiguration of the idea of Europe, it becomes possible to return to the two cartographic paradoxes introduced earlier, proceeding, as it were, in reverse order, from the second to the first.

The second paradox concerns the impossibility of producing a truly objective map. In Mercator’s projection, for example, Europe is stretched longitudinally. Every map, after all, serves to organise space so that it may be perceived in a particular way; it is, ultimately, the instrument through which a city, a state, or a continent presents itself according to a *dessein/dessin*, a “design” that is at once descriptive and projective, functioning both as a tool of representation and as the expression of a political or utopian model. Even more recent projections, which we may prefer for practical reasons, are not exempt from distortion; they too participate in an epistemological and representational framework inseparable from narrative structures. Thus, the scientific rationality that Europe has historically promoted and exported must itself be understood as embedded within a system of representation that is never neutral, and therefore never free from “myth”.

The first paradox, that of the one-to-one map, touches upon the epistemological aspiration to totality. This implicitly reveals the desire, at the heart of any mapping practice, and indeed of Reason itself as configured through modern Western epistemology, to obtain an exhaustive representation. The exponential development of cartographic and visualisation systems (from Google Earth and Google Maps to

Street View) attests to this panoptic impulse, the contemporary extension of a rationality that aims to render the world entirely visible. Yet such Reason inevitably encounters its own limit: the impossibility of representing itself, the threshold of the unrepresentable.

This, finally, is what the second corollary expresses: when the 1:1 map is achieved, the empire, and the rationality that sustains it, becomes unrepresentable.

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Weg und Bewegung. Im Übergang des Denkens

Rebekka GUHR*

ABSTRACT. Path and Movement. In the Transition of Thought. In contemporary Europe, being-on-the-way defines daily life within a dense network of paths. From phenomenological reflections on walking and road travel, drawing on Bollnow's *Mensch und Raum*, to the dynamics of urban mobility, the study probes how acceleration, technology, and goal-orientation shape experience, asking whether movement has become a standstill, an experience that no longer experiences. With Benjamin, it acknowledges modernity's new perceptual possibilities yet warns of its drive toward objectification. In the light of Husserl and Heidegger, it contends that thinking is never a fixed point or a new beginning, but rather an ongoing, self-moving transition.

Keywords: Phenomenology, movement, spatiality, temporality, transition

1. Unterwegs

Unterwegssein scheint in unserem 21. Jahrhundert, besonders in Europa, so leicht wie nie zuvor. Europa zeigt sich uns heute als ein verzweigtes Netz aus Wegen, Straßen, Schienen. Ein Netz, das von unaufhörlichem Verkehr, von Transportmitteln, von Reisenden durchzogen wird. Alle unterwegs, alle in Bewegung. Nur die Knotenpunkte verharren wie festgesteckte Pinnadeln auf einer Landkarte, sind Städte, sind bloße Namen auf Anzeigetafeln, sind Transit, anonyme Flugzeughallen, zerfallene Bahnhofsgebäude. Die Ankunft, trotz möglicher Zwischenfälle, trotz

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Verspätungen, immer gewiss, immer vorausberechnet, immer gewünscht. Wir legen größte Entfernungen in wenigen Stunden zurück, uns würde die Zeit fehlen, diese Wege zu Fuß zu gehen.

1.1. Der Weg des Gehens

Man mag träumen vom Losziehen ins Ungewisse. Vom Umherziehen ohne Ziel, ohne Richtung. Alles Alte, alles Vertraute, alle Aufgaben aufgeben. Es ist das alte romantische Motiv des zwecklosen und ungerichteten Unterwegsseins wie es Eichendorffs Taugenichts in Worte fasst:

Ich hatte recht meine heimliche Freud', als ich da alle meine alten Bekannten und Kameraden rechts und links, wie gestern und vorgestern und immerdar, zur Arbeit hinausziehen, graben und pflügen sah, während ich so in die freie Welt hinausstrich. [...] Mir war es wie ein ewiger Sonntag im Gemüte.¹

Wohin der Taugenichts will, darum ist er verlegen. Er braucht aber, als er gefragt wird, eine Antwort, ein Wohin und wird schließlich nach Wien mitgenommen. Kennen wir ein zweckfreies Unterwegssein, ein Gehen ohne Ziel, ohne Wohin? Unser alltägliches Gehen versteht sich nicht als eine solche Form des Unterwegsseins. Vielleicht kommen wir in einer Betrachtung des Wanderns, das wie Bollnow in seinem Buch *Mensch und Raum* schreibt zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts als eine Lebensform aufkommt², dieser Bewegung am nächsten. Wie lässt sich diese „Lebensform“ des Wanderns verstehen? Ein Gehen, das geht, um seiner selbst willen, um willen der Erfahrung des Gehens und des Weges. Und wie in einem solchen Gehen das Rascheln der Blätter im Wind, ein Schattenspiel am Wegrand, ein ferner Berggipfel beiläufig mitaufgenommen werden in die Bewegung, in das Gehen, so kommen auch die Gedanken mit dem Gehen ins Fließen, ziehen sie ihre Kreise, gehen sie ihren Wegen nach. Und überkommt den Wanderer eine Landschaft, kann er einen Anblick nicht fassen, versucht er ihn festzuhalten, so unterbricht er sein Gehen und bleibt stehen. In gleicher Weise kann dem Wanderer ein Gedanke in den Sinn kommen, der ihn stocken lässt, das Gehen wird auch hier unterbrochen, um dem Gedanken in Ruhe nachgehen zu können.

In dieser Erfahrung des Wanderns verweilen wir im Unterwegssein, vergessen wir die Kilometer, gibt es kein zu erreichendes Ziel. Bollnow charakterisiert so die „Lebensform“, die Bewegung des Wanderns: „Der Wanderer will wandern, unterwegs

¹ Joseph von Eichendorff, *Aus dem Leben eines Taugenichts*, Reclam, 2005, S. 5.

² Otto Friedrich Bollnow, *Mensch und Raum*, W. Kohlhammer Verlag Stuttgart, 1963, S. 111.

sein, aber er will nicht irgendwo hin gelangen.“³ Bollnow macht damit deutlich, dass das Wandern nicht darauf angelegt ist, um auf schnellstmöglichem Weg, in kürzester Zeit, ein Ziel zu erreichen. Das Wandern folgt in diesem Sinne keiner Zweckmäßigkeit. Vielleicht kommen uns bei diesen Ausführungen schon mögliche Einwände, die sich aus unserer Erfahrung des Wanderns schöpfen. Wir kennen heute sehr wohl den „besten Weg“, haben im Voraus eine berechnete Wanderoute, der wir folgen, wir wissen, wie viele Kilometer zurückzulegen sind. Aber selbst in einer solchen Einstellung des Wanderns zeigt der Wanderpfad in seinen Unebenheiten an, dass er nicht auf eine gradlinige Zweckmäßigkeit angelegt ist, dass er vielmehr auf ein Unterwegssein hin einlädt, das nicht in einer gerichteten Bewegung aufgeht. Der Wanderpfad ist ein Wanderpfad, da er sich schlängelt, da er Umwege macht, oft dorthin führt, wo sich ein Ausblick eröffnet oder der Weg selbst zur Erfahrung wird. In Linschotens Aufsatz „Die Straße und die unendliche Ferne“, auf den Bollnow in *Mensch und Raum* wiederholt verweist, heißt es:

Der Sand, der Felsenpfad, der natürliche Boden nehmen schon deshalb den Wanderer auf, weil sie ihn zwingen, den Schritt jeden Augenblick zu wechseln, den Fuß dem Boden anzuschließen. [...] Das Wandern fließt unregelmäßig wie ein Bach über das unebene Flussbett hin.⁴

Ist mit dem so verstandenen Weg die Schnelligkeit der Moderne, die Verwertungslogik, die Gegenständlichkeit der Neuzeit aufgebrochen? Eröffnet sich hier ein Bewegungsraum, der nicht im Netz der Straßen aufgeht? Wird hier eine Zeit erfahren, die nicht messbar, die nicht feststellbar ist? Ein Eingehen ins Gehen, in die Bewegung und in den Weg? Bollnow jedoch bleibt am Ende seiner Betrachtungen über „Die weite Welt“, über „De[n] Weg und die Straße“ und „De[n] Wanderpfad“ zurückhaltend. Zwar denkt Bollnow das Wandern als eine Bewegung, die keinem äußeren Ziel, keiner Zweckmäßigkeit folgt, aber für Bollnow bleibt das Wandern als Gegenstück zum Alltag auf dessen Zweckmäßigkeit bezogen:

Wenn hier von der hohen anthropologischen Bedeutung des Wanderns gesprochen wird, so kann das nicht heißen, dass der Mensch jetzt sein Leben ziellos in der Welt herumwandern sollte, dass also der Vagabund das Ideal des menschlichen Lebens sei. [...] Aber wie das Wandern von Anfang an nur als Gegenbewegung gegen eine verfestigte Lebensordnung entstanden war, so bleibt es auch später seinem Wesen auf diese bezogen.“⁵

³ Otto Friedrich Bollnow, *Mensch und Raum*, S. 114.

⁴ Johannes Linschoten, „Die Straße und die unendliche Ferne“, in *Situation. Beiträge zur phänomenologischen Psychologie und Psychopathologie*, 1954, Spectrum, S. 235- 260, S. 254.

⁵ Otto Friedrich Bollnow: *Mensch und Raum*, S. 121.

Für Bollnow stellt das Wandern keine Bewegung dar, die als solche ganz in ihrer Bewegung aufgeht, die somit jegliche Form des Weges und der Bewegung wandelt. Das Wandern ist bloß als „Gegenbewegung“ gedacht, ist klar abgegrenzt von einer anderen Form der Bewegung der „verfestigten Lebensordnung“. Der Mensch kehrt nach einem erholsamen Ausflug wieder zu dieser zurück. Der Alltag, die „verfestigte Lebensordnung“ ist gekennzeichnet von einem Gehen, das von Punkt zu Punkt sich vollzieht. Ein Gehen von der Haustüre zur Arbeit, zum Einkaufen, zu Verabredungen. Im Alltag liegt der Weg vor dem Menschen als überbrückbare Strecke, als etwas, das bewältigt werden kann, bewältigt werden muss, um zu etwas Anderem zu gelangen. Diese Form der Bewegung ist wie der Weg mit einem vorwärtsorientierten Richtungssinn versehen. Der Weg Transit. Die Bewegung Fortbewegung. Jede Störung ein aus dem Weg zu räumendes Hindernis.

1.2. Auf-der-Straße

Nicht nur die alltäglichen Gehwege sind in besonderem Maße funktional, Transit, sondern auch die Landstraßen und Autobahnen. Straßen, die befahren und als solche gedacht werden müssen. Diese Straßen erinnern an begradigte Flüsse, hier gibt es keine Windungen, keine Auffälligkeiten, keine Unebenheiten. Sie mäandern nicht. Bollnow beschreibt die Straßen treffend als die „nach Kilometer zu messende Linie des Weges.“⁶ Denn sie sind in besonderem Maße messbar, ausweisbar, vergegenständlicht. Auf-der-Straße kann zu jedem Zeitpunkt mit einem entsprechenden Navigationsgerät angegeben werden, wie lange noch zur Ankunft, zum Ziel benötigt wird. Wesentlich wird hier die Zeitangabe, die Straße zu einer zeitlich messbaren und überbrückbaren Entfernung. Eine Entfernung, die mit verbesserter Qualität der Straßen und zudem mit den gesteigerten technischen Fortbewegungsmöglichkeiten verkürzt, immer schneller zurückgelegt werden kann. Dieser Aspekt, der geforderten und sich immer weiter steigernden Schnelligkeit im Zusammenhang mit den Straßen, tritt schon bei den Römern hervor, die Linschoten in seinem Aufsatz als die „großen Lehrmeister im Straßenbau“ bezeichnet. Denn so führt Linschoten aus: „es ist ein machtvolles Herrschaftssystem, das diese Straßen hervorbringt. Sie sind zunächst einmal Militärstraßen, um die Truppen in den unterworfenen Gebieten schnell von einem Punkt zum anderen werfen zu können.“⁷ Die großen mehrspurigen Verkehrsstraßen fordern eine Bewegung, die sich selbst beschleunigt – Auf ihnen kann nicht verweilt werden, hier zählt jede Minute, jede Sekunde, jeder Augenblick. Die Fahrt duldet kein Zögern, kein Innehalten. Der Mensch kann sich der Straße nicht entziehen, sie

⁶ Ebd., S. 105.

⁷ Johannes Linschoten, „Die Straße und die unendliche Ferne“, S. 241.

reißt ihn mit sich fort, sie führt ihn auf immer neue Straßen. Diese Verlängerung der Straßen läuft nicht auf einen Endpunkt zu. Beginn und Ende einer Straße sind nicht feststellbar, sie verzweigen, biegen, überführen sich – führen in eine nicht zu erreichende Ferne.

Doch gerade auf diesen Straßen vermag sich auch eine Erfahrung zu öffnen, die nicht im Sinne der „nach Kilometer zu messende[n] Linie des Weges“⁸ verläuft. Es ist die Erfahrung des Eingelassen-seins in die Bewegung, in die Beschleunigung der Straße. Dann werden wir von ihrem Rausch mitgerissen, dann ist sie nicht eine starre, asphaltierte Bahn innerhalb weißer Markierungen. Schon der Fahrtwind, der das Gesicht beim Fahrradfahren streift, erzählt von dieser Erfahrung. Hier wird etwas erfahrbar, das sich in der Bewegung des Gehens nicht auftut, das sich dem Auf-der-Straße-sein verdankt. Für Bollnow, auf dessen Überlegungen sich die bisherigen Betrachtungen vorwiegend stützten, ist jedoch das Fahren eine Bewegung, die die Landschaft zu einem starren Panorama verkommen lässt:

Was jenseits liegt, ist für den, der die Straße benutzt, eine andre Welt, ein wie durch eine gläserne Wand von ihm getrennter bloßer Anblick und verblasst mit steigender Fahrgeschwindigkeit immer mehr zum bloßen Panorama.⁹

Die Landschaft beim Fahren bloßes Panorama? Der Mensch im Fahren bloß passiver Zuschauer? Ist die Schnelligkeit unserer Zeit letztlich ein Stillstand? Ein sich immer schnelleres Bewegen auf der Stelle? Ein Erleben, das nichts mehr erfährt? Eine große Gleichgültigkeit?

1.3. In-der-Stadt

Schon bei Schiller und Goethe steht die Schnelligkeit der Moderne unter Verdacht. Schiller etwa beschreibt in *Wilhelm Tell*: „[...] Denn hier ist keine Heimat – / Jeder treibt / Sich an dem andern rasch und fremd vorüber [...]“¹⁰ In gleicher Lesart lässt sich Goethes Neologismus „veloziferisch“ verstehen, gebildet aus „velocitas“ und „Luzifer“, der die dämonische Hast der Moderne, die den Menschen überfordert, jegliche Nähe unterbindet und Kontemplation unmöglich macht, zum Ausdruck bringt. Vor allem die moderne Stadt wird zum Schauplatz des flüchtigen Vorübergehens.

Bei der Erfahrung der Schnelligkeit und Flüchtigkeit des großstädtischen Treibens setzt auch Benjamin in seinem Denken an. Für ihn ist die städtische Erfahrung aber kein Ausdruck von „dämonischer Hast“, von überzeichneter Eile, nicht Anzeichen

⁸ Otto Friedrich Bollnow, *Mensch und Raum*, S. 105.

⁹ Ebd., S. 113.

¹⁰ Friedrich Schiller, *Wilhelm Tell*, Reclam 2025, IV, 3, 2270ff.

eines Verfallphänomens. Vielmehr kündigt sich für Benjamin mit der Art und Weise des Bewegens In-der-Stadt eine neue Form der Wahrnehmung an. Diese charakterisiert er in seinem *Kunstwerkaufsatz* als eine „Rezeption in der Zerstreuung“. Benjamin zeigt, dass sich die neue Form des Wahrnehmens an der Kunstform des Films ablesen lässt. Nicht zufällig kommt mit der Erfahrung des Unterwegsseins in der Großstadt die Kunstform des Films auf. Denn „[i]n seiner ‚Chockwirkung‘ kommt der Film einer Rezeption in der Zerstreuung entgegen.“¹¹ Die „Chockwirkung“ des Films, auf die Benjamin referiert, ergibt sich aus den Schnitten, den Abfolgen einzelner Szenen, aus der Zerstückelung der Bilder, die immer schneller, immer bruchstückhafter auf den Beschauer eindringen, denen er sich nicht entziehen, bei denen er aber auch nicht verweilen kann.

Benjamin greift in seinem *Kunstwerkaufsatz* das Zitat eines Filmkritikers auf, der beklagt: „Ich kann schon nicht mehr denken, was ich denken will. Die beweglichen Bilder haben sich an den Platz meiner Gedanken gesetzt.“¹² Was hier zunächst als Verlust beklagt wird, wird von Benjamin insofern gewendet, da er anhand der geschichtlichen Wandelbarkeit der Kunst eine Wandlung der Wahrnehmung und des Denkens aufzeigt. Die bewegten Bilder, die neuen technischen Möglichkeiten, machen das Denken nicht unmöglich, sie verschieben es. So kommt der Film nicht lediglich als eine weitere Ausdrucksform zu der Malerei hinzu, vielmehr zeigt er eine Wandlung des Sehens, des Denkens an.

Der Film selbst ermöglicht eine gewisse Einübung einer Rezeption in der Zerstreuung und ermöglicht damit auch einen gelungenen Umgang mit der zunehmenden Schnelligkeit der Moderne. Im Zusammenhang mit der Einübung einer Rezeption in der Zerstreuung durch die „Chockwirkung“ des Films, kommt Benjamin auch auf die moderne Architektur zu sprechen, die in besonderer Weise verdeutlicht, was mit einer Rezeption in der Zerstreuung gemeint ist. Denn der alltägliche gewohnheitsmäßige Gebrauch der Architektur vollzieht sich in einem „beiläufigen Bemerkten“, einem Wahrnehmen in Bewegung, das nicht stehen bleibt, um das Augenmerk auf dieses oder jenes gezielt zu richten und sich darin kontemplativ zu versenken. In der modernen Architektur werden räumliche Relationen bedeutend, die nur im Durchschreiten, in einem „beiläufigen Bemerkten“ erfahren werden können. Im Kontrast dazu stehen Reisende, die kontemplativ vor bestimmten Bauten verweilen, wie man vor einem Gemälde im Museum verweilt. Doch gerade in der Weise, in welcher nicht angehalten wird, sondern vielmehr erst aus der Bewegung heraus, im Vorübergehen findet die moderne Architektur ihre Form der Rezeption. Das „beiläufige

¹¹ Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, Suhrkamp Studienbibliothek, 2007, S. 47.

¹² Ebd., S. 44.

Bemerken“, die Zerstreuung ist keine Ablenkung von einer „eigentlichen Erfahrung“, sondern eröffnet allererst Erfahrung.

In gleicher Weise fordert die moderne Stadt eine Art und Weise des Bewegens, des „beiläufigen Bemerkens“. Hier eröffnet sich ein Spiel mit dem Flüchtigen, dem nicht mehr Einholbaren, mit dem, das trotz, ja gerade wegen seiner Flüchtigkeit alle Bedeutung in sich trägt. Ist es nicht das, wovon Baudelaires Gedicht *À une passante* erzählt? Aufleuchten, „Ein Blitz...dann Nacht!“¹³, kurz, voller Bedeutung und immer schon vergangen. Baudelaires Gedicht schließt mit: „Dich hätte ich geliebt und du hast es geahnt!“¹⁴ In dieser sich zueinander und aufeinander entfaltenden Bewegung: Blicke, Gesten, ein Flüstern im Vorübergehen, ein Gedanke, der nicht zu Ende gebracht wird. Ein Begegnen in Bewegung, das nur aus und in der Bewegung seine Bedeutung trägt. Da sind nicht zwei Menschen, die sich dann begegnen In-der-Stadt, im Vorübergehen, da ist alles aus dem Vorübergehen gedacht.

Der Flaneur weiß um solche Bedeutungen. Er ist es, der durch die Straßen schlendert, beobachtend, ohne von Eile getrieben zu sein, ein Müßiggänger. Doch seine Bewegung wäre missverstanden, würde sie als gegen das eilige Treiben der Stadt gerichtet aufgefasst werden. Es ist kein Protest, der in den Schritten des Flaneurs liegt. Sein Gehen fließt in das Treiben der Stadt ein. Er geht im In-der-Stadt-sein auf. Er irritiert. Hessel bringt dies in *Spazieren in Berlin* zur Sprache:

Langsam durch belebte Straßen zu gehen, ist ein besonderes Vergnügen. Man wird überspült von der Eile der andern, es ist ein Bad in der Brandung. [...] Ich glaube, man hält mich für einen Taschendieb.¹⁵

2. Im Übergang des Denkens

2.1. Der Weg (Denken) als Mitte

Was zeigte sich mit den vorangegangenen Betrachtungen über die verschiedenen Formen des Unterwegsseins? Wir nahmen zunächst das zweckfreie Gehen in den Blick. Im Gegensatz dazu das zielgerichtete Gehen von Punkt zu Punkt. Dann das Fahren auf der Straße. Schließlich die Flüchtigkeit der Stadt. Schon deutete sich das Zusammenspiel von Weg und Bewegung an. Die Wanderpfade und das langsame Gehen. Die ebenen, gradlinigen Verkehrsstraßen und eine entsprechend

¹³ Charles Baudelaire, *À une passante. An eine Passantin*, in *Les Fleurs du Mal. Blumen des Bösen*, Reclam, 2021, S. 272.

¹⁴ Ebd.

¹⁵ Franz Hessel, *Spazieren in Berlin*, Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2011, S. 19.

in Beschleunigung aufgegangene Form der Bewegung. Zuletzt die dicht gedrängten Straßen und verwinkelten Gassen der Stadt, die sich flüchtig kreuzenden Gehwege. Im Übergang eine Begegnung, die nicht vorauszusehen war.

All diese Entsprechungen aber, Weg und Bewegung, schienen zu schillern. Einerseits kann sich in all diesen Formen eine Bewegung zeigen, die völlig im Unterwegssein aufgegangen ist. Dabei zeigt sich verwunderliches: Der Weg verschwindet. Er liegt nicht mehr gegenständlich vor Augen, auf ihn kann nicht gezeigt, er kann gemessen, vorgestellt, optimiert werden. Selbst das Wandern auf holprigen Pfaden nimmt in solch einem Unterwegssein den Weg nicht als ein Objekt auf. Im Gehen ist der Weg schon hineingenommen, auf ihn braucht sich nicht erst ein achtsames Subjekt zu richten. Es ist ein Gehen, das Weg und Bewegung in sich schließt. Müssten wir uns erst auf jeden Stein, auf jeden heruntergefallenen Ast auf dem Weg konzentrieren, wäre die Erfahrung des Wanderns keine erholsame Angelegenheit.

Doch andererseits zeugen die vorangegangenen Formen des Weges und der Bewegung von einer anderen Erfahrung. Es ist die Erfahrung eines beschwerlichen, veräußerlichten Weges. Hier rücken Weg und Bewegung in den Blick. Hier können sie optimiert, hier kann sich auf die gerichtet werden. Eine Ungeduld tut sich kund: Etwas möchte überwunden werden. Es drängt uns. Etwas macht nichts mit uns, die Landschaft kann noch so schön, die Autobahn noch so frei, die Stadt noch so ausgelassen sein, aber alles geht uns nichts an, es geht uns nicht schnell genug. Befallen von einer unerklärlichen Hast, kehren wir reizüberflutet aus der Stadt nach Hause zurück.

Was besagt dieses Schillern? Das Schillern zwischen dem, was sich nur in Bewegung, auf dem Weg erschließt und dem Festgefahrenen, dem zum Objekt erstarrten Weg, der immer wieder begangen werden kann, der zurückgelegt werden muss, der gegenständlich ausweisbar ist. Wäre es nach unseren Betrachtungen nicht naheliegend unserer Zeit letztere Form des Weges und der Bewegung zu diagnostizieren? Die Schnelligkeit ein Stillstand. Europa zwar ein Netz aus Straßen, Wegen, Schienen, die Transport, Reisen und Unterwegssein ermöglichen, aber alles ist festgefahren und zum Objekt erstarrt. Ein Stillstand, in dem selbst die Bewegung und das Denken zum Gegenstand, zum Objekt geworden sind, da sie sich selbst nur als eine Objektifizierung vollziehen. Europa der Ausdruck einer großen Versteinerung. Bräuchte es nicht den Übergang zu einem anderen Denken, zu etwas Neuem? Aber wäre unsere Zeit dann nicht selbst als ein Weg aufgefasst, den es zu überwinden gilt? Das europäische Denken der Neuzeit eines, das schnellstmöglich zurückgelassen werden muss? Doch sind wir nicht der Gefahr ausgeliefert, des sich nicht mehr

Einlassen-könnens, des an der Oberfläche-treibens und müssen wir uns deshalb nicht schnellstmöglich auf den Weg begeben, mehr Tiefe, mehr Langsamkeit zu schaffen?

Worauf diese Fragen hinweisen wollen, ist, dass es nicht eines Übergangs von hier nach dort bedarf, auch nicht im Denken. Das Denken im Übergang ist ein Gang ohne Woher und Wohin. Wohl ein Denken, das unterwegs ist. Denken als solches ist Übergang. In *Tausendplateaus* von Deleuze und Guattari heißt es an einer Stelle:

Wohin geht ihr? Woher kommt ihr? Was wollt ihr erreichen? Das sind unnütze Fragen. Reinen Tisch machen, bei Null anfangen oder neu beginnen, einen Anfang oder eine Grundlage suchen– all das sind falsche Vorstellungen von Reise und Bewegung.¹⁶

Ein Denken also, das keinen „reinen Tisch macht“, das sich selbst nicht als den Anfang, nicht als Nullpunkt setzt. Kein Neubeginn, kein *fundamentum inconcussum*, sondern Eingang finden in das, in dem wir immer schon stehen.

Ist das nicht das, das eigenste Anliegen der Phänomenologie? Zeigt sich nicht schon in Husserls Zeitvorlesung 1905 auf die Frage nach dem phänomenologischen Ausweis des absolut zeitkonstituierenden Bewusstseinsflusses, die Schwierigkeit der Bestimmung des Anfangs, der Urimpression an? Wohl charakterisiert Husserl die Urimpression als „de[n] absolute[n] Anfang [...], als das, woraus, alles andere stetig sich erzeugt“¹⁷, als „das bewusstseinsfremd Gewordene“, das „Empfangene“¹⁸. Aber dieser „absolute Anfang“, das „bewusstseinsfremd Gewordene“ kommt erst in einem minimalsten retentionalen Abstand phänomenologisch zur Geltung, wird erst in einem „minimalsten Verflössensein“ anschaulich ausweisbar. Die Anfangsphase, der Beginn, der Nullpunkt, das Neue, das uns trifft, kommt phänomenologisch nicht in den Blick. In Beilage IX zur Zeitvorlesung schreibt Husserl:

Man kann die Frage aufwerfen: Wie steht es mit der Anfangsphase eines sich konstituierenden Erlebnisses? [...] Darauf ist zu sagen: Zum Objekt werden kann die Anfangsphase nur nach ihrem Ablauf auf dem angegebenen Wege, durch Retention und Reflexion (bzw. Reproduktion).¹⁹

¹⁶ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *Kapitalismus und Schizophrenie. Tausend Plateaus*, Merve Verlag, 1992, S. 41.

¹⁷ Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie des Inneren Zeitbewusstseins*, Felix Meiner Verlag, 2013, S. 108.

¹⁸ Ebd., S. 109.

¹⁹ Ebd., S. 134.

Der Anfang als solcher lässt sich nicht unmittelbar ausweisen, sondern kann nur in seinem Abklingen begriffen werden. Im Verfließen, im Ablaufen eröffnet sich das, worin wir immer schon stehen, wovon wir bereits getroffen worden sind. Nur auf diesem retentionalen Weg lässt sich die Urimpression phänomenologisch zur Geltung bringen. Es ist schließlich Lévinas, der an diesen Gedanken anknüpft: Etwas ist immer schon vorübergegangen. Wir kommen immer schon zu spät für den Anfang, für das Neue, „das bewusstseinsfremd Gewordene“. Dieses entzieht sich einem bestimmenden Zugriff, ist immer im Vorübergehen, im Übergang. Lévinas schreibt in seinem Aufsatz „Rätsel und Phänomen“: „Die großen ‚Erfahrungen‘ unseres Lebens sind nie im eigentlichen Sinne des Wortes erlebt worden.“²⁰ Das wovon wir getroffen sind, lässt sich in seiner Anfänglichkeit nicht fassen. Die großen Erfahrungen, das, was Bedeutung mit sich bringt, ist immer nur im Vorübergehen, im schon Vorübergegangen-sein phänomenologisch ausweisbar. Ist das ein Versagen? Es sei nochmals an das Zitat von Deleuze und Guattari erinnert: Die Frage nach dem „Woher“ und „Wohin“ sind unnütze Fragen. Unnützlich in dem Sinne, als würde jemand mitten auf dem Weg innehalten, nach längerer Strecke zurückblicken und versuchen, den bereits gegangenen Weg, Schritt für Schritt zu rekonstruieren, jede Biegung, jede Kreuzung, eine Linie ziehend. Eine solche Vorstellung gelingt nur mühevoll, sie gelingt vor allem nur nachträglich. Erfahrung, Bewegung, Denken setzen im Übergang ein, sie passieren nie am Anfang, sie stehen nie am Anfang. Ebenso wenig stehen wir am Anfang, beginnen wir mit dem Denken. Wenn das Denken einsetzt, ist dem Denken immer schon etwas vorausgegangen, ist es von etwas getroffen, das sich nicht mehr einholen lässt. Ein aufleuchten von Bedeutung. Und wir? Wir kommen immer schon zu spät.

2.2. *Der Weg (Denken) als wegen (denken)*

Aber ließe sich nicht der Weg als einer ausweisen, der von dem Menschen angelegt, gebaut, gepflastert worden ist, verdankt sich nicht der Weg dem Menschen? In Simmels Essay *Brücke und Tür* heißt es: „Die Menschen, die zuerst einen Weg zwischen zwei Orten anlegten, vollbrachten eine der größten menschlichen Leistungen [...]“²¹. Für Simmel ist „[d]er Wegbau [...] eine spezifisch menschliche Leistung“, die einem Wunder gleichkommt. Mit dem Wegbau vermögen wir es, „die Bewegung zu einem festen Gebilde, das von ihr ausgeht und in das sie eingeht, gerinnen zu lassen.“²²

²⁰ Emmanuel Lévinas, „Rätsel und Phänomen“, in *Die Spur des Anderen. Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Sozialphilosophie*, Alber, 1999, S. 250.

²¹ Georg Simmel: *Brücke und Tür*, K.F. Koehler Verlag 1957, S. 2.

²² Ebd.

Simmel denkt damit den Weg ausgehend von einer Bewegung, die die Menschen zunächst von einem Ort zu einem anderen vollziehen, die sich festigt, sobald der Weg als ein Objekt in die Landschaft eingeht. Der Weg als „festes Gebilde“ geht von der Bewegung des Menschen aus, veranlasst den Menschen aber zu eben dieser Bewegung erneut. Welcher Einwand lässt sich hier erheben? Kann man Simmel nicht in seiner Beschreibung folgen? Bewegt der Mensch sich nicht und eben diese Bewegung gerinnt zu Wegen, die wieder in Bewegung setzen? Mit Heidegger ließe sich an dieser Stelle anmerken: „neuzeitlich gesonnen denken wir von uns aus und stoßen wenn wir von uns wegdenken, immer nur auf Gegenstände [...]“²³

Europäisch, neuzeitlich denken wir ausgehend vom Menschen. Dann gibt es zunächst das Subjekt, das sich in Bewegung setzt und diese Bewegung formt dann Wege, die wiederum bestimmte Formen von Bewegung möglich und andere unmöglich machen. Aber was ist mit dem Vorangehenden? Mit dem zunächst Bewegenden? Ist das tatsächlich der Mensch? Schon ausgehend von unserer eigensten Erfahrung müssten wir eingestehen, dass wir meist nicht diejenigen sind, die die Wege, die wir gehen, bauten, die sie veranlassten. Wenn wir bei Simmels Ansatz verbleiben, ließe sich sagen: Wir gehen Wege, weil sie bereits gegangen wurden. Eine vorangehende Bewegung ist zu einem „festen Gebilde geronnen“, zu einem Weg, der uns veranlasst eine bestimmte Form der Bewegung zu vollziehen. Doch, wenn der Wegbau, wie Simmel schreibt, eine „spezifisch menschliche Leistung“ ist, dann stellt sich weiterführend die Frage: Warum gingen jene Menschen, denen sich der Weg verdankt? Was bewegte sie? Gingen sie auch, weil es schon Wege gab? Wir verfangen uns bei solchen Fragen in einer historischen Spurensuche nach dem ersten Weg, dem Ursprung der Bewegung, dem Anfangspunkt. Aber genau dieser Anfang bleibt unzugänglich, entzieht sich einem bestimmenden Zugriff. Auch hier zeigt sich: Wir stehen nie an einem Nullpunkt, nie am Anfang. Der Weg ist das Bewegende, ist Beweggrund, lange bevor er zu einem Gegenstand geronnen ist. Um an dieser Stelle erneut Heidegger zu zitieren: „Das denkerische Werk im Zeitalter des Übergangs [...] kann nur und muß ein Gang sein in der Zweideutigkeit dieses Wortes: ein Gehen und ein Weg zumal, somit ein Weg, der selbst geht.“²⁴

2.3. *Weg, Denken, Übergang*

Wie aber, wenn der Mensch nicht der Urheber des Denkens wäre, sondern derjenige, der sich immer schon im Denken wiederfindet? Ein Denken, das nicht von einem einzelnen, einsamen Subjekt ausgeht. Wie steht es um das Denken in Europa

²³ Martin Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, Vittorio Klostermann 1989, S. 88.

²⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, S. 88.

im 21. Jahrhundert? Sind unsere Wege, unser Denken nicht verkommen zu einem unüberwindbaren Netz, zu einer um sich greifenden Totalität, die nur tote Gegenständlichkeit produziert? Ist nicht längst alles funktionalisiert? Hat das cartesianische Subjekt das Denken in den Ruin getrieben?

Wollen wir nicht aus diesem, unserem heutigen Zustand schnellstmöglich heraus? Ist unsere Zeit uns nicht längst auf sonderbarste Weise höchst problematisch geworden? Müssen wir nicht Woandershin? Aber lässt sich dieses Woanders nicht eben nur von jenem veräußerten, zeitlosen Standpunkt, den wir eigentlich schnellstmöglich verlassen wollen, angeben?

Wie aber, wenn der Mensch nicht der Urheber des Denkens wäre, sondern derjenige, der sich immer schon im Denken wiederfindet? Wenn wir uns Wiederfinden im Übergang, in einem Gang, der nicht durchmisst, um irgendwohin zu gelangen, sondern im Vorübergehen, im Verfließen, die Bedeutung, die er mit sich brachte, schon wieder fortträgt. Vielleicht wäre unsere Zeit dann in einem anderen Maße aufschlussreich.

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Die Idee Europas in der Spannung menschlicher Einzig(artig)keit und Pluralität. Eine kritische Anfrage unseres Selbstverständnisses

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ABSTRACT. The Idea of Europe between Human Uniqueness and Plurality. A Critical Demand of Our Self-image. Although the problem of the idea of Europe unfolded by Edmund Husserl may give the impression that it is a purely scientific problem, he already introduced this as a problem of *behaviour*. This thesis is taken up here and approached from various perspectives in order to unfold the existential significance of the idea of Europe for our lives. If the idea of Europe proves to be one that does not merely concern those who identify themselves as Europeans, then a responsibility extending beyond the borders of Europe is discovered, which is newly opened up fundamental impact of our imagination for our ideas and behaviours, concreting our realities.

Keywords: existential significance; responsibility; imagination; care about *our* in-dividualities.

Abstract. Wiewohl das von Edmund Husserl entfaltete Problem der *Idee* Europas den Eindruck erwecken kann, dass es sich damit um ein rein wissenschaftliches Problem handelt, so erweist sich dieses bereits hier als ein Problem des *Verhaltens*. An diese These wird hier angeschlossen und zugleich aus verschiedenen Perspektiven angegangen, um die existenzielle Bedeutsamkeit der Idee Europas für unser Leben zu entfalten. Erweist sich dabei die Idee Europas als eine, die nicht bloß jene betrifft, die sich selbst als Europäer verstehen, so wird dadurch die über die ‚Grenzen Europas‘ hinausgehende Verantwortlichkeit entdeckt, die vonseiten dem Fond der Idee in der Einbildungskraft neu eröffnet wird.

Schlagwörter: existenzielle Bedeutsamkeit; Verantwortlichkeit; Einbildungskraft; Fürsorge um *unsere* In-dividualität(en).

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I. Einleitung

Die Frage und noch mehr das Problem Europas berührt mehr als ‚bloß‘ Europa. Und zwar nicht nur metaphorisch, auch nicht rein theoretisch-abstrakt gesprochen, sondern *real* – emotional und existenziell. Sie berührt Menschen und unsere Umgebungen, Menschen und Nicht-Menschen, Lebensentwürfe, die Frage, inwiefern und ob überhaupt gelebt werden kann, will und darf.

Im Folgenden möchte ich mich und uns daher damit auseinandersetzen, inwiefern die Frage nach und die Problematisierung von Europa weder eine ist, die ausschließlich von Seiten einer Modifikation der Wissenschaften behandelt werden sollte, noch bloß eine territoriale Frage ist, die bei der Lokalität stehen bleibt. Stattdessen wird diese Frage als eine Auseinandersetzung von, mit und für Menschen entlarvt, womit sie sich im ethischen Bereich unseres Miteinanderlebens bewegt. Denn als Frage nach der Vereinbarkeit von Pluralität und Einzigartigkeit, die übersetzt wird in konkrete politische Strukturen und Gesetze, bildet sie den Nährboden für ebenjenes Miteinanderleben, was schließlich bedeutet, dass sie einen jeden Menschen in seiner konkreten Situation betrifft. Ob wir jedoch heutzutage tatsächlich von einem Miteinanderleben reden können, bei dem die Andersheit des Mit-ein-Anders gewagt wird, ist im Angesicht identitärer Diskurse, die selbst innerhalb, vor allem aber um Europa herum strikte Grenzen gezogen haben möchten, fraglich. Doch dies ist mitnichten Grund zum Verzagen, sondern ruft vielmehr zu einer kritischen Auseinandersetzung und einem erneuten Fragen nach der Idee wie auch Praxis Europas auf. Diesem Ruf möchte ich hier nachgehen.

Um verschiedene Dimensionen dieses Problems zu erörtern, wird zunächst das Themenfeld der Krise Europas in ideeller und praktischer Hinsicht angerissen, um nach einer Annäherung an die *grundlegende* Bedeutsamkeit unserer Einbildungskraft diese Krise auf ihren Fond unserer Einbildungskraft zurückzuführen. Im letzten Schritt werde ich mich und uns im Eröffnenden Ausblick mit der Frage eines neuen Selbstbildes auseinandersetzen, die meiner Ansicht nach nicht nur eine logische, sondern auch eine dringliche existenziell-notwendige Aufgabe ist. Dabei werde ich diese Fragestellung von verschiedenen Perspektiven aus beleuchten, um von, zwischen und über diese hinaus der Frage nach Europa anzugehen. Zugleich maße ich mir nicht an, eine finale Lösung, geschweige denn Perspektive zu geben, sondern möchte vielmehr zu einem Nachdenken über und einer Neuansfrage an ‚Europa‘ unter bestimmten Vorzeichen anregen, die selbst zur Disposition stehen.

II. Mehr als eine Krise der Idee Europas

Die Krise der Idee Europas wird explizit von Edmund Husserl in seinen Vorlesungen von 1935, gehalten in Prag und Wien, entfaltet. Diese sind getragen durch seine *Erfahrungen* infolge des Ersten Weltkrieges, in dem er seinen Sohn

verliert. Dies scheint mir keineswegs marginal, hebt er sich in diesen Schriften doch klar von den kriegsverherrlichenden Schriften Georg Simmels¹ und Max Schelers² ab, die – zugebenermaßen zwanzig Jahre vor Husserl, in guter alter Kantischer Manier – im Krieg eine Neuformierung des Lebens, eine Bewährung der Standhaftigkeit und Resistenzfähigkeit derer sehen, die sich für ihr Anliegen einsetzen.

Dementgegen zeichnet sich Husserls Text durch eine Sensibilität für die existenzielle Verfasstheit des Menschen aus, die er in ihrer Korrelation mit der wissenschaftlichen Praxis entfaltet. Dabei rechtfertigt er also nicht von der privilegierten Situation des am Schreibtisch sitzenden Philosophen aus den Krieg, sondern spricht umgekehrt von der Notwendigkeit einer Revolutionierung der Wissenschaften im Sinne einer auf den Ursprung zurückgehenden und von diesem neu sich entrollenden *revolutio*³, steigt also in einer anderen Dimension in den von unter anderem Simmel, Scheler und Bergson geführten Geisterkrieg ein. Dies ist die logische Konsequenz seiner eigenen Diagnose, dass die *Idee* Europas, selbst also ein ideeller, kein überzeitlich-evidenter Fakt, an der von den Wissenschaften praktizierten Objektivierung des Menschen und der damit einhergehenden Reduktion des Menschen auf die Messbarkeit des Menschen krankt. Sich damit zugebenermaßen rein im Bereich der Wissenschaften tummelnd, um von dort aus der Vernunft zu ihrer ‚wahren‘, einer dem Menschengeschlecht adäquaten, Entfaltung zu verhelfen, von wo aus die Vervollkommnung des Menschengeschlechts angestrebt wird, bewegt er sich in den Fahrwassern einer Rationalisierung des Lebens. Doch zugleich scheint unklar, ob er damit womöglich eine *neue* Rationalisierung anstrebt, die mit einer Umwertung der Ratio einhergeht. So entfaltet er zwar mit *seinen Cartesianischen* Mediationen vermeintlich eine Hommage an Descartes, den er jedoch implizit infolge dieser selbst als ein Scheingebilde entzaubert. Denn er zeigt nicht nur mit seiner fortschreitenden Ursprungssuche auf, dass Descartes reine Selbstreferenzialität des *ego cogito* fehlgeht, weil sie die ursprüngliche intersubjektive Dimension des Menschen unterläuft. Ebenso kehrt er mit der Einführung der Epoché Descartes Einführung des Zweifels insofern gegen sich selbst, als es Husserl *um etwas geht*. Husserl geht es um den Menschen in seinem Verhältnis zu dem, was ihm als Welt erscheint, um eine spezifische Einstellung – weswegen er nicht so radikal sein kann, jegliche Evidenz einklammern zu können.⁴

Descartes Weg darf keineswegs *als die von Husserl vertretene Position* missgedeutet werden, der – um das nochmals zu betonen – in der *Krisis*-Schrift hervorhebt, dass die von Descartes als Primat gesetzte Intentionalität, die zu einer

¹ Simmel 1999.

² Scheler 1915.

³ Vgl. DWDS, ‚Revolution‘.

⁴ Vgl. Hua I.

Wahrnehmung von etwas als etwas führt, den Scheincharakter unserer Wahrnehmung hervorbringt, sowie er hinsichtlich der Frage des Verhältnisses von Lebenswelt und „Intention des Ichpols“ dazu anrät, entgegen der von Descartes beschriebenen Richtung zu operieren.⁵ *Hoch* gestochen kann daher Husserls Epoché insofern als revolutionärer Akt gedeutet werden, als er Descartes Einführung des Zweifels gegen *sich selbst kehrt*. Diese scheint weit über den rein wissenschaftlichen Bereich hinauszugehen, geht es ihm aufgrund der Bedeutsamkeit der Wissenschaften für unser Leben um eine Revolution des Menschengeschlechts vonseiten der Wissenschaften, um eine Verwirklichung des Menschentums, die bereits in der Einführung seiner Phänomenologie als *prima philosophia* bzw. als *philosophia universalis* angelegt ist:

Wird die allgemeine Idee der Wahrheit an sich zur universalen Norm aller im menschlichen Leben auftretenden relativen Wahrheiten, der wirklichen und vermutlichen Situationswahrheiten, so *betrifft das auch alle traditionellen Normen*, die des Rechts, der Schönheit, der Zweckmäßigkeit, der herrschenden Personenwerte, Werte von personalen Charakteren etc. Es erwächst also ein *besonderes Menschentum* und ein besonderer Lebensberuf korrelativ mit der Leistung einer neuen Kultur. *Philosophische Welterkenntnis schafft nicht nur diese besondersartigen Ergebnisse sondern eine menschliche Haltung, die alsbald eingreift in das ganze übrige praktische Leben, mit allen seinen Forderungen und Zwecken, den Zwecken der historischen Tradition, in die man hineinerzogen ist und die von da her gelten. Es bildet sich eine neue und innige Gemeinschaft [...]*⁶

Dem Verhalten sowie dem Bewusstsein der ForscherInnen über ihre eigene Relationalität kommt dabei eine entscheidende Tragweite zu, geht es doch darum, einen Umgang mit der eigenen Lebensbezüglichkeit zu finden, um von dort aus das Miteinanderleben neu angehen zu können.

Ob sich notwendigerweise eine, wie Husserl es nennt, „Gemeinschaft rein idealer Interessen, zwischen den Menschen aus[bildet] — Menschen, die in der Philosophie leben, verbunden in der Hingabe an die Ideen, die nicht nur allen nützen sondern allen identisch zueigen sind“, möchte ich anzweifeln.⁷ So stimme ich damit überein, dass sich durch ein stärkeres Engagement der Philosophie „ein Gemeinschaftswirken besonderer Art heraus“ bilden *kann*, „das des Miteinander- und Füreinanderarbeitens, einander hilfreich Kritikleistens, aus dem die reine und unbedingte Wahrheitsgeltung als Gemeingut erwächst.“⁸ Hier zeigt sich seine Neuinterpretation des antiken Denkens. Denn während die Mäeutik des platonischen Sokrates das Vehikel zu den unsterblichen Ideen sei, ist sie bei Husserl das Instrument zur Vervollkommnung des Menschentums vonseiten der Wissenschaften, womit

⁵ Vgl. Hua VI, 174f.

⁶ Hua VI, 334; Herv. VS.

⁷ Ebd.

⁸ Ebd.

die phänomenologische Praxis zu einer Sorge der Sorge der Wissenschaften wird, und damit im Dienste des *lebendigen Menschen* operiert, der sich der Einwirkung der Wissenschaft auf die Lebenswelt nicht entziehen kann. Bemerkenswerterweise wird er dabei – trotz des Scheiterns der Vernunft – getragen von einem unerschütterlichen Glauben an den Geist; oder, genauer: an die *Unsterblichkeit* des Geistes. Damit wird konsequenterweise die Subjektivität samt ihrer Bewegung aus sich selbst heraus zum Grundprinzip alles Seins erhoben, weswegen erst durch eine der Vernunft gemäßen Verwirklichung der Vernunft, also der Verwirklichung der ‚wahren‘ Vernunft, die Krise des der Idee Europas gelöst werden könne. Oder, in für Husserl untypisch emphatischen Worten:

Die Krise des europäischen Daseins hat nur zwei Auswege: Den Untergang Europas in der Entfremdung gegen seinen eigenen rationalen Lebenssinn, den Verfall in Geistesfindschaft und Barbarei, oder die Wiedergeburt Europas aus dem Geiste der Philosophie durch einen den Naturalismus endgültig überwindenden Heroismus der Vernunft. Europas größte Gefahr ist die Müdigkeit. Kämpfen wir gegen diese Gefahr der Gefahren als ‚gute Europäer‘ in jener Tapferkeit, die auch einen unendlichen Kampf nicht scheut, dann wird aus dem Vernichtungsbrand des Unglaubens, dem schwelenden Feuer der Verzweiflung an der menschheitlichen Sendung des Abendlandes, aus der Asche der großen Müdigkeit der Phoenix einer neuen Lebensinnerlichkeit und Vergeistigung auferstehen, als Unterpfand einer großen und fernen Menschenzukunft: Denn der Geist allein ist unsterblich.⁹

Doch da eine Gemeinschaft *rein* idealer Interessen weder den Bezug zur aktuellen Realität hat, noch selbst mit der Wirklichkeit des Menschen zu tun hat, der aufgrund seiner Weltlichkeit weit über eine reine Idealität hinaus ist, kann ebenso – und hiermit deutet sich ein dritter Weg an – eine Möglichkeit sein, dass sich durch ein lebendiges Engagement der Philosophie eine lebendigere Gemeinschaft entfaltet. Wohlgemerkt nicht ausschließlich initiiert von PhilosophInnen, sondern beeinflusst durch ihr kritisches Engagement für eine lebendigere Gemeinschaft, sehe ich das Wirkzentrum *zwischen* den Menschen, das sich selbst aus den Wirkkräften von Individuen und Sozialstrukturen entfaltet. Das bedeutet jedoch auch eine Rückwendung der Philosophierenden zur menschlichen Existenz, mit der es nicht bloß um den Menschen geht.

Kehren wir zurück zu Husserl. Sich zwar im Bereich der Wissenschaften bewegend, diagnostiziert und argumentiert dieser letztlich gegen eine *Krise des Verhaltens*, die mit einer bestimmten vornehmlich unbewussten Selbstauffassung der Forschenden zusammenhängt. Denn der Kardinalfehler besteht ihm zufolge in der naiven Einstellung, dass die objektive Wissenschaft zum einen meint, mit seiner

⁹ Hua VI, 347.

Messbarkeit des Menschen sich auf dessen Realität zu beziehen und dabei die eigene Lebensbezüglichkeit und Konstruktivität der Forschung im Labor unterläuft. Dementgegen glaubt bzw. hofft er, dass sich durch eine Revolution der Wissenschaften eine neue Lebensgemeinschaft konstituiert, die motiviert ist durch eine Genese „des Interesses durch *Nachverstehen dessen, was da gewollt und geleistet wird*“, wobei es ihm kruderweise aufgrund *seines Credos der Vorherrschaft der Philosophie, der prima philosophia*, um eine „eine Tendenz der Einbeziehung immer neuer noch *unphilosophischer Personen in die Gemeinschaft der Philosophierenden*“ geht. Es wird nicht besser, wenn er davon spricht, dass diese potenzielle vereinnahmende und zugleich exkludierende Vergemeinschaftungsprogramm „zunächst innerhalb der heimatlichen Nation“¹⁰ stattfinden soll, da, und darauf werde ich später noch näher eingehen, damit einerseits *ursprünglich* eine rein eurozentrische Geschichtsentfaltung vollzogen wird, und andererseits der Nährboden für eine philosophische Rechtfertigung neokolonialer Praktiken bereitet wird, die dezidiert von Kwame Nkrumah in seinem Text *Neocolonialism*¹¹ von 1965 beschrieben worden ist.

Bevor ich fortschreite, scheint es mir hilfreich, nochmals einen Blick zurückzuwerfen. Denn dass Europa nicht bloß zu ‚Husserls Zeit‘ in der bzw. einer lebenserschütternden Krise war, ist wohl evident. Erinnern möchte ich hier bloß an die Kreuzzüge im 11. bis 13. Jahrhundert wie auch die Zeit vor, während und nach der Französischen Revolution – allesamt geschichtliche Extremsituationen, die mehr blutige Ideologiekriege als Auseinandersetzungen mit Interessen waren. Diese dunklen Zeiten, um einen Terminus von Arendt aufzugreifen, wurden auch nach Husserl nicht überwunden, sondern erlebten mit dem Naziregime resp. dem Zweiten Weltkrieg eine der dunkelsten, perversesten und lebensfeindlichsten Konkretionen.

Zugleich ist die Krise – in den oben genannten Beispielen zugebenermaßen in Extremfällen aufgeführt – weniger ein Ausnahmeereignis, denn ein existenzielles Grund- und Verfallsphänomen, bei dem die Frage nach dem Menschen einschließlich der Frage nach dem konkreten Leben fraglich wird. So bewegen wir uns immer mehr oder weniger in dunklen Zeiten, die durch Lichtfunken der Hoffnung und des Anderen aufgebrochen werden können; der Andere also nicht ausschließlich als Bedrohung *qua* Negation meiner Selbst fungiert.

Zurück zu der Krise der Idee Europas, die, wie bereits angedeutet, eine Frage der Inkludierung und Exkludierung ist. Als solche reicht sie von einer Identifikation mit einer bestimmten Selbstidentifikation hin zu einer existenziellen Lebensbedrohlichkeit und -vernichtung des Anderen bzw. Fremden, womit deutlich wird, dass diese Frage praktische und vor allem existenzielle Auswirkungen haben kann und hatte; diese

¹⁰ Hua VI, 334.

¹¹ Nkrumah 1965.

Frage also nicht bloß eine akademische, sondern eine Frage ist, die das konkrete Leben von Menschen, Orten und anderen Lebewesen beeinflusst. So setzen sich beispielsweise die Spanischen Phänomenologen Ortega y Gasset und Miguel de Unamuno mit der Frage auseinander, inwiefern es eine Spanische Philosophie gibt und inwiefern das Spanische Denken sich in den Fahrwassern des Europäischen bewegt.¹² Was hier, zugegebenermaßen bloß im Bereich der Philosophie zum Ausdruck gebracht wird, ist die Frage, inwiefern das eigene Selbstverständnis mit einem bestimmten Verständnis von Europa kollidiert, womit sowohl die Inklusionsfähigkeit eines europäischen Denkens wie auch die phänomenale Eigentümlichkeit des Spanischen Denkens auf dem Prüfstand stehen. Dass es damit jedoch vielmehr um eine Frage des Zusammenlebens geht, wie María Zambrano, Schülerin von Gasset und Unamuno, und selbst gekennzeichnet durch ihre eigenen Exilerfahrungen im Zuge des Spanischen Bürgerkrieges, hervorhebt¹³, scheint mir ebenso evident, als die Frage nach Europa nicht ‚bloß‘ Europa betrifft.

Das krisenhafte Verhalten europäischer Akteure geht weit über die zugegeben fluiden Grenzen Europas hinaus, indem beispielsweise afrikanische, chinesische und indonesische Bevölkerungen unterjocht und ausgebeutet werden. Unter der Vorherrschaft des Neokapitalismus, der – wie Rita Segato schreibt – leblose Körper anstelle von Leichen zurücklässt¹⁴ – werden, um mit Nkrumah einen Fokus auf Afrika zu legen, die Verbesserung der Lebensumstände der afrikanischen Bevölkerung zugunsten der Ausbeutung der Ressourcen für den europäischen Kontinent vernachlässigt. Zugleich wird mit einer Fragmentarisierung des afrikanischen Kontinentes unter europäischen Vorzeichen – einzelne Bereiche werden unter europäischen Ländern als deren Herrschaftsgebiete aufgeteilt, um zugleich ökonomisch ausgebeutet zu werden – dieser Kontinent tendenziell von Europa vereinnahmt. Damit wird so weit in das Gemeinschaftsleben samt ihrer Ressourcen eingegriffen, dass ökonomische Interessen in Koalition mit Herrschaftsinteressen über das Leben von Menschen gestellt werden, womit sich der Schulterschluss von Neoliberalismus, Meritokratie und Patriarchalismus als Rechtfertigung von Gewalt, Unterdrückung und Ausbeutung wiederholt.¹⁵

Dies spiegelt sich auch in der Migrationsdebatte nieder, die zum einen aufbaut auf einer Wahrnehmung des Anderen als Fremdem, der das eigene Leben gefährdet, und zum anderen von der Annahme des Besitzes von Land *qua* Geburt

¹² Vgl. Ferrer et al. 2022.

¹³ Vgl. Zambrano 2015, u.a. 51ff.

¹⁴ Vgl. Segato 2021, 15.

¹⁵ Vgl. Segato 2021, Escobar et al. 2024.

ausgeht – anstatt den eigenen Ort als ein Geschenk zu nehmen, das nicht exklusiv mir gehört. Aber diese Debatte steht auf einem anderen Blatt.

Kurzum, weder ist die Idee Europa bestimmt, noch ist sie problemlos oder gar überhaupt bloß eine Idee. Vielmehr ist auch und vor allem das Selbstverständnis wie auch das Verhalten europäischer Akteure in einer Krise, die im Spiegel unserer Verantwortlichkeit für unser Zusammenleben und unserer Weltbezüglichkeit resp. unserer ursprünglich im Humus gründenden Humanität schlicht nicht mehr tragfähig ist.

III. Facetten unserer Ein(s)bildungskraft

Wenn man so will, wird hier die Hoffnung vonseiten der Einbildungskraft eingeführt, womit diese Hoffnung nicht von außen her kommt, sondern vielmehr aus der Mitte des Lebens, kommt der Einbildungskraft doch eine bedeutsamere Rolle zu, als wir es uns im Alltag vielleicht bewusst sind. Diese Blindheit geht Hand in Hand mit der Philosophiegeschichte, in der die Einbildungskraft trotz prominenter Annäherungsversuche tendenziell als kleine Schwester der Realität belächelt oder gar in den vermeintlich vom Leben abgetrennten Bereich der Künste abgeschoben wird.

Doch die Einbildungskraft ist kein *sur plus*, das nachträglich oder gar in schwachen oder traumtänzerischen Momenten als Kompensation des Realen hinzuträte. Vielmehr ist sie fundamental im menschlichen Lebensvollzug involviert.

So nimmt sie – von der Rezeptionsgeschichte tendenziell unterbeleuchtet – schon bei Kant eine prominente Stelle im Gesamtgeschehen der realen Entfaltung der Vernunft ein. Wer die These vertritt, für Kants Denkprozesse sei die Frage nach dem Vermögen der Einbildungskraft irrelevant, da er diese aus der allgemeinen Logik ausklammert, der verkennt, dass der Hintergrund dessen das Argument ist, dass *für diesen Bereich* die „Möglichkeit synthetischer Urteile“ nicht von Bedeutung ist, dementsgegen „in einer transzendentalen Logik das wichtigste Geschäft unter allen“ sei, „und sogar das einzige, wenn von der Möglichkeit synthetischer Urteile a priori die Rede ist, imgleichen den Bedingungen und dem Umfange ihrer Gültigkeit.“¹⁶

Das Vermögen der Einbildungskraft ist also eine nicht zu unterschätzende Grundbewegung der Kantischen Philosophie, durch den sich nicht nur deren sinnlicher, keineswegs im Voraus bestimmter Fond herauschält, sondern sich auch das menschliche Verortetsein als ein *Zwischenbereich* unserer Weltlichkeit und unserer mehrdimensionalen Bezugnahme auf und Verhalten zu dieser erweist. Unsere Wirklichkeit wird damit zu einer, die sich aus der Spannung unserer

¹⁶ Kant KrV, A 14/ B 59; A193/ B 195.

mundanen und unserer transzendentalen Bezogenheit entfaltet, und ursprünglich über die Einbildungskraft vermittelt wird. Dabei wird die Einbildungskraft nicht nur zum vermittelnden Dreh- und Angel'punkt' dessen, was wir als Wirklichkeit wahrnehmen, sondern selbst zum unsere Existenz *belebenden* Herzstück. Keineswegs reines Hirngespinnst, das sich jenseits der Wirklichkeit bewegt, und auch nicht „bloß Phantasie“, die sich jenseits des Lebens abspiele, ist sie jene Kraft, durch die wir überhaupt erst auf Welt und Wirklichkeit bezogen sein können, ja, die selbst fundamental an der Welt- und Wirklichkeitsgenese partizipiert.

So weist uns Kants mehrdimensionale Einführung des Vermögens der Einbildungskraft darauf hin, dass wir uns zwar in Systemen bewegen, diese jedoch weder festgefügt sind, noch wir eine absolute Bestimmungshoheit über sie haben; der Mensch als das vernünftige Wesen sich also bewegt in der Spannung, ein Mindestmaß an Systematizität und Ordnung zu benötigen, um sich orientieren zu können, diese aber letztlich derart *fragil* ist, das zu guter Letzt die konkret-lebendige Existenz des Menschen in verschiedenen Intensitäten auf dem Spiel steht.

Das Kantische Vermögen der Einbildungskraft ist streng genommen ein sich in drei Grundbewegungen differenzierbares Vermögen, das im Menschen zu jedem Zeitpunkt in *einer* Einbildungskraft zusammenläuft und in ihrer Relation zu der Synthesis der Apprehension und der Synthesis der Apperzeption das Spielfeld der menschlichen Existenz aufspannt. Erkenntnis wie auch Wahrnehmung werden dabei bloß aus dem Verhältnis dieser drei Synthesen möglich, insofern die transzendente Apperzeption der Ursprung der empirischen Apperzeption ist, die durch die synthetisierende Wirkkraft der produktiven Einbildungskraft das konkrete Bewusstsein konstituiert¹⁷, während die transzendente Einbildungskraft jene Reproduktion leistet, die die auf die Anschauung bezogene Synthesis der Apprehension fundiert. Mit anderen Worten wird die Einbildungskraft, selbst eine „blinde[], obgleich unentbehrliche[] Funktion der Seele“, zum Vermittlungsvermögen der numerischen Identität des (inneren) Gemüts oder auch inneren Begehrens mit der äußerlich gegebenen Anschauung, die dem Gemüt erscheint; schließlich zu einer unhintergehbaren Bewegung der Erkenntnis, die erst aus dem spannungsreichen

¹⁷ Dies beschreibt Kant wie folgt: „Diese ursprüngliche und transzendente Bedingung ist nun keine andere als die transzendente Apperzeption. Das Bewußtsein seiner selbst, nach den Bestimmungen unseres Zustandes, bei der inneren Wahrnehmung ist bloß empirisch, jederzeit wandelbar, es kann kein stehendes oder bleibendes Selbst in diesem Flusse innerer Erscheinungen geben, und wird gewöhnlich der innere Sinn genannt, oder die empirische Apperzeption. Das, was notwendig als numerisch identisch vorgestellt werden soll, kann nicht als ein solches durch empirische Data gedacht werden. Es muß eine Bedingung sein, die vor aller Erfahrung vorhergeht, und diese selbst möglich macht, welche eine solche transzendente Voraussetzung geltend machen soll“ (Kant: KrV, A 106/ B 713).

Dreiklang dieser drei Vermögen zueinander möglich ist, der sich wiederum aus dem Dreiklang von „Synthesis“, „Rezeptivität“ und „Spontaneität“ aufspannt.¹⁸ Erkenntnis – und das ist wohl eine der wichtigsten Thesen bei Kant, die sowohl das Geschäft der Wissenschaften durchflieht und auch die Kommunizierbarkeit von Erfahrungen notwendig, aber auch schwierig werden lässt – sei selbst ein immer nur vorläufiges Vermittlungsprodukt von Begriffen und Anschauungen bzw. Erscheinungen. Plakativ formuliert, stünde die Erkenntnis eines Gegenstandes unter den zwei Bedingungen, einerseits „Anschauung“ zu sein, in der uns der Gegenstand „als Erscheinung gegeben wird“ und andererseits *zugleich* auf einen Begriff bezogen zu sein, durch den „ein Gegenstand gedacht wird, der dieser Anschauung entspricht.“¹⁹

Ausgehend von der reinen Apperzeption, von der aus insofern die Möglichkeit von Erscheinungen möglich ist, als diese ihrem Ursprung nach *einem* Subjekt erscheinen, wird die Einbildungskraft zu einer Grundbewegung der Erkenntnis, die nicht nur selbst teilhat an ihr, sondern diese vielmehr bedingt, indem sie überhaupt erst die Bezugnahme von Anschauung und Bewusstsein evoziert.²⁰ In diesem Sinne erkennt auch Arendt mehr vorsichtig denn semi-spekulativ an, „[d]ie Rolle, die die Einbildungskraft bei unseren erkennenden Fähigkeiten spielt, ist die vielleicht größte Entdeckung, die Kant in der *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* gemacht hat.“²¹

Diese ‚eine‘ konkrete Einbildungskraft wiederum ist selbst keineswegs eine feststehende Identität, sondern vielmehr ein dynamisches, im Werden sich entfaltendes, responsives, letztlich auf Mannigfaltiges bezogenes und daraus Weitererfahrungen gewinnendes Vermögen, das in unterschiedlichen Bewegungen tätig ist. Folglich gibt es bei Kant weder die *eine* Einbildungskraft, noch *gibt* es sie tatsächlich in einem materiellen oder gar überzeitlichen Sinne. Vielmehr betrachtet er das *Vermögen* der Einbildungskraft in ihren *potentiellen Bewegungen*, die durch das Zusammenwirken von reproduktiver und produktiver Einbildungskraft das Fundament der möglichen

¹⁸ Kant KrV, A104/ B128; A 97/ B706. Wie im Laufe des Textes deutlich werden wird, geht dieser Dreiklang auf die synthetisierende Handlung der transzendentalen Einbildungskraft zurück.

¹⁹ Kant KrV, A 125/ B 145.

²⁰ „Alle Anschauungen sind für uns nichts, und gehen uns nicht im Mindesten etwas an, wenn sie nicht ins Bewußtsein aufgenommen werden können, sie mögen nun direkt oder indirekt darauf einfließen, und nur durch dieses allein ist Erkenntnis möglich.“ In der Fußnote betont Kant: „Alle Vorstellungen haben eine notwendige Beziehung auf ein mögliches empirisches Bewußtsein: denn hätten sie dieses nicht, und wäre es gänzlich unmöglich, sich ihrer bewußt zu werden; so würde das soviel sagen, sie existierten gar nicht. Alles empirische Bewußtsein hat aber eine notwendige Beziehung auf ein transzendentales (vor aller besondern Erfahrung vorhergehendes) Bewußtsein, nämlich das Bewußtsein meiner selbst, als die ursprüngliche Apperzeption. Es ist also schlechthin notwendig, daß in meinem Erkenntnisse alles Bewußtsein zu einem Bewußtsein (meiner selbst) gehöre“ (ebd., A 116/ B 719).

²¹ Arendt 1985, 122.

Erkenntnis und letztlich auch einer guten Gemeinschaft²² bildet, indem dadurch die der Anschauung und des Urteilens zugrundeliegende Einbildungskraft mit ihrem Ursprung der der transzendentalen Einbildungskraft zusammenwirkt. Und doch sollten wir hier nicht unbemerkt lassen, dass Kant das, was er gute Gesellschaft nennt, fatalerweise auf den das Zusammenwirken von Gewalt, Gesetzen und Freiheit zurückgeführt, womit er – zusammen mit seiner Verherrlichung der Europäer²³ und der Denunzierung gerade von Menschen aus Afrika²⁴ – koloniale Praktiken rechtfertigt.

Zurück zu dem hier potentiell fruchtbarem Teil von Kants Auseinandersetzungen. Erkenntnis, Wahrnehmung wie auch Urteile werden schließlich zu *Zwischenbereichen* von Verstand und Vernunft, die durch die Bewegungen der Einbildungskraft in Relation zueinander gebracht werden; zu einer Antwort auf die begriffliche Bezugnahme dessen, was wahrgenommen wird. Das selbe Spiel wiederholt sich auf der Ebene der Wahrnehmung und des Urteilens unter ihren jeweiligen Vorzeichen, wobei jeweils die reproduzierende, die produzierende wie auch die genuin vermittelnde Einbildungskraft in einem einzigartigen Vermittlungsknäuel zusammenlaufen. Dass hier jedoch der Fokus auf die Erkenntnis gelegt worden ist, kommt nicht von ungefähr, sondern ist vielmehr dessen geschuldet, dass die Idee Europas, die Husserl ja ebend als *Idee* und nicht als eine überzeitliche Gegebenheit ausgewiesen hat, die selbst maßgeblich von der wissenschaftlichen Praxis beeinflusst ist, unter den Vorzeichen der reproduzierenden, produzierenden und genuin vermittelnden Einbildungskraft nochmals dazu anmahnt, das eigene Wissen und auch die eigene Haltung kritisch zu hinterfragen. Zugleich berühren wir mit dieser Tiefenbohrung der epistemischen Dimension gemäß der typischen Kantischen Trinität auch jene der Wahrnehmung und des Urteilens, da diese im Menschen zusammenlaufen ursprünglich verzahnt miteinander, das Miteinanderleben bedingen.

Letztlich erweist sich jedoch, wie bereits angedeutet, auch Kants Projekt als eine inner-europäische Geschichtsschreibung, da er die Vernunft nicht als einsames Vermögen des Einzelnen beschreibt, sondern diese vielmehr in ihrer pluralen Erscheinung in *den* Menschen diese vereint. Dabei seien die Europäer, und allen voran die Deutschen, aufgrund der klimatischen Verhältnisses in der privilegierten Situation, die Vernunft in einer ausgezeichneten Weise zu entfalten, wohingegen er dies vor allem aus Afrika stämmigen Menschen abspricht.

Er zeichnet damit aufgrund seiner Anthropologie ein unterkomplexes eurozentrisches Selbstverständnis des Menschen, womit er dessen Einzigartigkeit und

²² Vgl. Kant AA VII, B 329/ A331

²³ Vgl. Kant VII, B 297ff/ A299; B 307/ A 309.

²⁴ Vgl. Kant AA II, 252.

Pluralität unterläuft, während er gleichzeitig wichtige Beiträge für die Bedeutsamkeit der Einbildungskraft liefert, die bei ihm im Rahmen der Vernunft verbleibt.

Jene Bedeutsamkeit möchte ich mit Arendt und Haraway auf eine neue, nicht bloß rationale Stufe bringen.

Arendt, deren politisch ambitioniertes Denken ihren Sinn erhält auf dem Hintergrund der These, dass wir Menschen denkend und handelnd auf das, was wir als Welt erfahren, bezogen sind, und schließlich Denken und Handeln sich gegenseitig befruchten, so dass ein Nachdenken über den Menschen den Boden für einen neuen Umgang und schließlich zu einer neuen Welt führen kann²⁵, kann als eine eigenwillige Fortführung des Kantischen Ansatzes gedeutet werden.

Arendt verfolgt mehr einen einladenden, denn exkludierenden Ansatz, bei der die Spannung von menschlicher Einzigartigkeit und Pluralität versucht wird, zu wahren und gleichzeitig fruchtbar zu entfalten, indem sie aufzeigt, dass vom Miteinander her, vom Zusammenschluss der individuellen Kräfte zu einer Macht, eine Wirkmächtigkeit entfaltet wird, die *etwas* bewegen, die *Wirklichkeit* verändern kann. Dabei wird die Einbildungskraft zu einem sich in die Wirklichkeit übersetzenden, aber auch konstituierenden Vehikel unseres Ethos, der Bernhard Waldenfels zufolge unsere „allgemeine *Lebenseinstellung* und *Lebensführung*“ bezeichnet.²⁶ Demzufolge wird sie selbst zu einem *Movens* der für den Menschen unhintergehbaren Verantwortlichkeit, die erst im Rahmen der unter anderem durch Kant aufkeimenden „Entstehung des neuzeitlichen Geschichtsbewußtseins“ thematisch werden kann²⁷, insofern sich die Verantwortlichkeit des Menschen dem Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit verdankt. Anders gesagt, ist sie eine Handlung, die ausgehend vom Transzendentalen unsere eigene Involviertheit nicht bloß dupliziert, sondern insofern in einer ausgezeichneten Weise evoziert, als sie das vernunftbegabte Wesen aktiv auf seine Sujets bezieht. Sie wird damit zu einer Handlung unserer ursprünglichen Involviertheit, die sie konkret verwirklicht.

Dass im Zuge dessen der Sprache eine entscheidende Rolle zukommt, die wiederum unterfüttert wird von dem Vermögen der Einbildungskraft, wird ein entscheidendes Herzstück von Arendts Denken, von dem aus das Miteinander seine lebendigen Züge erhält, und das sich schließlich erst als ein menschliches Miteinander erweist, das insofern aus dem *Zwischen* der Menschen erwächst, als hier einzigartige Menschen einen gemeinsamen Bund eingehen; also schließlich eine Gemeinschaft bilden, die der Einzig(artig)keit eines jeden und der pluralen Existenz Rechnung zu tragen versucht. So sei auch Arendt zufolge „keine Wahrnehmung ohne Einbildungskraft

²⁵ Vgl. Arendt 1967.

²⁶ Vgl. Waldenfels 2015, 324.

²⁷ Vgl. Arendt 1967, 176.

möglich“²⁸, womit wiederum überhaupt erst die Grundlage für jene Kommunikation geschaffen sei, die als Grundphänomen des menschlichen Miteinanders unsere konkrete Existenz in einer Welt fundiert.²⁹ Denn Kommunikation ist nur dann möglich, wenn wir „über das gleiche Ding sprechen – daß wir, die wir viele sind, übereinstimmen“ – jedenfalls hinsichtlich dessen, worauf wir uns in unseren Gesprächen beziehen – „zusammenkommen in Hinblick auf etwas, das ein und dasselbe für uns alle ist.“³⁰ Was hier als ein allzu romantisierter Harmonismus gelesen werden kann, meint zunächst einmal, dass wir im Miteinandersprechen aus einer – womöglich auch hochspannungsvollen – Synthese unserer Erfahrungen und damit einhergehenden Meinungen nach gemeinsamen Lebenspfeilern suchen können, die als Fundament eines von den konkreten Menschen ausgehenden Miteinanders fungieren können. Die fundamental von der Einbildungskraft herkommende Sprache wird damit nicht bloß zum Vehikel der Verlautbarung einer Erfahrung, sondern als solche auch Anruf an und möglicher Referenzpunkt anderer Menschen, die sich dadurch in einer ausgezeichneten Weise begegnen und nach Grenzen eines möglichen Gemeinsamen suchen können. Das Miteinandersprechen, das eine wechselseitige Einladung in das jeweilige Haus sein kann, wird damit zu einer neuen Dimension der Einbildungskraft, die – wie auch bei Kant – nicht stehenbleibt beim Einzelnen, sondern seinen Sinn und seine Wahrheit erst in Relation zu anderem erhält. Im Umkehrschluss wird damit das Miteinander selbst zu keinem festen Gefüge, sondern zu einem Ort des Ge-Mein-samen – einem Ort, der sich aus der Bezugnahme der Meinungen auf- und zueinander verdankt –, der seinen Ursprung hat im imaginativen Vermögen des Menschen, der so anderen Menschen begegnet. Doch auch hier keineswegs eine blinde Imagination, gewinnt sich dieser ge-mein-same Ort aus 1) der Spannung der jeweiligen Meinungen und Bedürfnisse, die in Korrelation stehen zu je einzigartigen Erfahrungen, 2) dem Versuch des Verstehens der Meinungen und Bedürfnisse der anderen, sowie 3) dem Streben aus dieser Begegnung einen gemeinsamen Ort zu erschaffen, der im besten Falle als Boden einer jeden Selbstentfaltung fungieren kann. So kann auch Europa als ein Ort des spannungsreichen Ge-mein-samen verstanden werden, der immer schon über die eigenen Ländergrenzen hinaus ist und sich zugleich zwischen ihnen bewegt. Dies hieße zugleich, weder von einem festen Grundgefüge Europas auszugehen, geschweige denn dieses blind gegen Andere verteidigen zu wollen, um das Eigene zu bewahren, da das Miteinandersprechen immer auch eine Auseinandersetzung ist, bei der wir – ganz im Sinne der Aus-einander-Setzung – durch die Auseinandersetzung mit Anderen und anderen gewissermaßen neu

²⁸ Arendt 1985, 125.

²⁹ Vgl. Arendt 1985, 126.

³⁰ Arendt 1985, 126.

zusammengesetzt ‚heraustreten‘; im Falle Europas womöglich fortwährend, nicht als einmaliges Ereignis. Ja, womöglich geht es hier gerade darum, „in sich den Sinn einer Exteriorität wiederzufinden und auszuschöpfen“³¹, wie Levinas es entfaltet, womit Freiheit und Verantwortlichkeit füreinander zusammengedacht werden; es schließlich auch nicht bloß um die individuelle Freiheit, sondern einen Befreiungsprozess aus einer ursprünglichen Verantwortlichkeit für den Anderen geht. Dies bricht aktiv mit dem europäischen Denken, in dem sich Levinas zufolge „die Vorherrschaft einer Tradition erkennen [lässt], die die Unwürdigkeit dem Scheitern, ja sogar die moralische Großmut den Zwängen des objektiven Denkens unterordnet“³², das Fehlgehen also traditionell nicht auf das eigene Verhalten, sondern auf das eigene Unvermögen zurückgeführt wird, während sich das rationale Geschöpf in einer Totalität einrichten könne. Dementgegen finde die „Utopie des Menschlichen“, das „der-eine-für-den-Anderen der Verantwortung“ „jenseits des Logos“ statt, insofern es um etwas geht, das menschliche Gerechtigkeit anstatt vernünftige Gerechtigkeit genannt werden kann.³³

Eine noch weitaus radikalere und kreativere wenngleich weniger intraphilosophisch interessierte denn interdisziplinär angesiedelte Auseinandersetzung mit der Wirklichkeit im Spiegel unserer Einbildungskraft fährt wohl Donna Haraway mit ihrem SF. Dieses Chiffre „verweist auf Science-Fiction, spekulativen Feminismus, Science Fantasy, wissenschaftliche Fakten (*science fact*), aber auch auf Spiele mit Fadenfiguren (*string figures*)“, also „das Weitergeben und In-Empfang-Nehmen von Mustern, um das Fallenlassen von Fäden und um das Scheitern, aber manchmal auch darum etwas zu finden, das funktioniert, etwas Konsequentes und vielleicht sogar Schönes; etwas, das noch nicht da war, ein Weitergeben von Verbindungen, die zählen; ein Geschichtenerzählen, das von Hand zu Hand geht, [...] – um Bedingungen zu schaffen, die auf der Erde, auf Terra, ein endliches Gedeihen ermöglichen.“³⁴ Sie entwickelt mit ihrer „Terrapolis“ einen fiktiven „*n*-dimensionalen Nischenraum“, der „offen, weltlich, unbestimmt und polytemporal“ ist, „für Art-GenossInnen, *cum panis*, diejenigen, die mit Brot an einem Tisch zusammensitzen – nicht ‚posthuman‘, sondern ‚kom-post‘, und schließlich in seiner Gegenwärtigkeit den Raum bereitet „für unerwartete GenossInnen“, also „das SF-Spiel der Responsabilität.“³⁵ Sie beschreibt damit einen Ort, der die Weltbezüglichkeit des Menschen in einem radikaleren, den Wurzeln zugewandten Sinne zum Ausdruck bringt, indem Terrapolis „nicht die Heimat des Menschen als *homo*, dieses stets parabolischen, auf- und abschwellenden,

³¹ Levinas 2002, 176/ 98.

³² Levinas 2011, 114/55.

³³ Levinas 2011, 110/ 58.

³⁴ Haraway 2018, 20.

³⁵ Haraway 2018, 21.

phallischen Selbstbilds des Immergleichen“ ist, „sondern [...] die Heimat für jenen *human*, der sich durch einen Zungenkünstlertrick der indo-europäischen Etymologie auf wundersame Weise in *guman* verwandelt, den Arbeiter aus und mit dem Erdboden.“³⁶ Dabei keineswegs beim Einzelnen und auch nicht bloß beim Menschen bleibend, sondern mit der *Sympoiesis* – ähnlich der Rombachschen Konkreativität³⁷ – das Zusammenwirken von Menschen und nicht-menschlichen Entitäten auf ein „Machen-Mit“ abhebend, wird ihr Ansatz insofern zu einem *Gemeinsamen*, als *Sympoiesis* „partnerschaftlich bis in die letzte Konsequenz [ist], frei von initiierten und im Fortschritt interagierenden ‚Einheiten.‘“³⁸ Den Ursprung des Humanen interessanterweise nicht im homo, sondern im humus entdeckend, ruft sie uns keineswegs dazu auf, uns Zeit unseres Lebens im Schlamm zu wälzen, sondern vielmehr, uns unseres eigenen Ursprungs und der damit einhergehenden Verantwortlichkeit für uns allumgreifende Atmosphäre bewusst zu werden und dementsprechend zu handeln. Inwiefern ihre eigene Fiktion einer materiellen Verschmelzung von Menschlichem und Nicht-Menschlichem über die Freiheit literarischer Fiktion hinausgeht, das möchte ich hier bloß als Frage im Raum stehen lassen.

Dabei schafft sie doch eines besonders: Hier wird spielerisch aber durchaus aus ernsten Absichten mit der Wirkkraft der Einbildungskraft für unsere Wirklichkeit ernst gemacht. Das, was hier in den Fokus gerückt wird, ist die *schöpferische* Wirkweise der Vorstellungskraft, die, philosophiegeschichtlich tendenziell unterbeleuchtet oder zu sehr in den Bereich des Theoretischen abgeschoben, in ihrer *wirk-lichen* Fruchtbarkeit und Lebendigkeit verfehlt wird. Diese besteht gerade darin – wie Eva von Redecker es so treffend formuliert – mit der vermeintlichen Kontinuität unseres Lebens zu brechen; „jeder Dauer Einhalt zu gebieten“ und so „das Existierende um unzählige Möglichkeiten [zu] erweitern.“³⁹ Wird bei Haraway unsere Weltbezüglichkeit in der Spannung der menschlichen und nicht bloß menschlichen Einzigartigkeit und Pluralität zusammen mit unserem Selbstbild zur Disposition gestellt und vonseiten der Einbildungskraft neu angegangen, so scheint mir, dass wir gerade davon lernen und genau dies wagen sollten; macht sie sich doch explizit die schon von Kant thematisierte Möglichkeiten *eröffnende* Wirkweise der Vorstellungskraft zueigen, die sie allerdings unter die Vorzeichen des Lebens anstatt der Vernunft stellt.

Denn im Zuge des Bisherigen erweist sich auch die Idee Europas als eine Idee – zugegebenermaßen als eine sehr beschränkte, die tendenziell nicht den Blick über den eigenen Tellerrand hinauswirft bzw. nicht bereit ist, von anderen Kontexten zu lernen, geschweige denn ‚innerhalb‘ dessen, was sich als Europa bezeichnet, praktiziert

³⁶ Haraway 2018, 22.

³⁷ Vgl. Rombach 1987, 127ff.

³⁸ Haraway 2018, 50.

³⁹ Von Redecker 2023, 108.

wird, sondern vielmehr dann auf andere zugreift, wenn dadurch eigener tendenziell ökonomischer Profit – gezogen werden kann. Für meine Begriffe ist daher eine Neuansfrage an das europäische Selbstbild im Spiegel der eigenen Relationalität notwendig, die mit einer Auseinandersetzung über unsere Einzig(artig)keit und Pluralität einhergeht.

IV. Eröffnender Ausblick

Damit bewegen wir uns bereits im eröffnenden Ausblick, mit dem ich anstelle einer Zusammenfassung zunächst enden möchte. Im Angesicht unserer Relationalität, die zum einen unser ontologisches Fundament ist und zugleich tendenziell zerstört wird, wie von Rombach⁴⁰ und Escobar et al.⁴¹ auf je einzigartige Weise ausgeführt, scheint mir eine Neuansfrage des europäischen Selbstbildes von Gewicht. Dieses krankt vor allem an einem schiefen Individualitätsverständnis, bei dem – plakativ gesprochen – das scheinbare singuläre Individuum gegen ‚die Gesellschaft‘ ausgespielt und zugleich pedantisch an einer Wahrung des Eigenen festgehalten wird, anstatt sich der ursprünglichen Verwobenheit miteinander gewahr zu sein und Verantwortung für die eigene Einflussnahme zu übernehmen. Damit einhergehend wird der Andere spätestens hinter der eigenen Ländergrenze tendenziell zum Fremden, der im besten Fall nichts mit mir zu tun hat und mir schlimmstenfalls meine eigenen Ressourcen und Entfaltungsmöglichkeiten streitig macht. Vermeintlich. Vielleicht potenziell. Aber notwendig?

Da es „von Gewicht [ist], welche Geschichten Welten machen und welche Welten Geschichten machen“⁴² und im Angesicht der Vergangenheit und Gegenwart Europas möchte ich hier für die Notwendigkeit einer Dekolonialisierung Europas plädieren, das heißt eine Befreiung Europas von seinem tendenziell narzisstisch-neokolonialen Grundzug und Europa nicht rein von sich aus zu verstehen. Dieser Versuch wird in einem anderen Rahmen angegangen.

Als *ein* Teil der Gesamtstruktur unserer Weltgemeinschaft ist das ‚Selbst‘ Europas immer schon eingebettet in den Kontext einer gemeinsamen Welt, die sich womöglich in mehrere Welten differenziert, damit aber nicht notwendigerweise den Blick und eine Offenheit füreinander verlieren muss. Eine Offenheit, bei der ich nicht bei mir verbleibe, sondern die Tür nach außen, zum Anderen und jeder potenziellen Umgebung hin geöffnet habe, und bereit bin voneinander zu lernen. Zugleich heißt eine Geschichtsschreibung im Sinne eines Mit-Werdens, das auch als ein Miteinander(s)-

⁴⁰ Vgl. u.a. Rombach 1994.

⁴¹ Vgl. Escobar et al. 2024.

⁴² Haraway 2018, 23.

Werden verstanden werden kann in der Bewegung „reziproker Anregung“⁴³, keineswegs die Forderung eines harmonischen Einheitsbreis, sondern vielmehr – und damit würde es sich meiner Meinung nach von der heutigen unterscheiden – unter den Leitlinien des Lebens anstelle der Vereinnahmung des Lebens vom Kapital bzw. der Ökonomie oder dem lebensfeindlichen Herrschaftsstreben. Also nicht die Aufhebung des Ökonomischen, sondern vielmehr eine Umwertung, um der Verlebendigung oder auch Vivifizierung unserer Wirklichkeit, schließlich der Verlebendigung des Lebens in seiner Pluralität, Diversität, Relationalität und Eigenwertigkeit *zuzuarbeiten*.

Kurzum: die Aufgabe scheint mir, im Angesicht der Potentialität des Menschenmöglichen die Frage nach Europa in seiner Verbundenheit mit der Frage nach unserer Welt zu stellen, die uns zunächst einmal als ein Geschenk gegeben ist, um uns dort in unserer Relationalität zu entfalten. Husserls Bewertung des guten Europäers kann dabei weder von Europa her bewertet werden noch dabei stehenbleiben, sondern – wenn überhaupt, nur im Spiegel dessen, ob jemand ein *guter Mensch* ist; eine Frage, die im Spiegel unserer Relationalität ihren Wertmaßstab findet. Wobei die Beantwortung dessen auf einem anderen Blatt steht.

Zugleich scheint dabei ein Aufbrechen des unterkomplexen Individualitätsverständnisses notwendig, dahingehend, dass wir – wie Hans Rainer Sepp argumentiert – sowohl auf das eigene Zentrum bezogen sind (Insein 1), zugleich und damit verwoben aber auch auf ein gemeinsames Zentrum bezogen sind (Insein 2), das sich gerade in der Spannung zu seinen Peripherien gebiert.⁴⁴

Schließen möchte ich gerne mit einem Zitat Husserls, der dieses Vorhaben vielleicht ernster und multidimensionaler hätte nehmen sollen, kann hier doch die Forderung erkannt werden, dass die Aufgabe Europas vielleicht gerade darin besteht, fluider, vielleicht auch eher einladend anstatt ausgrenzend mit den menschengemachten Ländergrenzen umzugehen, diese in ihrer abweisenden Funktion abzubauen und zugleich das eigene Verständnis nicht notwendigerweise auf den eigenen Kontinent zu beschränken:

Wissenschaftliche Kultur unter Ideen *der Unendlichkeit* bedeutet also eine Revolutionierung der gesamten Kultur, eine Revolutionierung in der ganzen Weise des Menschentums als kulturschaffenden. Sie bedeutet auch eine Revolutionierung der Geschichtlichkeit, die nun Geschichte des Entwerdens des endlichen Menschentums im Werden zum Menschentum unendlicher Aufgaben ist.⁴⁵

⁴³ Haraway 2018, 60.

⁴⁴ Sepp XX.

⁴⁵ Hua VI, 325.

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Towards a Pluriversal Europe? The Performance *Dispak Dispac'h – Crépuscule européen* from Patricia Allio and Her Co-Creators as a Shift from the Universalist Monologue to Pluriversalist Dialogues

Sylvan HECHT-AUSSENAC*

ABSTRACT. This article dreams and thinks the hypothesis of a utopian “pluriversal Europe” thanks to the study of the “agora-performance” *Dispak Dispac'h – Crépuscule européen* from Patricia Allio and her friends, colleagues and comrades. To explore *Dispak Dispac'h – European Twilight*'s pluriversalist aesthetics and politics, the paper investigates two directions. First, it outlines the concepts of “Pluriverse” and “pluriversalism” as a theoretical framework, examining the “ontological turn” in philosophy and anthropology, its political implications, and – briefly – some critiques of this current. In a second part, the aesthetics of the “agora-work of art” *Dispak Dispac'h – European Twilight* is analysed as an antidote to “monological universalism”, enabling to sketch out pluriversalist dialogues, and *Dispak Dispac'h – European Twilight*'s “artist” approach is established as a way of overcoming the modern dualisms between art and life and between artworks and social struggles – even beyond the limits of twentieth-century documentary theatre –, and contributing to the emergence of a new, “pluriversal” Europe¹.

Keywords: Pluriverse, agora-performance, activism, Patricia Allio, *Dispak Dispac'h – European Twilight*

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¹ This text was originally written in French thanks to Patricia Allio, who invited me to present it during the workshop « Faire agora : autour de *Dispak, Dispac'h* » organised by Prof. Dr. Sophie Lucet at the Université Rennes 2 on April 10th, 2024 (unpublished). Thanks to the invitation of PD Dr. Niels Weidtmann and Lect.





Figure 1 – Léonie Pernet (music) and Bernardo Montet (dance) in *Dispak Dispac'h – Crépuscule européen*, staged by Patricia Allio, 2023.
© Christophe Raynaud de Lage / Festival d'Avignon

Introduction

On July 21st, 2023, at the Avignon Festival, I had the chance to attend *Dispak Dispac'h – Crépuscule européen*, a six-hour long version of the *Dispak Dispac'h* performance of Patricia Allio, an interdisciplinary artist from the Bretagne region of France who used to teach philosophy in a previous life. This extended form of *Dispak Dispac'h*, which we could describe in its two versions as an “agora-performance”, both moved me, gave me food for thought and motivated me to act politically.

Dr. Alina Noveanu, I then rewrote the paper and translated it into English thanks to DeepL to present it at the conference *Europe – between Idea, Imagination and Reality. New Philosophical Perspectives* at the Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj on June 24th, 2025. The present text is the new corrected and rewritten version of the translation-adaptation. I would like to deeply thank Patricia Allio, Sophie Lucet, Niels Weidtmann and Alina Noveanu for their great support during this whole artistic, epistemological, ethical and political process.

Dispak Dispac'h – Crépuscule européen (meaning literally *To open up, to resist – European Twilight* in Breton and French languages) is depicted as follows on the website of the Avignon Festival:

Which lives deserve to be mourned? How to open oneself up, how to resist? Sit down in the agora of *Dispak Dispac'h* with its protagonists and listen to the masterful indictment delivered in 2018 by the *Groupe d'information et de soutien des immigrés* (GISTI) in front of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal, forcing Europe to face the violations of the rights of migrant and refugee people that our continent allows to be committed. Actors and members of civil society will take turns speaking, listening to each other, looking to each other, dancing, and creating with us a space of emotional contagion: such is the device imagined by Patricia Allio, a Breton author, theatre director and filmmaker, whose outlook and practice upend our sensibilities and target our Europe and its renunciations.

After this last representation, the audience will be invited to participate in a meal. The evening will continue with performances and new testimonies, where we will express our refusals and the need for a world without borders.

With the participation of Bridget Anderson, Damien Careme, Moctar Dan Yaye, Jalila Khenissi, David Yambio².

Before beginning the analysis of this performance, a methodological explanation is required. As a doctoral student in research-creation, I try to bring together several disciplines in my artistic practice as well as in my theoretical work, namely the performing arts at the University of Toulouse – Jean Jaurès, and cultural theory at the Eberhard Karl University of Tübingen – a field which combines philosophy, anthropology, literary studies and other approaches to examine cultural facts. This paper will therefore articulate concepts coming from anthropology and philosophy, such as the “Pluriverse”, “pluriversalism” and “pluriversality”, with aesthetic and political reflections coming from theatre and performance studies. As my PhD aims to “feel-think” through the stage what might be “pluriversalist revolutions”, I will focus on the hypothesis that *Dispak Dispac'h. European Twilight* is a paradigmatic performance of the transition from the universalist monologue of modern-imperial³ Europe to what might be *pluriversalist* dialogues in a future utopian Europe.

² Patricia Allio, *Dispak Dispac'h – Crépuscule européen*, Festival d'Avignon 2023. Available online; URL: <https://festival-avignon.com/fr/edition-2023/programmation/dispak-dispac-h-332087>; accessed on 31 August 2025.

³ For an historical and philosophical analysis of the concept of “imperiality” in the modern era until today, see Mohamed Amer Meziane, *The States of the Earth: An Ecological and Racial History of Secularization*, Verso Books, 2024 [2021].

To explore *Dispak Dispac'h. European Twilight's* pluriversalist aesthetics and politics, I will proceed in two steps: first, I will outline the concepts of "Pluriverse" and "pluriversalism" as a theoretical framework for studying *Dispak Dispac'h*. I will then look at the pluriversalist aesthetics of this "agora-work of art" as an antidote to "monological universalism"⁴, enabling us to sketch out pluriversalist dialogues, and *Dispak Dispac'h. European Twilight's* "artist" approach as a way of overcoming the modern dualisms between art and life and between artworks and social struggles – even beyond the limits of twentieth-century documentary theatre –, and contributing to the emergence of a new, pluriversalist Europe.

But first things first, let us get back to basics: what is the "Pluriverse", and what could a "pluriversalism" – or "pluriversalisms" in plural – consist of?

From the "Pluriverse" to "pluriversalisms" and "pluriversality": breaking with Eurocentrism in existence *and* thought

After several centuries of ideological hegemony, "monological universalism"⁵ – to quote the philosopher Fátima Hurtado Lopez –, which we will also call "abstract universalism" or "universalism from above", is today being fought on many fronts by the struggles of peoples all over the planet. To the monologue of the West, unduly erected as *the sole* universal, these peoples are using their polylogues to oppose a whole "Pluriverse"⁶: "a world made up of multiple worlds"⁷, to use the expression of the Zapatista revolutionaries of Chiapas – and by "world" we mean, following the philosophers Sophie Gosselin and David gé Bartoli, "a set of relations instituted

⁴ Fátima Hurtado López, « Universalisme ou pluriversalisme ? Les apports de la philosophie latino-américaine », in *Tumultes*, « Pluriversalisme décolonial », vol. 48, no. 1, Kimé, 2017, p. 39-50. Available online; URL: <https://doi.org/10.3917/tumu.048.0039>; accessed on 31 August 2025.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Arturo Escobar and several other authors in the field of "pluriversal studies" generally write "Pluriverse" with a lower-case "p", perhaps to avoid the emergence of a new hegemony replacing the old universalist hegemony. For my part, I have opted instead, in my PhD thesis as well as in this article, for a capital "P", otherwise we run the great risk of falling into the conceptual vagueness of speaking of a "plurality of pluriverses", whereas in my view, *the Pluriverse* already constitutes *the whole* that brings together all the cosmologies and all the metaphysics of the peoples of the planet. Just as the astrophysical theory of the Multiverse refers to the hypothesis of *one* totality subsuming all possible *physical* universes, so the anthropological study of *the Pluriverse* already points to a *metaphysical* totality. There can be no other "pluriverse" with a lower-case letter, as I understand it.

⁷ Cf. the Zapatistas' "Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle": "*Queremos un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos*" ("We want a world where many worlds come together"), quoted in Arturo Escobar, *Sentir-penser avec la Terre. L'écologie au-delà de l'Occident*, Le Seuil, 2018.

between human beings and other-than-human beings in such a way as to inscribe them in a signifying and lasting totality⁸.

Following in the footsteps of the Zapatistas and many other activists and researchers inspired by them and by other insurgent peoples⁹, such as the anthropologists Marisol de la Cadena and Arturo Escobar, I see the Pluriverse as the network woven by the *cosmologies* of the peoples of the Earth, i.e. by their ways of “composing worlds¹⁰”, both materially and spiritually. Hence, the Pluriverse would be composed of “animism”, “totemism”, “analogism” and modern scientific “naturalism”, according to Philippe Descola¹¹, but also of other types of cosmologies not fitting in this “four ontologies” scheme, regarding the important critiques of the “ontological turn” of social sciences made by Indigenous researchers such as the anthropologist and artist Zoe Todd (Red River Métis, Otipemisiwak) and the sociologist Vanessa Watts¹² (Anishnaabe and Haudenosaunee). Furthermore, acknowledging their critiques, which complexify our representations of multiple cosmologies beyond Descolas’s scheme, it is also crucial to include *metaphysical* “interworlds” in our perception and conception of the Pluriverse, such as the metaphysics of the *barzakh* in Sufism, which considers dreams and the invisible as spaces situated “at the edge of worlds” and between them, to paraphrase the philosopher Mohamed Amer Meziane¹³.

In the French translation of his book *Sentipensar con la tierra: Nuevas lecturas sobre desarrollo, territorio y diferencia* (*Feeling-Thinking with the Earth: New Lectures about Development, Territory and Difference*), Arturo Escobar, inspired by the Zapatistas, also defines the *Pluriverse* as the whole formed by *all the cosmologies*

⁸ Sophie Gosselin and David gé Bartoli, « Terre-mondes et personnes-chimères : donner voix au pluriversel. Récit à deux voix et plus », p. 64, in *Chimères*, 2023/2 N° 103, pp. 63-76. DOI: 10.3917/chime.103.0063. URL: <https://shs.cairn.info/revue-chimeres-2023-2-page-63>; accessed 4 April 2025.

⁹ See Alberto Acosta, Federico Demaria, Arturo Escobar, Ashish Kothari and Ariel Salleh (eds.), *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary*, Tulika Books / Columbia University Press, 2019, which brings together articles from almost every continent, covering a wide range of cosmologies, metaphysics and political struggles, and written by activists and/or researchers.

¹⁰ We borrow the expression “composition of worlds”, as well as the categories of analogism, animism, totemism and naturalism, from the anthropologist Philippe Descola. See Philippe Descola, *La Composition des mondes. Entretiens avec Pierre Charbonnier*, Flammarion, 2014.

¹¹ See Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, The University of Chicago Press, 2013 [2005].

¹² See Zoe Todd, “An Indigenous Feminist’s Take on the Ontological Turn: ‘Ontology’ is just another word for colonialism”, in *Journal of Historical Sociology* 29(1), 2016 and Vanessa Watts, “Indigenous place-thought & agency amongst humans and non-humans (First Woman and Sky Woman go on a European world tour!)”, in *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, Vol. 2, no. 1, 2013.

¹³ See Mohamed Amer Meziane, *Au bord des mondes : vers une anthropologie métaphysique*, Vues de l’esprit, 2023, and particularly the chapter 5, « *Barzakh* ou comment les rêve font imposer l’ontologie ».

(or ontologies¹⁴) of the peoples of the planet. This whole is thus woven from the ways of *composing a world* specific to each people, i.e. ways of perceiving and organising “reality” on both the physical and metaphysical levels. Visible and invisible, sensation and reflection, human and other-than-human, living and inanimate: all these distinctions, which seem fundamental and intangible in our modern “naturalist” cosmology, are in fact nothing more than *one* way of composing the world, or rather of composing *one* world out of all the others that are possible. For A. Escobar, the Pluriverse therefore refers to the *nexus* containing the multiple cosmologies of peoples fighting against what he calls the modern, colonial, capitalist, patriarchal and anthropocentric “World-1” or “One-World-World¹⁵” (OWW).

Therefore, for those who wish to work towards the liberation of all beings and the renewal of the idea, imagination and reality of Europe, there seems to be an urgent need to develop “pluriversalisms¹⁶” as alternatives to the “monological universalism” that has marked the entire history of the invasion of other continents by European empires since the symbolic milestone of 1492. These “pluriversalisms” would be both necessarily plural and ideally unitary, in order to avoid both the pitfalls of uniformity and those of particularism, which is why we speak of pluriversalisms *in the plural* from the outset, while retaining the *unitary* “ism”. Dismissing postmodern relativism and abstract universalism back-to-back, these pluriversalisms would make it possible to imagine new *cosmopolitical* alliances genuinely made up of *all* the perspectives of the peoples of the Earth, beyond even human peoples: alliances with “river-peoples, mountain-peoples, archipelago-peoples¹⁷”, to quote Sophie Gosselin and David gé Bartoli once again, and many others besides. Other authors, such as feminist studies researcher Madina Tlostanova and linguist Marie-Anne Paveau, speak of “pluriversity¹⁸”, a concept that might make it possible to promote a unitary *and* plural ethic while avoiding the creation of yet another “ism”.

¹⁴ “Ontology here refers to the presuppositions that different social groups have about the entities that *actually* exist in the world [...] By being embodied in practices, ontologies create real worlds.” Arturo Escobar, *Sentir-penser avec la Terre. L'écologie au-delà de l'Occident*, Le Seuil, 2018 [2014], pp. 73-74, my translation.

¹⁵ Arturo Escobar, *Pluriversal Politics*, Duke University Press, 2020.

¹⁶ See Enrique Dussel, « Pour un dialogue mondial entre traditions philosophiques », in *Cahiers des Amériques latines* [En ligne], 62 | 2009, online since 31 January 2013, accessed 04 February 2025. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/cal/1619>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/cal.1619>.

¹⁷ Sophie Gosselin and David gé Bartoli, « Terre-mondes et personnes-chimères », *art. cit.* p. 75.

¹⁸ Madina Tlostanova, « Toutes les femmes sont russes, tous les Caucasiens sont des hommes ? Intersectionnalité, pluriversalité et les autres genre-e-s des frontières eurasiennes », in *Les cahiers du CEDREF* [En ligne], 20 | 2015, online since 15 June 2015, accessed 28 May 2025. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/cedref/830>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/cedref.830>; Marie-Anne Paveau, « Une analyse du discours contre-hégémonique. Intersectionnalité critique et pluriversalité décoloniale »,

And yet, even without explicitly addressing the question of cosmologies, *Dispak Dispac'h. European Twilight* immediately stroke me as an assembly of witnesses from the Pluriverse. In the second part of the piece particularly, after the “indictment delivered in 2018 by the *Groupe d’information et de soutien des immigrés* (GISTI) in front of the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal¹⁹”, these witnesses, through the polyphony of the geo-histories they tell us, tear to shreds the monologue of the modern-colonial “One-World-World” that usually saturates the entire media space without leaving any room for the voices of the Pluriverse to express themselves.

According to A. Escobar again, at the opposite end of the spectrum from modern naturalism (i.e. our hegemonic ontology, based on the grand dualism between nature and culture) and the extractivist OWW it has engendered, the Pluriverse refers not only to other *cosmologies*, but also to what I would call *cosmopolitics*, in other words, other ways of *worlding* driven by struggles which, as the preface to the French edition of *Feeling-Thinking with the Earth* puts it, “closely articulate economic, political, ecological, epistemological, ethno-territorial, gender and sexual demands²⁰”. The Pluriverse already exists, then, but on the margins of the modern OWW it opposes, woven from all the cosmologies and metaphysics of the planet, and from the local and cosmopolitical struggles to defend them – including the decolonial and ecological mobilisations in the Global North too (for instance in the *Zones À Défendre* (ZAD) in France, where the anti-dualist and analogist motto “We are not defending nature, we are nature defending itself” flourishes).

Taking seriously the radical critique of the modern One-World-World enabled by the concept of the Pluriverse necessarily implies working out collectively – and in particular through agora such as *Dispak Dispac'h* – alternatives to what the philosopher Fátima Hurtado López calls “monological universalism”, a so-called abstract universalism that, since the beginnings of colonisation and despite its historical mutations, still sets up the point of view of the Euro-Christian white Western male, human, bourgeois and able subject as the only one worthy of being universalised, all other perspectives seeming “particular” in the eyes of this hegemonic universalism. Donna Haraway characterises this universalist gaze as “the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere²¹” in her famous article about “situated knowledges”.

in *Langage et société*, 2023/1 N° 178, pp. 161-190, consulted on 31 May 2025. DOI: 10.3917/ls.178.0149. URL: <https://shs.cairn.info/revue-langage-et-societe-2023-1-page-161?lang=fr>.

¹⁹ Patricia Allio, *Dispak Dispac'h – Crépuscule européen*, Festival d'Avignon 2023. Available online; URL: <https://festival-avignon.com/fr/edition-2023/programmation/dispak-dispac-h-332087>; accessed on 31 August 2025.

²⁰ Arturo Escobar, *Sentir-penser avec la Terre*, op. cit., p. 16.

²¹ Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective”, in *Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1988, p. 581. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>. Accessed 1 September 2025.

So, what might a “pluriversalism”, or rather “pluriversalisms” in plural or “pluriversality”, consist of as a way out of modern-colonial universalism – particularly in Europe, since Europe’s past, present and future was the topic of the symposium in Cluj in which I presented this paper? This is precisely what *Dispak Dispac’h – European Twilight* gives us to think about as well as to feel, by immersing us in the experience of a work of art as well as an agora, as I will show in my second part.

Pluriversalist aesthetics and politics of a “work-agora” as antidotes to “monological universalism” (Fátima Hurtado Lopez)



Figure 2 – The audience walking and dancing around the musician Léonie Pernet during *Dispak Dispac’h – Crépuscule européen*, staged by Patricia Allio, 2023.

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The *dramaturgy* of *Dispak Dispac’h – European Twilight*, first of all, and what I will call the “spoken texts” of the show (because they are real oral testimonies transcribed by Patricia Allio to transform them into texts learned by heart, while remaining non-fictional texts), seem to me to qualify as pluriversalist because of the

multiplicity of geopolitical worlds they embody. Far beyond “giving a voice” to exiles and other traditionally minoritised people, the aim is to speak *with* them, rather than *for* them. The difference is radical: *Dispak Dispac'h – European Twilight* is not yet another work of fiction written by a white author who would make exiles invisible by asserting his universalist and romantic vision of migration without even consulting the people concerned when writing, as it seems to be the case with some literary and theatrical works. On the contrary, *Dispak Dispac'h – European Twilight* is dramaturgically constituted as a succession of *situated* words, from the global South as well as the critical North, which are then put on an equal footing by the staging, as we shall see later. And even though the testimonies that make up the second half of the show resemble long tirades rather than short lines, they never reproduce the monologism of Eurocentric universalism: conversely, the resonance between the words, a resonance that weaves itself throughout the ritual, provokes a genuine pluriversalist *polyphony* in the audience's listening.

In the longer, six-hour version of the play, known as *European Twilight*, which is the one I saw in person and which is therefore the one I chose to analyse in this article, the testimonies, to name but a few, of Jalila Khenissi, a Tunisian activist fighting for freedom of movement and the right to repatriate the bodies of her two sons Hedi and Medi, who disappeared in the Mediterranean in 2019; David Yambio, a Sudanese activist and founder of *Refugees in Libya*, who himself survived multiple shipwrecks before managing to settle in Europe; or Moctar Dan Yaye, co-founder of Alarm Phone Sahara in Niger, all these testimonies are not just personal life stories, but *also* radical critiques of both the *Frontex* agency, which knowingly refuses to provide assistance to people who risk death at sea and therefore plays a full part in the “necropolitics²²” of the European institutions, *and* of the contemporary *Françafrique*, the neo-colonial structure that continues to plunder uranium and many other mineral resources in Niger for the benefit of French multinationals like Areva, thereby maintaining unequal development between certain African countries and the former colonial power and driving thousands of people into poverty.

But all these pluriversalist viewpoints from the global South do not prevent critical voices from the North from being heard, such as that of Stéphane Ravacley, who went on hunger strike to protest against the deportation of his baker's apprentice, or the voice of Bridget Anderson, researcher and director of *Migration Mobilities* in Bristol, who develops, in the *European Twilight* version of the show, an implacable analysis of the social and political causes that produce the condition of “undesirables” to

²² Patricia Allio directly refers this concept forged by Achille Mbembe during her performance. See Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, Duke University Press, 2019.

which exiled people are assigned. *Dispak Dispac'h – European Twilight's* cosmopolitical pluriversalism is therefore a move *beyond* Eurocentric universalism, not a step backwards; a polyphony of all critical voices, whether from the South or the North.



Figure 3 – Jalila Khenissi in *Dispak Dispac'h – Crépuscule européen*, staged by Patricia Allio, 2023. © Christophe Raynaud de Lage / Festival d'Avignon

But this pluriversalism, far from being purely dramaturgical, also manifests itself in all the *scenic* dimensions of the creation. Thanks to Mathieu Lorry-Dupuy's set design, when I attended *Dispak Dispac'h – European Twilight* at the Avignon Festival, we were invited to sit on bleachers from the outset, on which were *also* Elise Marie, the actress who would carry the indictment in the first part, *and* all the witnesses who would speak in the second part. Far from reiterating the modern universalist viewpoint of the West through a frontal scenography that would have placed the stage in a position of superiority in relation to the audience, *Dispak Dispac'h's* quadrifrontal set-up makes it possible, conversely, to institute from the outset a radical and pluriversalist equality between all the people in presence, in

a form of agora²³ that blurs all the modern boundaries between aesthetic works and life, art and activism. Everything is aesthetically conceived, which is why it *is* a work of art; but when I was in the gymnasium of the Lycée Mistral in Avignon, I *also* had the impression of taking part in a political assembly (for instance, to organise a general strike), thanks to the spatial configuration that plunged us into a *real*, non-fictional agora. Moreover, at the start of the second movement of this agora-performance, i.e. after the indictment and at the start of the testimonies, we are invited to sit on the *Benches of Utopia* created by the artist Francis Cape, which brings us even closer to the witnesses, since we are allowed to move from the slightly off-centre bleachers of the first part to benches *in the centre* of the stage. This displacement immerses us even more in the *real* emotional and political power of the agora by further blurring *the separation* between art and life.

Dispak Dispac'h – European Twilight's pluriversalism is therefore a genuine "artivism", in terms of both its dramaturgy and its scenography, in other words a quasi-situationist overcoming of the thoroughly modern *split* between, on the one hand, so-called "art for art's sake" and the pseudo-"autonomy of art" – which is in any case a fiction under capitalism –, and, on the other hand, everyday life in all its "politicity", and all the activisms that run through it.

This presence of "everyday life" was all the more powerful in the long version known as *Crépuscule européen* because, during this agora that lasted nearly six hours, we were all invited to dine together outside between the "classic" form of *Dispak Dispac'h* (which corresponds to the show-agora still touring in France in 2025), and the special "third part" that was only being performed on 21st July 2023 in Avignon, with the presence of a number of additional witnesses. Enjoying a delicious shared meal cooked by the *Grenade et Pistache* restaurant, founded in Marseille by the two Syrian sisters Nahed and Samar Damlaki, we were able to take the time to really meet each other in the courtyard of the Lycée Mistral gymnasium *before coming back* to listen to other witnesses and dancing on the music of Léonie Pernet – again breaking with the capitalist theatrical conventions that have turned works of art into commodities to be consumed in a hurry before heading home as quickly as possible after the show, sometimes without even taking the time to chat with other spectators after the performance. That evening, in contrast, we were not forced but joyfully *encouraged* to meet *during* the performance-agora *itself*, and thus to become aware of the *actions* that we could also initiate collectively *at the end* of the experience.

²³ Patricia Allio herself and the researcher Sophie Lucet use the words "agora" and "theatre-agora". See Patricia Allio and Florian Gaité (dir.), *Autoportrait à : performer les identités relationnelles*, Brest, Éditions Autonomes, 2025, « Nous », « Autoportrait à l'agora », p. 60, and Sophie Lucet, « Faire agora, une nouvelle inflexion du théâtre documentaire ? », in Patricia Allio and Florian Gaité (dir.), *Autoportrait à : performer les identités relationnelles*, op. cit., pp. 62-69.



Figure 4 – The shared dinner imagined by Nahed and Samar Damlaki in the middle of *Dispak Dispac'h – Crépuscule européen*, staged by Patricia Allio, 2023.
© Christophe Raynaud de Lage / Festival d'Avignon

So, it seems to me that *Dispak Dispac'h – European Twilight* goes even further, in its form, than twentieth-century documentary theatre, which, as aesthetically powerful as it was with Erwin Piscator, Peter Weiss and many other directors, still maintained a certain *boundary* between stage and auditorium, between performance and life, between the form “work of art” as an object and the rest of existence. Patricia Allio and her team’s work-agora, contrariwise, by virtue of the very *experience* it institutes, blurs our traditional perceptions: are we still faced with a *representation* outside our daily lives, or are we instead immersed in the very *reality* of the artists and witnesses who speak to us, even if this immersion is nuanced by an aesthetic distancing that protects it from the risks of the spectacular commercial voyeurism of television, for instance? I’m leaning towards the second option: *Dispak Dispac'h – European Twilight* is urging us to resume the work begun by the Situationists, such as Guy Debord and Raoul Vaneigem, of overcoming the economic, political, temporal and other *separations* between art and life²⁴.

²⁴ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, PM Press, 2024 [1967], chapter 1: “Separation Perfected”.

The pluriversalist “artivism” of *Dispak Dispac'h* is also reflected in the graphics of the banners, created by H-Alix Sanyas, which, when unfurled, inscribe militant slogans in the four corners of the scenography, designed both as trilingual demonstration banners in French, Arabic and Farsi, and as works of graphic art; I quote the banners: “Freedom of movement for all; Wall by wall stone by stone; We will destroy the detention centres; No border, no nation, stop deportation”. Just as in another artist creation that was performed in 2023 during the same edition of the Avignon Festival, *Antigone in the Amazon* by the Brazilian Landless Movement and Milo Rau, the slogans of the struggle invade the whole of the stage, reminding us of the urgency of their very real demands: here again, the universalist-modern distinction between aesthetic invention and political struggle is abolished, giving us a glimpse of what would be a pluriversalism that would genuinely bring social mobilisations and artistic creations into dialogue.



Figure 5 – Moctar Dan Yaye and the motto “No border no nation stop deportation” in *Dispak Dispac'h – Crépuscule européen*, staged by Patricia Allio, 2023.
© Christophe Raynaud de Lage / Festival d’Avignon

Finally, the music of Léonie Pernet and the sound designed by Maël Contentin also play a very important aesthetic and political role in this agora-performance. Léonie Pernet's music, who was herself returning from Niger when she played in Avignon, set the pace for the whole dramaturgy of the ceremony, through its cyclical nature as much as through its sensory power, reminding us through experience of the importance of sound spaces and rhythm in the rituals of all societies, all eras, all cosmologies and all metaphysics. Maël Contentin's sound creation also contributes to this rhythm, giving all the spatialisation it needs to Léonie Pernet's music, especially with one protest song that appears at the same time as the banners, and which galvanises us sonically, just as the banners excite us visually. This song, called "Dispak Dispac'h" too, combines the voices of antiracist protesters reclaiming papers and a normal life to the French state with the music of Léonie Pernet; it has now been released in her new album *Poèmes pulvérisés*²⁵.

Through all its aesthetics and politics, from dramaturgy and texts to "sonography" and scenography, from the witnesses present to the staging of their incarnation, from sensitive experience and activism to the overcoming of their modern separation, *Dispak Dispac'h – European Twilight* gives us a multitude of pluriversalisms to feel and think about in polyphony, in a radical break with the "monological universalism" of modernity-coloniality²⁶. Of course, all these pluriversalisms remain to be deployed in much greater detail, in struggles as well as in thought and creation – but the next pluriversalist revolutions belong to us all *collectively*.

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²⁵ Léonie Pernet, « Dispak Dispac'h », in *Poèmes pulvérisés*. Available online; URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dn1eL4zm4DQ>; accessed on 31 August 2025.

²⁶ See Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, Duke University Press, 2011.

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Book Review

Diana-Felicia COLCERIU*:

**The Protection of Human Rights at the European Level.
A Comparative Study: Council of Europe – European Union. –
A Review of the Human Rights Problem
in the Context of Europe of 2025**

The work of Mihaela Gavrilă (Morar), following the concept of human rights in *The protection of human rights at the European level. A comparative study: Council of Europe – European Union*, represents an excellent incursion in the problematic chosen which is of essential meaning to every European citizen. It is a very complete thesis, following the concept chosen by the author and also the various institutions in Europe that help protect human rights. What is necessary to be done now is to see if this work, which was published in 2009, is still not only of interest today, but if it is still enough in the context of the recent conflicts of the world. While reading the book I kept on thinking about the question whether Europe, through its institutions has become the power that it was supposed to be, if Europe can still manage the conflicts inside and outside of it as it wanted to do, and if it can protect the human rights of the European citizens.

The book is organized in three big chapters, an introduction and the conclusion suited to the topic. The first chapter is entitled “Introductory Notions” and it follows the concept of human rights throughout history. In this chapter we can see the concept chosen by the author evolving from the antique period, through

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the Age of Enlightenment, to nowadays when it is a very important theme of discussion not only in Europe, but in law, sociology, philosophy, human security problems, etc.

What is very important to keep in mind, and the author raises awareness to this, is that human rights are not something that can be imposed, it's not something that you can decide for other societies. If certain countries don't want to apply this concept in their law and in their rules, you cannot oblige them into doing so. But can we regulate this somehow? Is there any way in which human rights can be protected without imposing this concept on societies that don't want to apply it, but still somehow favor the application of it? This is where Europe comes in play. With all of the treaties, the conventions, and all the documents signed in the European Union or the Council of Europe, we can somehow regulate this. That is not to say that the European Union or the Council of Europe are some sort of entities that can police societies into adopting something that they don't want to. The reality is that the countries that usually don't want to apply this concept and introduce it in their society are the third world countries. These same countries would still want some sort of benefits from cooperating with European countries though. The fact that the European states need to protect human rights not only in their state, but also in the case of other cooperations that they might have, might be a way in which these third world countries are somehow eased into applying this concept in their societies as well if they want to cooperate with European states.

The book does talk about the UN Human Rights Protection System, the African Human Rights Protection System, and the Inter American System. It shows their problems and it gives certain solutions as to what can be done better, if the states come to a consensus. This is also a very important theme of discussion because human rights is not only a European problem, but it is also an international problem that needs to be handled. In the year 2025, there are a lot of new conflicts and a lot of human rights violations going on. In 2009, when the book was written, the human rights system was seen as something that was needed to be perfected in order to have a strong legacy in the future. But did we get there? At the time the book was written, the development of the situation looked as if everything was moving towards a very good, very stable situation. But now that we see all of the conflicts happening in 2025, we can't help but wonder if something was lost along the way.

The last two chapters of the analyzed thesis focus on the comparative study on the human rights problem in the context of the Council of Europe and in the European Union, respectively. Here, we can see how the concept of human rights emerges directly from the democratic values of the European states. The author presents, in a historical manner, many documents adopted by the Council of Europe

and the European Union that favored a secure, strong space for the European states, but very important, for the European citizens also. On one hand, there is the Council of Europe that adopted the *Convention of Human Rights*, an entity which was meant, in the beginning, to be created strictly on political basis, but which became essential to the human rights protection system. On the other hand, we have the European Union, which was conceived in the beginning as an economic entity, but became political as well, and also became of enormous importance in the problematic of the protection of human rights.

In the beginning, when states wanted to be part of the European Union, it was not mandatory for them to protect the human rights. A crucial turning point for the topic of discussion is the moment when human rights and their protection became an admissibility criteria in the European Union. This is the moment when the states that wanted to adhere to the European Union had to start changing their legislation in order to take part in this system that protects human rights. They started to be attentively monitored before being able to adhere to this entity. And this is very important because a lot of countries in the Eastern Europe were part of the communist bloc. Their legislation, even after getting out of the communist bloc, was not necessarily paying attention to the human rights concept. This is the moment when these states had to change not only their legislation, but their mentality towards their citizens.

The *Convention of Human Rights* mentions many human rights that ought to be protected, but because it would take way too much space and time to analyze all of them, I decided to stick to analyzing the human rights that have to do with the topic of punishment (this being my main topic of research also). The main rights guaranteed by the Convention which are of importance to the theme I chose are: the general obligation to respect human rights, freedom from torture and from inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the right to a fair trial, no punishment without law. There are also some added protocols which have to do with punishment, as for example protocol number six and thirteen that have to do with the death penalty, and protocol number seven, which specifies the right of appealing criminal matters, compensation for wrongful convictions, and the right not to be tried or punished twice. There are obviously many more rights that are protected, that have to do with punishment, but this is only a subjective selection.

On the topic of punishment there is a lot of emphasis being placed on protecting the dignity of the incarcerated people. This is not to be understood as some sort of praise for their actions, but is to be understood as a right of a human being, being protected for the simple fact that they are a human being. That is to say, Europe and its legislation start to see the incarcerated individual not only as

someone expelled from the community, as it was before¹, but as an individual with rights, that not only serves a punishment, but needs to be rehabilitated in order to be able to take part in the society again after serving their sentence.

It seems as if this new goal in terms of punishment and how sentences are served is focused more on the individual, but in reality this can't be further from the truth. The rehabilitation process that the European states start to encourage more and more these days, is in reality, a very selfish act of the state². Europe wants to rehabilitate individuals, but not for them to be better people per se, but so that when they get out, the society as a whole is not threatened by their presence. This being a selfish act is not necessarily a bad thing, because it aims at reducing recidivism, which is very beneficial for any state, but what I mean here is that the mentality didn't change so much in reality. Yes, the detainees are not seen anymore as slaves or as people that are expelled from a community and won't ever come back to it, but they are not seen necessarily as complete individuals. This is an example that a selfish act can do good to the society, can do good to its citizens, being them in liberty or incarcerated, but the same selfish act shows that there is still more emphasis being placed on the state and the society's rights, then on European citizens' rights.

There are still many more problems that need to be solved in terms of the punishment system in Europe. In theory, the convention and other documents are trying to set some new rules so that the punishment system works better and respects more the human rights of the individuals sentenced. In practice however, there are still a lot of things that don't work out and that are not respected from those rules set by Europe. An example for this is the overcrowding that we can see in a lot of prisons in Europe and the problem of the fair trials. By the latter one I mean the reoccurring situation in which individuals are awaiting trial for a very long time before being sentenced. In the Convention, there is a paragraph that says that every trial has to happen within a reasonable time. This is still a very vague and open to interpretation way of formulating things.

As we can see in terms of the punishment problem, Europe started to give some solutions but they are still not enough for the penal system to get better. For this to happen, all of the ideas and rules set by the European states need to be not only accepted by all the members of the European Union and respectively of the

¹ See the way that detainees were treated before in Michel Foucault, *History of madness*, London and New York, Routledge, 2006.

² Adriano Martufi, "The paths of offender rehabilitation and the European dimension of punishment: New challenges for an old ideal?", *Maastricht Journal of European and Comparative Law*, Vol. 25(6) 672-688, 2018.

Council of Europe, but put into practice. Until there is a consensus on this matter, things cannot get much better than they are right now. Similar to the topic I chose to analyze from the book, which is punishment, we can think of a lot of other topics that are in the same situation. There are solutions, but they are not necessarily being put into practice all the time.

Right after the Cold War, the idea of Europe meant a safe space, something that would bring with it security for the Member States. Starting with the events of 9/11, things in the world didn't seem so manageable anymore. From that moment until this day, in the year 2025, we are being faced with fanaticism and a lot of extremism, we are being faced with conflicts, wars, and poverty. What does this mean for the entity that is Europe? Does it mean that Europe lost something along the way? From being so optimistic and positive about the development of human rights to seeing conflicts every day where human rights are not even taken into consideration, there is a long way. So where is the Europe that wanted so much to protect the human rights? Where are the European citizens that were thoughtful in terms of alterity? And the last question that I want to leave open is, can we still come back to what Europe was supposed to mean and to the protection of human rights at an international level?

The book of Mihaela Gavrilă (Morar) is an excellent starting point for us to see the ideal of Europe. It is a very well composed book, with a lot of information that is necessary to be read by every European citizen, in my opinion. We also have to look into how this topic of protecting the human rights is connected to the one of human security at an international level³. These two topics are not only linked, but are essential to be understood in our contemporary time. The problems of today's world are not so easy to be solved and managed, but I strongly believe that the European states still have what it takes to form that unity that Europe is, and to try to protect its citizens from all the religious fanaticism, the extremism, the wars and the poverty we are being faced with.

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Book Review

Paula Pompilia TOMI*:

Understanding and Conscious Experience. Philosophical and Scientific Perspectives

When it comes to the most common terms, those that we use on a daily basis, philosophy seems to have a hard time defining them. It is not that we do not have a grasp of those concepts, but rather that we cannot provide a satisfactory definition, one that can easily be generalised and used in different domains. First, it was 'truth'. Then, 'meaning' followed. 'Understanding' had to be on the team as well. These are terms that are used daily, but they also have an important role in the scientific and formal knowledge. Therefore, it is not an unfounded philosophical work, it is a much needed one, that also impacts non-philosophical fields.

'Understanding and Conscious Experience. Philosophical and Scientific Perspectives' edited by Andrei Ionuț Mărășoiu and Mircea Dumitru manages to collect philosophical articles focused on 'understanding'. What is interesting is the fact that the book does not focus solely on an aspect of the term, or on a specific philosophical tradition, but gathers different perspectives that are trying to provide answers to distinct questions. This provides almost an exhaustive image of the philosophical work done around this concept, making this book intriguing both for those newly interested, and for the titrated philosophers.

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As Mărășoiu mentions in the *Introduction*, there are different types and aspects of understanding. Objectual understanding and explanatory understanding are different, since the first one is holistic, while the second is pointed. Also, grammar seems to point out that there must be differences between understanding *that*, understanding *of*, and understanding *why*. In order to capture different dimensions of the concept, the book is divided into three parts. The first one focuses on how can the term be defined, and its links with other terms and fields. The second part links understanding with consciousness. This section includes articles that explain both artistic understanding and understanding transformative experiences. Finally, the third part incorporates articles that are focusing on a specific domain of understanding: from mathematical and formal understanding, to moral understanding, and to scientific one.

When it comes to moral understanding, Kelp supports a systematic knowledge account. This new account avoids the problem of both moral explanationism and moral manipulationism. The new systematic knowledge account of moral understanding is more complex, since it takes into account both understanding *why* and understanding phenomena. The perspective starts from specifying the maximum degree of moral understanding and then moves on to degrees of moral understanding. Therefore:

“Degree of moral understanding of P is a function of distance from maximally systematic knowledge of P: the closer one approximates maximally systematic knowledge of P, the higher one’s degree of moral understanding of P.” (Kelp, 2025, p. 233)

In order to extend the proposal to understanding *why*, the author suggests that moral understanding *why* should be seen as a species of moral understanding of phenomena (Kelp, 2025, p. 234). This perspective seems to work for those that are willing to accept such a reductionism, because, in the end, we seem to have just one type of understanding, namely understanding phenomena. Since understanding *why* is a species of the first kind, the route to reductionism is wide open. Therefore, it might not be suitable for those that want to support the idea that understanding phenomena and understanding *why* differ in kind.

Knowledge seems to be central in understanding other notions. Therefore, some philosophers - for example, Williamson - gave up the classical definition of knowledge, namely the one provided by Plato. The classical definition of knowledge is to understand it as justified true belief. However, as Gettier pointed out, there might be some situations when the definition seems not to work. Therefore, taking knowledge as a primitive notion and using it to define other concepts seems to be an alternative route to the classical perspective. The perspective looks quite

intuitive and helpful when it comes to the philosophical work. However, there are some aspects of this perspective that might not be that intuitive. Dumitru points out that Williamson's idea of being 'cognitively homeless' might not work in all cases.

Williamson considers that there does not exist a central core of mental states. This implies that despite the fact that an agent a might know that p , it does not follow that the agent knows that a knows that p (Williamson apud Dumitru, 2025, p. 182). Despite the fact that one might agree with the idea that necessarily no proposition is luminous, one might also argue that 'at least some propositions can be luminous for some agents' (Dumitru, 2025, p. 182). The idea that Dumitru argues for in the article is that at least for some contents we might experience semantic or cognitive qualia.

In order to support the claim, Dumitru provides arguments from modal logic and Euclidean geometry. It is easily noticeable that sometimes we might prefer a more intuitive structure or theory over another structure. For example, despite the fact that many-valued non-classical logics are meant to be alternatives to classical (bivalent) logics, the meta-logic of those many-valued logics is expressed using a bivalent logic (Dumitru, 2025, p. 188). It seems that despite the fact that we might be able to build theories or formal systems that give up at least one of the classical logic principles, we are still using those principles to either define the new concepts from those theories, or to do a meta-theoretical analysis of the new perspectives. If we are trying to explain why this happens, we might end up with an explanation as following:

"(...) if we are aware of our familiarity and ease in working with a structure, that might be a mark (or a symptom) of its preeminence (...) In other words, cognitive *qualia strike us* when such representations occur. When a structure is privileged over another structure than with respect to the one that gets represented in it." (Dumitru, 2025, p. 189)

The concept of preeminence seems to support the idea that some things/processes might have cognitive qualia. Dumitru's arguments are clear and well developed in order to support this claim. The question that the author provides a well-argued answer for might have similar answers from different fields. The ones presented in this article come from a formal and mathematical perspective. However, one might find some preferred notions or concepts that are used to define others, based on the fact that they seem more familiar or intuitive. We can simply return where we started, and focus on the so-called primitive concepts. It seems that we are tempted to use *truth*, *meaning*, *knowledge* and other terms, even if we might have other

alternatives. We seem to do so based on the fact that we are more familiar with those and to the structures they are part of. Therefore, Dumitru's idea might be extended beyond the formal approaches.

A transformative experience has effects both on a personal and epistemological level. Such an experience gives a new perspective, it provides new cognitive abilities and it can change your core preferences. Despite the fact that all these explanations use vague terms, the idea remains quite clear: a transformative experience is 'epistemologically relevant in such a way that may trigger a change of identity' (Toboşaru, 2025, p. 150). Toboşaru offers a clear presentation of what a transformative experience might be and its core elements and taxonomies.

The author offers convincing counterarguments for the idea that a transformative experience must be a new kind of experience, not just a token of an old one. It seems quite intuitive that the claim might be false, since new tokens of an already experienced experience might be transformative as well. Let us take a different example from the ones proposed by Toboşaru: the loss of a loved one. We might have previously experienced the death of a loved person, but it might be a specific person's loss that might be truly transformative for us. Of course, someone might consider each loss as a new kind of experience since it involves different persons. However, if we open this route, we might easily argue that each experience that involves something new is a new kind of experience.

The author points out that not all transformative experiences are voluntary or individual. It seems that some interpersonal experiences, or even collective ones might be transformative. For example, starting a revolution is clearly collective and it might turn out to be transformative. According to Toboşaru:

"(...) it is rather more appropriate to think that transformative experiences are rather epistemically transformative and identity transformative, given that the expression 'personal transformative' closes the real possibility of there being also collective transformative experiences." (Toboşaru, 2025, p. 152)

This might be the case. But there can also be a different approach related to this aspect. Despite the fact that someone can argue that there might be collective actions, when it comes to experiences, someone might consider this quite hard to be argued for. It is one thing to inflate an ontology with collective agents - it might be argued that even this is quite problematic - but how can collective experiences be explained? Since an experience seems to be strongly linked to one's brain and one's body, we would need - at least - a collective brain in order to support such collective experiences.

However, the author might have in mind a different perspective: rather than suggesting that there are collective experiences in the sense presented above, he might have suggested that since there are collective actions, a collective experience might be understood as: at least two people facing the same (sensorial/cognitive/or any other type of) input, thus (possibly) having a similar experience. It should also be added that the author mentions collective mystic or religious experiences. For these, the argument mentioned in the previous paragraph might not work, since they seem to differ in kind.

The article ends up with a useful matrix of transformative experiences that sums up the main concepts used.

To conclude, the book edited by Andrei Mărășoiu and Mircea Dumitru covers different questions related to the concept of understanding, questions that come from different philosophical areas, offering a comprehensive image of the work done in the field. The articles included in the book consist of well-developed and well-argued perspectives.

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