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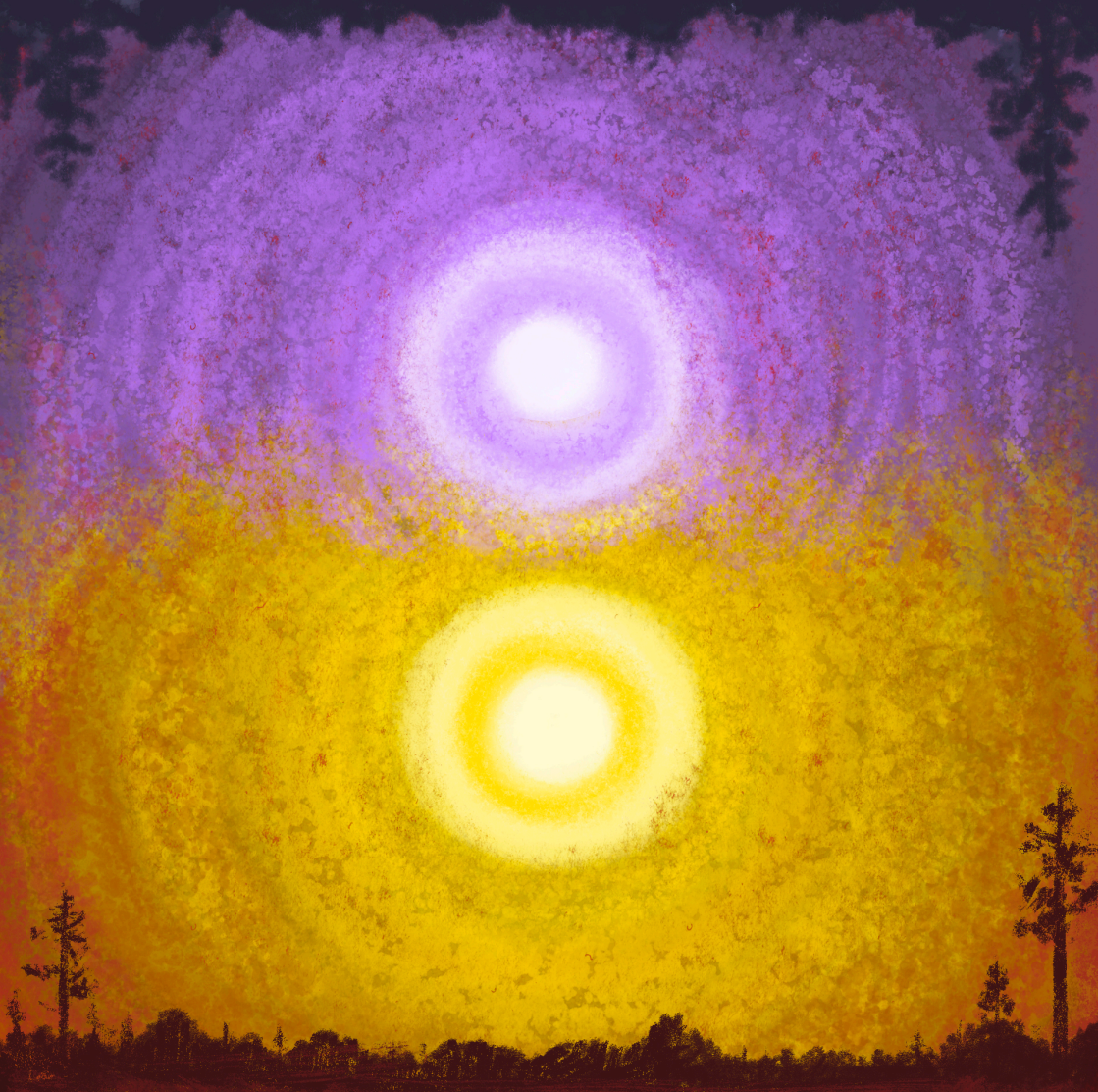

The Subjective and The Objective: Philosophical Traditions in Dialogue

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The Subjective and The Objective:
Philosophical Traditions in Dialogue

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About Perspectives

Perspectives: UCD Postgraduate Journal of Philosophy is an annual blind peer-reviewed journal edited and published by postgraduate students at the School of Philosophy, University College Dublin, Ireland. Since 2008, the journal has featured a diverse array of content, including research articles, symposium and conference papers, book reviews, interviews, and artistic contributions. It serves as platform for postgraduate students and recent graduates to explore and engage with various philosophical traditions, ranging from the history of philosophy to analytic and continental philosophy, as well as underrepresented traditions. The journal is available in both online and print formats, making its content accessible to a wide audience.

About the Contributors

Joseph Cohen is a leading philosopher in the continental tradition today, working at the School of Philosophy at University College Dublin since 2007. His philosophical research revolves around the questions of sacrifice and meaning, forgiveness and history, testimony and responsibility, truth and justice. Professor Cohen has published extensively on Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, Levinas and Derrida. He is also principal investigator of a research project at UCD – the first of its kind in Ireland – on Jewish Thought and Contemporary Philosophy.

Georgi Zhechev completed his MA degree in Philosophy and Literature at University College Dublin in 2024. His MA Thesis is entitled "The Notions of Desire and Death in the Philosophies of Hegel, Freud, and Lacan. A Critical Examination of the Dialectics of Psychoanalysis" and deals with the dialectical workings of psychoanalysis and the parallels between the Hegelian *Aufhebung* and the Freudean *Vereinigung*. He also holds an MA degree in Liberal Arts with a focus on Philosophy and Film Studies from the University of Dundee. He is currently enrolled in the Philosophy PhD programme at University College Dublin. His research interests include German idealism (particularly Hegel's dialectical method), existentialism, psychoanalysis (specifically Freud and Lacan), critical theory, and phenomenology.

Xingchen Mao obtained his MA in Philosophy from KU Leuven and is currently a PhD Candidate at NUI Maynooth. His research interests include all major areas in phenomenological research with a particular focus on Husserlian transcendental phenomenology; the nuances of phenomenological analysis of time-consciousness, the understanding of meaning and being, the eidetic ideation of objects and the transcendental reduction of the natural world, the lifeworld as the turning-back of consideration from a transcendental-phenomenological perspective, and so on. His doctoral project is an investigation into Transcendental Illusion and the Problem of Immanence-Transcendence in Kant and Husserl.

Natalija Cera is a doctoral researcher in Philosophy and a Research Ireland Postgraduate Scholar at University College Dublin. The working title of her project is "Understanding Belonging in the

Condition of Migration." Through this project she aims to answer the question "What does the phenomenon of belonging mean in the condition of migration?" In order to contribute to the critical examination of the underexplored connection between experiences of belonging and being oriented in the world as a migrant, she draws on conceptual resources from critical phenomenology and hermeneutics, in particular the works of Sara Ahmed, Maria Lugones, and Richard Kearney.

Misha Goudsmit is a second-year postgraduate researcher in the School of Philosophy at University College Dublin, where he examines issues at the intersection of meta-philosophy, meta-metaphysics, and aesthetics. His research addresses the problem of how thought experiments can be epistemically conducive for philosophical inquiry despite their susceptibility to framing biases. He argues that philosophical thought experiments are best understood as narrative frames which serve the rational function of guiding the adoption of apt perspectives. As such, thought experiments constitute a vital part of hermeneutical inquiry: the type of inquiry aimed at finding the most practically, morally, and epistemically fruitful ways of making sense of situations. Previously, Misha studied philosophy, sociology, and politics at Amsterdam University College, KU Leuven, and the University of Amsterdam. Outside of tutoring for undergraduate philosophy modules, he is currently serving as the PhD representative of UCD's School of Philosophy, as well as an active member of its Graduate Committee. He has also presented his work at conferences and workshops in Hong Kong, Oslo, and Helsinki.

Thomas Froy is an FWO-funded Fellow at the Institute of Jewish Studies and the Department of Philosophy at the University of Antwerp. His research investigates the meaning of 'home' or 'dwelling' in twentieth century French- and German-Jewish thought (Martin Buber, Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida), especially as it reflects or anticipates the contemporary rise of xenophobia, Islamophobia, ethnonationalism and anti-immigrant sentiment in the UK, Europe and Israel/Palestine. He is in the very final stages of his Doctoral work and intends to continue his research into notions of the 'domestic' and the 'everyday'.

Eve Poirier is a DPhil student in the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Oxford. She holds a BSc in Mathematics and Philosophy and an MPhil in Philosophy both from the University of Warwick, where she also worked as a research assistant in the Warwick Mind and Action Research Centre. Her research focuses on the study of practical reasoning, particularly on irrationality and different kinds of action contrary to reason, including moral failure and akrasia. She is also interested in the intersection of philosophy of mind, action, and ethics, and the special place that practical reasoning holds in connecting these subfields.

Antonio Pio de Mattia is a PhD Candidate in the School of Philosophy at University College Dublin. He obtained his Bachelor's and Master's degrees from the La Sapienza University of Rome, where his scholarly pursuits have centered on critical theory, hermeneutics, and the philosophical foundations of communicative rationality. His current research critically examines Jürgen Habermas' transcendental-pragmatic method, focusing on its application in evaluating truth and normative rightness across diverse contexts of justification and signification. He has presented his research at prestigious international conferences and is dedicated to advancing philosophical discourse on democracy, ethics, and social justice.

Daphne Kae Schwarz (they/she) aquired a BA in State Studies at Erfurt University in 2015, and enrolled in an MA in Philosophy at Göttingen University which they completed in 2018. In 2024, she was awarded the title Doctor of Philosophy with a thesis on moral epistemology which was published as *Der Ethische Standpunkt. Moralepistemologie jenseits von Realismus und Antirealismus*. Other publications of hers are on public health ethics and personhood in video games. Daphne's research interest concern metaethical questions, virtue ethics, theories of the good life, philosophical anthropology, phenomenology of the lived body, and pragmatism.

Pablo Vera Vega is a Substitute Professor at the University of La Laguna. He graduated in Philosophy from the University of the Balearic Islands and obtained his Master's degree in Philosophical Research and his PhD from the University of La Laguna. In his research, which falls within the fields of Social and Political Epistemology and Applied Philosophy of Language, he investigates

the philosophical aspects of the post-truth phenomenon, focusing on notions like distrust, bullshit, and pseudo-expertise. His work is part of the project "Looking at the World with New Eyes: Perspectives, Frames, and Perspectivism". He has carried out research stays in Turin (UniTo), Barcelona (UB), Zaragoza (UniZar), and Dublin (UCD). He has collaborated with journals such as *Análisis*, the journal of the SLMFCE, and *Laguna*, and has participated in conferences such as the XI SEFA Congress, the XXV World Congress of Philosophy, the XI Conference of the SLMFCE, the 11th ECAP, and the Final Conference of the PERITIA Project. In addition, he has taught courses on the Philosophy of Language, Philosophical Analysis, and the Philosophy of Social Sciences.

Maddalena Borsato is a post-doctoral Research Fellow at the University of Gastronomic Sciences (Pollenzo, Italy). From July 2022 to November 2023, she held a post-doctoral research position at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto (Japan). Her research interests encompass gustatory aesthetics, philosophy of food, eating disorders, and the intersection of cooking and pastry with art and design. On these topics, she is the author of one monograph and several scientific papers. Beyond her academic commitments, she has been a pastry chef since 2014 and actively participates in various projects—such as workshops and food design initiatives—that promote food as a tool for communication.

Bruno Cortesi is an *Ernst Mach* OeAD Scholar at the University of Graz. He has obtained a Ph.D. in 'Cognitive Neuroscience and Philosophy of Mind' at the School of Advanced Studies *IUSS* of Pavia, in Italy. Before that, he obtained a Master in 'Consciousness and Embodiment' at the University College of Dublin and a Master in Philosophy at the University of Pavia. He has been a visiting researcher at the University of Cambridge, the Central European University and the University of Fribourg. His research interests mainly concern the intersections of the epistemology and the metaphysics of conscious phenomena, with particular reference to the phenomenological approach and to non-dualistic approaches alternative to mainstream physicalist materialism about consciousness (e.g., neutral monism, panpsychism, idealism, *etc.*). He also has an interest for the History of Philosophy and for non-Western Philosophies (especially Indian Philosophy).

About this Issue

Welcome to the 11th issue of *Perspectives: UCD Postgraduate Journal of Philosophy*. The current issue of *Perspectives* sets out to explore theories and counter-theories of objectivity and subjectivity. This year's topic has willingly been selected because of its ample breadth in content, method and scope. The subjective-objective distinction in fact cuts through a great variety of philosophical subjects and is adjacent to several important debates within them. More specifically, the present issue of *Perspectives* is underwritten by the intention of portraying the current state of the art relative to the chosen theme in a multitude of philosophical disciplines and methodologies, such as epistemology and metaphysics, philosophy of language and mind, phenomenology, political philosophy, and history of philosophical thought; not the least in what the literature commonly refers to as continental European philosophy and the Anglo-American analytic tradition. While discussion and argumentation seem of the essence to philosophy, and partly with reason, this issue of *Perspectives* strives for a complementary and adjacent goal, that of serving as platform of conversation between different conceptions of what philosophy is or should be whilst still maintaining the rigor that rightly informs philosophical reasoning. Its guiding interest is to foster dialogue across longstanding philosophical divides such as that between history of philosophical thought and philosophical analysis, or between the so-called continental and analytic traditions. While these demarcations can offer valuable meta-philosophical heuristics, they can also sometimes hinder philosophical progress across the spectrum.

Philosophy is known as the science which asks important questions about the meaning of life in all its facets (scientific, cognitive, political, ethical, axiological). Though a priori there is no bar setting limitations to how widely the subject matter of philosophical theorizing can range, there are competing accounts of philosophical methodology, with the continental-analytic divide delineating just one direction these accounts may take. In this regard, the question of whether and how reality is distinct from appearance, or the world as perceived by the subject, strikes us as a rather fundamental one: it appears to us as a question relating to the form or method of philosophy rather than to the more specific question of the subject matter or content of philosophical theories.

We intuitively assume that a clear delineation of the distinction between the realm of the subjective and that of the objective should be a necessary requirement of any conception of philosophical methodology regardless of the specificities pertaining to different research areas. Despite this appearance of fundamentality, there exist opposing philosophical conceptions of the threshold separating the world as it appears to the subject and the world as it is. Perhaps then, our intuitions might not be accurate after all. Perhaps the very intuition of the methodological fundamentality of the distinction mentioned above is arbitrary. On that note, who is to say that a theory of reality, or a theory of appearance, is indeed methodologically basic to philosophical reasoning? In fact, not only our intuitions but also some philosophical theories openly challenge whether the distinction is sufficiently clear or useful. These theories moreover explicitly criticize the presupposition that the subjective-objective distinction is empirically, historically, or even cognitively and psychologically, real. Despite similar criticisms, it is at least clear that the topic has enjoyed significant currency over time and has made repeated appearances in the history of philosophical thought.

The 11th issue of *Perspectives* is formed by an interview, eight research articles, and two reviews. The research articles include an honorary essay dedicated to Professor Maria Baghramain (UCD) to celebrate her untiring support to *Perspectives* throughout the years, from its inception to its current stage. This essay, written by Pablo Vera Vega and titled "Distrust, Suspicion and Criticism", picks up from a Workshop on Professor Maria Baghramian's philosophy featuring Professor Baghramian as keynote speaker, entitled "Reading Putnam" and held at the University of La Laguna, Spain, on November 12-14, 2024 (Project PID2022-142120NB-I00 funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation). The international workshop of La Laguna focused on all three aspects of Baghramian's philosophical thought: the foundational strand, covering epistemology and foundational questions concerning relativism; the technical strand, including philosophy of language and history of analytic philosophy; and the most recent strand, namely social epistemology, trust and democracy. The workshop has hosted scholars with diverse backgrounds ranging from philosophy of language to contemporary social epistemology and

ethics. The social epistemological component is where Professor Baghramian's recent efforts have produced rather significant outputs; not the least her newest prestigious research project ETICA, funded by Horizon Europe's European Research Area Chair program, and dedicated to the 5-year research theme "Hope and Trust in a Time of Multi-Crises". It will be carried out mostly at the Center for Ethics in Public Affairs of the American University of Armenia (AUA). The topic of Pablo's paper, namely that of trust, is one to which Professor Baghramian has dedicated considerable energies over the last 10 years, starting from the 2015 project "When Experts Disagree" (WEXD), an interdisciplinary research project funded by the Irish Research Council New Horizons Award Scheme.

Foreword

There is in philosophy a legitimate question as to the nature of objectivity and its relation to subjectivity. One approach suggests that by rephrasing it in more familiar terms we can thereby grasp the distinction more closely: subjective is to mind and the way the world appears to us, as objective is to truth and the way the world is despite us. This however leaves us short of an explanation. In fact, the two words are technical terms of philosophical jargon. Very different philosophical disciplines, methodologies and traditions, have grappled with these concepts in very different ways. Some have even questioned the legitimacy of posing a difference at all.

According to idealism, the world is an epistemic construction of the subject. According to realism, instead, the world exists independently of our thinking. Parallel to these metaphysical positions are correlated epistemological theses. An idealist theory might construe knowledge in terms of internal coherence of reasoning. A realist theory might instead believe that our thinking is subject to constraints from outside the conceptual sphere. Idealism and realism both face important, yet different, philosophical predicaments. Though idealism is well-equipped to explain how the external world is conceptualizable by beings like us, it is ill-suited to explain the supposed normativity and objectivity of knowledge and truth. If what counts as objective is a projection of my subjective point of view, then who is to say that my beliefs are correct? Some might argue that idealism leads to incoherent positions like solipsism. If my awareness of what appears to me is the foundation of what counts as objective, then the only possible notion of objectivity that is in general available to me is what is objective for me. Hence the risk of solipsism; but does everyone else have access to what is objective for me? Is there one notion of objectivity, or instead are there are as many conceptions of objectivity as there are other subjects? If the latter, hence the risk of relativism, how would I know it? Is the existence of others something I can know? On the other hand, though realism is well-equipped to explain why we take our knowledge as objective and normative, it faces a problem of epistemic access. How can we establish cognitive contact with a reality that is supposedly external to our subjective standpoints? A realist position might choose to argue that whichever external factors constrain thought, these are

epistemically within our reach as they are discovered and improved through our best current science. One might respond, however, that this scientific approach to realism is simply a disguised form of idealism. Other realist theories, in fact, have an extra-scientific and more traditionally metaphysical approach. They claim that what exists out there are things with structures and contents not only independent of our first-person point of view but also wholly autonomous from our (scientific and ordinary) concepts of them. Nevertheless, these stronger forms of realism are confronted with very intuitive and plausible objections. If reality is not only external to the first-person point of view, but also constitutively beyond the contents within reach of the first-person, then the risk opens up that the world might remain utterly incommensurable to whatever cognitive or linguistic measurements we as a species may have at our disposal at any given time.

There is however an alternative approach. We could deny altogether that there exists a metaphysically and epistemologically significant dualism separating the subjective and the objective spheres. This takes us back to a more foundational question: is it philosophically necessary or useful to draw a telling separation of mind and world? Some theories reject this distinction, others retain it. Depending on how the divide is interpreted, there arise different and equally possible philosophical positions. The purpose of this consideration is not to take a stand regarding which ones are accurate, but just to make the point that a spectrum of philosophical views is possible which prospects the consequences of both positions, namely the acceptance and the rejection of the feasibility of the subjectivity-objectivity distinction. The broad overview of idealism and realism presented above serves only as a starting point for outlining some of the implications on both sides of the divide. The consequences of accepting or rejecting the subjective-objective dichotomy are primarily metaphysical and epistemological, but they affect all other levels of philosophical theorizing and research: the phenomenological, semantical and linguistic; the ethical, the political and even the aesthetic.

The above considerations are reflected in the papers included in this issue of *Perspectives*, appearing either as underlying philosophical assumptions or as positions towards or against which arguments

are directed. The objectivity-subjectivity separation is moreover developed in considerably different ways depending on the philosophical discipline and tradition. The papers composing this 11th issue of *Perspectives* cover philosophy of language and mind, metaphysics, theoretical epistemology and social epistemology, hermeneutics, de-colonial philosophy, phenomenology, history of philosophy, and aesthetics. Some papers focus on the philosophical status of a science or theory of subjectivity (research articles n. 1 and 3), while others reflect on the very metaphysical possibility of such science (see the interview to Professor Joseph Cohen). Some papers tackle the social-epistemological (cf. honorary essay), sociological (research article n. 4), political (research article n. 2) and aesthetic (review n. 1) consequences of the acceptance or rejection of the subjective-objective distinction. Other papers examine the topic within the field of contemporary epistemology (research article n. 7 and review n. 2). This raises an interesting question about whether theories that rely on the intermediation of sense data offer accurate accounts of perception, or whether, in attempting to bridge the gap between mind and world, they inadvertently reintroduce a form of idealism (see book review n. 2 and research paper n. 7). Finally, the present collection of papers extends into the field of philosophy of mind (research paper n. 5), philosophy of language (research paper n. 5 and 6), and aesthetics (book review n. 1) where arguments (for or) against solipsism abound. Though an extreme position, solipsism is perceived as something that is very much worthy of attention, considering how easily it appears to be lurking behind the metaphysical and epistemological assumptions of many theories, starting at least from 17th century British empiricism.

At the foundation of any theory of subjectivity or objectivity lies an even more fundamental question, namely whether, and in what way, that distinction should be drawn. This is the overarching concern that guides the papers collected in this 11th issue of *Perspectives*. Where and how do we find the threshold separating the objective and the subjective? Does subjective begin where objective ends? Is the distinction practically, psychologically or even empirically real? More foundationally, is it philosophically necessary or useful? The papers collected in the present volume offer a panoramic outlook on how these and related questions can be tackled in a variety of

philosophical fields. In so doing the papers provide a repertoire of philosophical approaches through which to analyze, confront and challenge the distinction between appearance as perceived by the subject and reality as it is, subjectivity and objectivity.

About the Contributions

The issue begins with an interview with Prof. Joseph Cohen (University College Dublin), one of the leading philosophers working in the continental tradition today whose research interests include Phenomenology, Contemporary French Philosophy, as well as Critical Theory and Jewish Philosophy. The interview was conducted by **Georgi Zhechev**, a UCD alumnus who recently enrolled in the Philosophy PhD programme at UCD. The question that initiates the interview is one regarding the philosophical origins of the concept of subject/*hypokeimenon* in which Cohen recognizes the workings of a certain logic of origin resting on the presuppositions of a purity and propriety, as well as of a reappropriating return to the truth of the concept in question. If one is to ask such a question philosophically, one needs to inquire into the background of such a logic by asking what, or rather who, is at work and presupposed in the origins of these concepts. In response to Zhechev's introduction of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and the question of whether or not the subject is wholly made up of unified opposites, Cohen is quick to point out that an alternative inquiry into the presuppositions of the origins of subjectivity is necessary, since the Hegelian dialectic always appropriates and reappropriates the essence of its negation. Through an analysis of the similarities and differences between the notions of subjectivity and *hypokeimenon* Cohen attempts to develop a logic of sacrifice as an alternative to the dialectical framework. He does this through a thorough investigation of the following historico-philosophical question; "what, or who (...) has the idea of *hypokeimenon* dissimulated and concealed to project itself in its transition and transformation, translation or transmutation into the concept of subjectivity?" (p. 7). The history of philosophy is, among other things, a history of such movements of dissimulation and concealment, but these movements are never totalising or all-encompassing, in spite of their ambitions. Thus, Cohen asks the provocative question of the necessary witness or subject of testimony; "Who remains "unsacrificiable" through its "sacrifice", who resists its sacrifice, breaks or interrupts the temptation of offering itself, of giving itself up, of abandoning itself in "sacrifice"? And thus, testifies to that which voids out, empties out, excavates the very logic of sacrifice so central in the speculative dialectic" (p. 16). Zhechev's final question regarding the proximity between Hegel and Freud

on the concept of the unconscious prompts Cohen to draw on the work of Eduard von Hartmann as an outlier in the discourse on the unconscious whose work shows that the otherness inhabiting every subjectivity remains irreducible to the process of dialectical reappropriation. By way of conclusion, the philosopher proposes a brief sketch of an alternative framework for understanding subjectivity as a kind of aporetic entity relentlessly haunted by that which it cannot subsume within itself despite this alterity being part of it; "As if we were called from "I think, I am" to "I return/ arrive unthinkable, other, spectral" (p. 23).

Inquiries into the dynamics of the relation between subject and object continue with a selection of research papers. This section of the issue opens with a paper on Brentano's descriptive psychology and its indebtedness to Kant's transcendental idealism, authored by **Xingchen Mao** (National University of Ireland Maynooth, NUI Maynooth). In the text Mau maintains that "despite methodological innovations made in the attempt to develop a more empirical alternative to Kant's transcendental idealism, Brentano's theory of knowledge does not meet these conditions" (p. 24). Such an evaluation is not intended to serve as a refusal of Brentano's method, but rather as a corrective of the philosopher's own harsh critique of post-Kantian philosophical systems as speculative in the pejorative sense. Through a close examination of the *a priori* character of Brentano's analysis of consciousness and conscious acts, as well as his attempts to establish an account of causality separate from those of Hume and Kant, Mau illustrates how Kant's 'shadow' remains a persistent element in Brentano's philosophy-as-descriptive-psychology, particularly in the relations between transcendence and immanence. As we read in the text, "Transcendence in the genuine Kantian epistemological sense never manifests (in Brentano's framework). Rather, the unknown for Brentano becomes an immanent part of the known" (p. 44).

Natalija Cera's article on hermeneutic invisibility in the context of migrant orientation transposes the subjective and objective from the sphere of theoretical philosophy onto that of social life. Drawing from the critical phenomenology of Sara Ahmed, as well as Miranda Fricker's landmark studies on epistemic injustice, Cera seeks to show how the two poles are intertwined in our lived experiences in

a manner that is "always situated in and interacting with the spatio-temporal and socio-political environments" (p. 66). The piece also features philosophical readings of fictional and autobiographical texts (*Kartonwand* by Fatih Çevikkollu and *The Island of Missing Trees* by Elif Shafak) as well as personal stories of migrants in the attempt to exhibit the workings of various instances of hermeneutic invisibility and/or injustice. By so doing, the paper shows how "a conditioned lack of relevant interpretative resources (words, concepts, meanings)," and the related hermeneutic invisibility that is inflicted upon migrant communities "leads to hermeneutical harm inflicted on the systemically marginalised group" (p. 68). The paper moreover illustrates the power of critical phenomenology for mitigating the ills stemming from such conditions.

Fourth to the line-up is **Misha Goudsmit's** paper 'Stories Outside the Head: Against Reductionist Narrativism' on narrativist theories of identity. As the author explains, according to so-called psychological continuity theories personal identity does not depend on self-consciousness but only on causal relations between a subject's mental states at spatiotemporally distinct moments of her existence. According to narrativist theories of mind, instead, personal identity consists of the psychological disposition to produce self-narratives. Misha's focus is Jeanine and Robert Schroer's (2014) specific interpretation of narrativism, which they call "narrative continuity theory", for it is based on a variation of psychological continuity. On this particular view, what constitutes our sense of identity is not merely the dispositional ability to generate self-narratives as the psychological continuity theorists would argue, but it is our awareness of these narratives as narratives of ourselves. According to Misha, personal identity cannot be reduced to internal factors but it is instead constituted of external elements such as socially shared norms and intersubjective intelligibility. Misha argues that self-narratives do not interface the external environment as if from a void. Rather, they are part of it. Self-narratives are intelligible only within a web of socio-cultural norms and publicly shared conventions of intelligibility and we cannot simply ignore the constraining role that the community plays.

Thomas Froy's paper on the sociological work of Georg Simmel, as well as its relation to Martin Heidegger's fundamental ontology developed in *Being and Time*, explores the notion of the subject and its place in the philosophers' thought. Presenting Simmel as a unique outlier of anti-subjectivist theory, Froy maintains that his work can be read as an attempt to simultaneously "move away from an investigation which itself thinks from the perspective of the singular subject (...) (as well as replace) a focus on the existence of the singular subject in favour of a focus on social interaction among a plurality of subjects" (p. 103). The paper also offers an account of the points of proximity and distance between Simmel and Heidegger. While both thinkers share the conviction that the subject is an inadequate framework for a philosophical inquiry into existence, their conclusions and subsequent directions are contrary. Froy notices that, while Simmel wants to broaden the notion of subjectivity, Heidegger wants to leave it behind in order to deepen the investigation into the fundamental aspects of existence. The essay thus provides a convincing attempt at both broadening the philosophical notion of the subject, as well as mitigating two very close theories that nevertheless remain essentially separated.

Next up we have **Eve Poirier's** paper 'Connecting the Second Person in Mind and Ethics' at the intersection of philosophy of mind, language and ethics. Eve critically engages with Donald Davidson's renowned account of objectivity as presented in his essay collection *Subjective, Objective and Intersubjective* (2001). She argues that, when it comes to the theory of other minds, Davidson's approach is informed by a third-personal perspective which seems highly vulnerable to the charge of solipsism. The problem with Davidson, Eve suggests, is the absence of a role for the concept of the second person. Poirier argues that, while Davidson's account places great importance on the presence of an interpreter observing and interacting with the speaker, Davidson's story fails to capture the intrinsically second-personal nature of our knowledge of the speaker's mind. According to Eve, while Davidson assigns a formal (semantical) role to me as the interpreter, the speaker I am observing is not recognized as a subject like me. Hence mutual recognition is absent. According to the view proposed in Eve's paper, instead, the content of your speech does not solely depend on my, the interpreter's, observation of what the words

you use mean; but also on what your words mean for me and on you addressing how your words are modulated by my awareness of them. Moreover, Eve's second-person considerations against solipsism point to an important connection with ethics which, it is maintained, is lacking in Davidson's third-person theory.

Antonio Pio de Mattia examines the relation between the subjective and the objective through his paper on Jurgen Habermas and Karl-Otto Apel entitled 'The Problem of Transcendental Justification: Reconciling Subjective Validity and Objective Truth in Discourse Ethical Framework'. He makes the claim that the former's formal-procedural model of truth based on intersubjective agreement suffers from a "fundamental circularity: the procedural norms that govern rational discourse presuppose the very validity they seek to establish" (p. 141). Further in the text De Mattia analyses Habermas' distinction between theoretical and practical discourses as the source of his proceduralist notion of truth, as well as the source of its limitations due to the presupposition of the necessary connection between argumentative discourse and the normative framework within which it unfolds. This creates an impasse observed by Apel whereby Habermas "reifies post-conventional rationality, a historically emergent epistemic modality specific to modernity, as if it were a transcendental condition of discourse" (p. 162). The paper concludes with an open question about the possibility of Habermasian discourse theory not relying on an implicit foundationalism regarding the notion of truth.

In the next paper, the author **Daphne Kae Schwarz** sheds light on how the work of a largely neglected philosopher, Helen Wodehouse (1880 – 1964), and more specifically her 1910 publication the *Presentation of Reality*, anticipates contemporary anti-representationalist theories like McDowell's in *Mind and World*. Dr. Daphne Kae Schwarz argues that, not only does Wodehouse's theory of perception anticipate McDowell's direct realism, but it represents an advancement with respect to contemporary theories. McDowell's and Wodehouse's accounts are both opposed to empiricist theories of knowledge where extra-conceptual elements like sensory inputs provide the foundation for the construction of theories of the world. According to these theories, perception plays two functions which it seems it cannot

have at the same time. Perception is both, something passively given outside the space of reasons and a source of evidence for knowledge. Moreover, this kind of empiricism presupposes there is a basic metaphysical asymmetry between the subject and the external public world. McDowell argues instead, that if perception is outside the domain of thought it cannot play the kind of role empiricism would want it to play. Therefore, perception itself must be somewhat conceptual but prior to judgment or other cognitive stances towards the world. So, perception is brought on this side of the concept-object gap. What is missing, our author argues, is a similar account of how the world can be brought on this side of the dichotomy, which would also explain how it is that the world is conceptualizable by beings like us. Daphne suggests that Wodehouse gives us exactly what we are missing. In Wodehouse's philosophy, the world is accessible to us because the objects of perception are, from the epistemological point of view, not independent substances passively waiting to be conceptualized but rather complexes of laws guiding our thoughts of those objects. Most importantly, Wodehouse's contribution challenges the intelligibility of the dualism implicit in the subjective-objective asymmetry model above.

In contemporary social epistemology a lot of emphasis is being placed on epistemic attitudes like trust and distrust because of their potential to secure communitarian and individual gains. There emerges here an important question concerning the social consequences of supposedly solipsistic attitudes like distrust and suspicion. A further unbeaten question, raised and addressed by **Dr. Pablo Vera Vega** in his paper 'Distrust, Suspicion, and Criticism' concerns whether distrust is really conducive to alienation and social disharmony: is distrust solipsistic as is often supposed? Against those who believe that distrust only produces paranoia, Pablo Vera Vega advocates that distrust is a crucial ingredient for the good development of humanity. The author shows that distrust is rather best conceptualized as the onset of objectivity, a practical epistemic attitude which prepares our minds to take a determinate cognitive stance on a given subject matter. For this reason, the attitude of distrust along with its cognate, suspicion, allows us to develop a critical attitude towards reality and towards that which

we find is simply given to us, perhaps through extemporaneous discussions on social media.

This volume of Perspectives concludes with two book reviews, the first being a review of Howard Robinson's *Perception and Idealism: An Essay on How the World Manifests Itself to Us, and How it (Probably) is in Itself* (2022) authored by **Dr. Bruno Cortesi** (University of Pavia). In his review Cortesi analyzes the author's defense of the sense-datum theory of perception against naive realism on the basis of his reading of David Hume, George Berkeley, and John Forester. While the scrutiny conferred by the reviewer is overwhelmingly positive, the text also highlights some potential shortcomings of Robinson's endeavour, such as the little interest he devotes to the phenomenological tradition, whether as a welcome supplement to his own theory or as a possible point of critique against it.

The second review has been written by **Dr. Maddalena Borsato**. It concerns Kenneth Liberman's book *Tasting Coffee: An Inquiry into Objectivity* (2022), a work of exceptional interest since not only it deals with philosophical notions of objectivity but also explores the socio-cultural practices and gustatory judgments employed in its construction and dissemination. The author's background in ethnomethodology, as well as his expertise in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Dan Zahavi, makes for a compelling interdisciplinary study of the notions of taste used to describe a beverage that has become a ubiquitous global commodity. While Borsato maintains that this can lead to the book being too technical for philosophical and lay drinkers, as well as it being very theoretically challenging for coffee experts, the illuminations of the work with regard to taste and objectivity lead overall to a positive review.

Agnese Casellato
Borna Šućurović

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A Philosophical Dialogue on the Genealogy of Subjectivity

Interview with Prof. Joseph Cohen

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Georgi Zhechev: Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in the discussion on the objective and the subjective for the 11th issue of *Perspectives: UCD Postgraduate Journal of Philosophy*. Here is my first question: What are the philosophical *origins* of the concept known as *hypokeimenon* or *subject*?

Joseph Cohen: Such a question posed at the beginning of our dialogue and without any preliminary development shows a certain *resolution*: *to get to the bottom*, *to the ground*, *to the foundation of that which is*, or otherwise said, *to return to the things themselves*! First point: your question aims at defining, and thus at confining, not the concept of *hypokeimenon*, and what we have – too easily – "translated" as *subjectivity* (we shall return to this historical shift, this passage or this "translation" from *hypokeimenon* to *subjectivity*), but the *origins* (which you mark the *plurality* – a marking which *in itself* would require an explication and a commentary of its own) of both these "concepts". Your question aims, and thus assumes, to reveal the *origins* of what we call *hypokeimenon* and/or *subjectivity*. It seeks to uncover that *from which* these "concepts" *come to presence* in the history of philosophy. Furthermore, your question also ventures into indicating in which manner these very "concepts" have interacted with each other and have related to other "concepts" of our philosophical tradition.

Our task here is therefore highly complex as it implies both a reading of the *origins* of what we call thinking – insofar as thinking implies a *hypokeimenon* and/or a *subjectivity*, which is not an absolute certainty either – as well as an interpretation of how and why these *origins* have enacted themselves in our philosophical history through the concepts of *hypokeimenon* and/or *subjectivity*.

However, your question also commits us to the position that there is one or multiple *origins*, and thus engages us into a certain *logic of the origin*, and thus an *original logic* from where it becomes possible to think conceptually, and most specifically, these two "foundational" concepts, *hypokeimenon* and/or *subjectivity*... According to which Law are we to admit and acquiesce, conform and follow this original position on the origin or origins of thinking? In the name of which Law are we to submit and subject the "concepts" of *hypokeimenon* and/or *subjectivity* to their enframing in a *logic of the origin* and what this logic implies – *firstly* the idea of a *purity* and *propriety*; and *secondly*, that of a *return*, at least the promise of a return to the "truth" of that which founds, an *appropriation* of that which lies at the original place from where erupts the possibility of situating and thus of grounding thinking itself?

Although we shall attempt to remain faithful to your question, we can already suspect – and indeed already have begun suspecting – that such a fidelity will also be *impossible*. Indeed, our "fidelity" to your question will also reveal a certain impossibility to not also undermine it by *dissociating* the question of the *origins* of *hypokeimenon* and/or *subjectivity* from that which remains irreducible to the philosophical trope of the *originary* and the *logos* of *origins*. In a certain sense, to your question, we would be tempted to ask preliminarily: what occurs *after* or *beyond* the *logos of origins*, or otherwise said, *who* occurs *before* and *prior to* the concepts of *hypokeimenon* and/or *subjectivity*? In this sense: *who* remains beyond or before the *logos of origins*? And thus: *who* evades, *who* could be the *who* who would occur before or after, who has passed before and occurs beyond what we have circumscribed under the name of the "origin"? Perhaps this *who* ought to remain *unnamed*. And perhaps we are approaching here the possibility to think towards the *unthinkable*: that is, a *thinking without origins*, *without reference* to an original *place* or *source* in which and from which all the signifiers we have associated to this historical development from *hypokeimenon* to *subjectivity* – "signification", "presence", "being", "universality", "rationality", "foundation", "self-consciousness", "humanity", "history", the "Law", etc. – are *given*.

In a certain sense, and without contradiction, to think the *unthinkable* would engage a radical manner of thinking an instance for a *who* which would erupt before what we have determined as the "origin", the "original", the "authentic" and in which and by which the *subject* would or could find comfort, its sure and assured place or source. *Who* "is" this *who*? That is, in which sense does this *who* before and beyond *subjectivity*, before and beyond the *hypokeimenon*, immemorially past and absolutely futural to the possibility of circumscribing an origin, of unification, essentialisation, synchronisation, and thus, of the capacity to determine that from which the concepts of *subjectivity* and/or *hypokeimenon* have oriented what we mean by *who*? And in which manner can this question affect our responsibility, philosophical certainly, but also ethical and political?

But before we enter into this *complex situation* provoked by your *abyssal* question on the *origin*(s) of what lies at the base, the ground and the foundation of thinking and thus of beings – a situation tracing a history which is in no manner linear or undeviating – allow us here to indicate another component of your question which *also* engages the *context* of our discussion. And this question pertains to another assumption: that of a certain idea of *language* from which *we* can even begin a discussion about the *origin*(s) of *hypokeimenon* and/or *subjectivity*. Indeed, your question also presupposes that *between* these two "*subjects*", ourselves, lies a linguistic possibility and community through which we can understand each other and think together, define and recognize the *origins* of what and who *we are* or at least have been defined as "*subjects*". According to which Law are we to assume this possibility of a *dialogue* between "our" two subjectivities on the source(s) of "our" subjectivities, and of that which occurs or can occur *between* these two *subjects* which are here and now engaged in thinking from whence they or we come from?

Certainly, this *situation* also implies a *responsibility* towards one another, a responsibility which, *without* knowledge – perhaps *without* truth? – aims nonetheless to search for what and who we are "fundamentally" and that from which we occur "originally". This is also why your question is *not* innocent. It inscribes an *explosive* splicing undermining the very possibility of engaging our dialogue

to which we will undoubtedly return. On the one hand, it questions the *origin(s)* of these "concepts", one Greek, *hypokeimenon* and the other Latin, *subjectivity*, *whilst also and at the same time*, undermining the possibility of determining what these can or could signify without also grasping their "*origins*". In this sense, your question says: *who* are we who are speaking on or of *who* we are? And thus, it conceals a further question: on which "ground" do we stand to speak of our "ground"? Or again, *who* are these two "subjectivities" and how are they justified in engaging, *without* knowing what their *origins* as "subjectivities" are, in an "inter-subjective" community?

Far however from seeking to point here a logical fallacy, a type of "performative contradiction" and expect we speak from what we have already determined and justified, we rather seek to indicate in which sense – and here your question is exemplary, exemplarily *not innocent* and thus *highly philosophical* – the *beginning* of *any* philosophical inquiry *always* must accept, acquiesce, say "yes" to a confrontation with *unjustifiables*.

G. Z.: I see what you are getting at and where this is heading. Your thorough approach which investigates the genealogy of the terms in question, and which acknowledges the aporetic nature of posing such a question in the first place as we in a way take it for granted that we are subjects who engage in a conversation which is aimed at understanding what it is to be a 'subject' and thus this dialogue is a priori possible for us to hold, but at the same time we are still searching for ad hoc answers to the question of how that is even possible. I am sure your former supervisor Jacques Derrida would have loved this question. To get to the point, however, I would have to indicate that the notion of the subject does not need to be defined in advance for us to be able to deconstruct it, again hinting at Derrida, or simply to scrutinise what it is to be a subject; what subjectivity is and how it can be defined – and indeed confined. It is true that there is nothing that comes before the subject at least if we follow the Latin etymology of the term '*subjectum*' which means that which is 'thrown beneath or below', but do we need to find out where this *agent* comes from first before actually being able to deploy it for our purposes?

J. C.: It is not a question of definition. We are not saying that we need to define the "subject" prior to our discussion, but all the contrary! We are marking how and why *all* philosophical questioning, what we call philosophical thinking, always engages itself *without* definition, *without* knowledge. Such is its singularity, precisely: it possesses no pre-determined domain and activates a mode of questioning which refuses its enclosure in a specified region, or even a determined language. This is precisely why philosophy is incessantly called to transgress the frontiers of what is perceived as defined or known; it is also incessantly engaged in an interrogation of its own limits, destination, orientation, direction. Such is its singular freedom. And our freedom here is exercised precisely when we think towards that which "is" unjustifiable. The unjustifiable here is *ourselves*. That is: we are asking philosophically *who* is at work and presupposed in our "original" *subjectivities*, in the *origins* of our historical development from *hypokeimenon* to *subjectivity*?

G. Z.: My answer would be that there is no such requirement whatsoever, that the subject *always and already* is there in the speech act, and it does not require any explications that would enable it to operate in a certain fashion after the fact. That is what Hegel points to as early as his first Jena writings published at the turn of the 19th century. What is more, I do find such 'performative contradictions', as you yourself call this question, really powerful and productive in a Hegelian sense. In relation to that, I do recall the beginning of Hegel's essay titled *Faith and Knowledge* where he writes about the Absolute and its link to Reason; how the Absolute is both for and against Reason, that it goes *beyond* Reason. In that vein, I think we can say something similar with regards to the subject and its relation to the object, namely that the former *always and already* presupposes the latter and that hence the boundaries between the two are blurred by definition. It is precisely this interaction between the doer and that at which its action is aimed that makes the subject possible according to Hegel. That is the place where reflection and thus an eventual intervention by another is founded. Without that other or that original alterity, what we could call the 'non-ego', there is no ego in the first place. Only by turning to the other, can the subject recognise its own self and take into account its features, what it

is in terms of essence or quiddity in the Aristotelian sense. This is what enables the birth of dialogue as well, both in its inner and its outer forms. To get to the point, this is precisely what we are doing at the moment. Getting back to Hegel, that is the nature of the dialectical process for which he is so famous. Thinking dialectically a priori presupposes a certain negativity or difference which could only be overcome after an initial negation or exclusion, only for the two distinct substances to be later on reconciled. Paradoxes and contradictions, including antinomies, are in this sense more than welcome. What is also at stake here, though, is the unity of the subject itself.

Is the subject a unified whole that is made up of opposites which work together to create a homogenous unity or is that not at all the case? What about the unconscious and the inner contradictions that are contained within the self? Can these inner antagonisms be lifted, *aufgehoben*, as easily as the outer ones? Are they even necessary and can they also be considered productive following Hegel's predilections vis-à-vis the ideas of unity and difference/duality?

J. C.: Of course, it is absolutely essential that you call here into play the figure of Hegel. For your question was indeed *exemplified* in the philosophical system which so powerfully sought to reconcile the Greeks and the Moderns, and most particularly, which sought to think the *hypokeimenon* as *both* substance *and* subject. And yet, at the same time and perhaps both with Hegel *and* outside Hegel, if we are here marking how *thinking* also means a confrontation with *unjustifiables*, and thus that the event of thinking is always a certain *response preceding any question*, foregoing any intentional aim, expressing itself always before any autonomous possibility of conditionally determining its *event*, it is also to propose that *all* philosophical dialogue inevitably, and yet resourcefully, is engaged by the singularity of the Other, the indeterminate call of the Other which always speaks *without* defining its place or its identity. In this sense, to think, to think a *subject*, means also to confront and endure an *undecidability* as to the *origin*(s) of its own deployment and development. And this *undecidability*, we must seek to think it also outside the regime of the negative, of negation, of the dialectical movement which always appropriates

and reappropriates the essence of the negation. That is, think outside the structures of reflexion or self-reflexivity. Precisely "where" the singularity of thinking or the thinking of singularity does not mean to mark an individuality identical to itself, for itself and in itself. Our question thus, deconstructive, would amount to rethink from this *undecidability* wholly other performatives of and for thinking… not to negate the history of signifiers which have constituted our tradition, but to propose a *wholly other idea of responsibility* in thinking.

We would thus be tempted to say: think the deconstruction of presuppositions and assumptions, the logic of *origins* thus, by seeking each time to also think the *unthinkable*, or as Schelling also marked, the *un-pre-thinkable* as the incessant *aporias* of what we call *hypokeimenon* and/or *subjectivity*. And in this sense, we would suggest an incessant *confrontation* with that which would also create, invent, respond to wholly other performatives than those coordinated and framed in the "economy" of the speculative dialectic. Otherwise said: *risk* a thinking always *beyond* the binarism or indeed the reconciliation of identity and difference towards the *unsacrificiable singularities* in our History. Our own work on Hegel has always sought to think this *suspension* and this *interruption*, this *unthinkable* or *un-pre-thinkable*, not as a negation of the speculative, but rather as that *impossible* and *irreducible* opening *before* and *beyond* Hegel's sacrificial reappropriation of meaning in and within the "identity of identity and difference." Towards which end and according to which heading? Perhaps towards a *wholly other* and novel "idea" of what we still call "*subjectivity*", and thus towards a *wholly other* approach of temporality.

But before engaging into this other "idea" of "*subjectivity*", we ought to recall that from *hypokeimenon* to *subjectivity*, that is from the Greek to the Latin, lies a profound *similarity* which does not efface an irreducible *difference*.

The *similarity* between both concepts is that they each mark a "ground" on which and from which beings appear. But the *difference*, which is certainly as philosophically interesting as the theoretical continuity from *hypokeimenon* to *subjectivity*, is how the concept of *hypokeimenon* does *not*, contrarily to that of the *subjectivity*,

presuppose a distinction, a differentiation, an opposition. The concept of *hypokeimenon* is *one* and functions as a unitary and enveloping comprehension in which beings are present and show themselves in their being-present, in their *being-there*, in their being in Being as presence. The concept of *subjectivity*, however, instigates an *opposition* as it also marks a *divide*, and a *difference* with *an-other*, *its* other, that against which it stands; an alterity which, whilst grounding it in representation nonetheless and irreducibly remains opposed to it: the "object". Which is not without prompting the following question: what occurs historically in the advent of the "subject" to see it also mark an irreducible difference to that which it itself is *not*, and thus a distinction between the "subject" and the "object"? And furthermore, which are the philosophical consequences of this *passage* from the unitary *substratum* to the *distinction* and *separation*, *difference* and *differentiation* between a "subject", ground of conceptual representation and intuition, *and*, an "object", standing independently in front of "*subjectivity*" and its experience? And indeed, if the concept of "*subjectivity*" has been, at least since Descartes, understood as a *certain* translation of *hypokeimenon* in that it also conveys the sense of that which stands *under*, "grounds", we are also entitled to ask: *what*, or *who* (to retrieve our previous development) has the idea of *hypokeimenon* dissimulated and concealed to project itself in its transition and transformation, translation or transmutation into the concept of *subjectivity*? And furthermore, what has the concept of *subjectivity* replaced in the idea of *hypokeimenon* and which necessitated that we pass from one to the other? In the name of which Law have we shifted from *hypokeimenon* to *subjectivity*, and furthermore, what is concealed or foreclosed in such a *turn*?

We interrogate here the process of *substitution* which has deployed itself throughout the history of philosophy. And in this idea of *substitution* naturally is lodged a certain interpretation of what we would call a *logic of sacrifice*. In which manner does *sacrifice* operate from *hypokeimenon* to *subjectivity*? And furthermore, has our Modern concept of *subjectivity* inherited this *sacrificial operation* from the history of this *substitution* from *hypokeimenon* to *subjectivity*? In which sense? And indeed, *what is sacrifice*? What is called "sacrifice"? Why are we here insinuating that *sacrifice*, a *logic of sacrifice*, a *sacrificial structure*, is lodged within the very

constitution and institution of subjectivity and within the history of *hypokeimenon* to *subjectivity*?

Certainly, that which is at work in these questions would bring us to the very confines of an interrogation on the *origins* and this incessant desire in the history of philosophy to *return* to the origin. And furthermore, it would bring us to think in which sense a *sacrificial operation* and structure engages our thinking to desire this return, this appropriation or reappropriation to and of the *origin*? What is and who is *sacrificed* in our desire to return to the *origin*(*s*) of thinking? Is *sacrifice* a necessary condition for such a *return*? And if so, what is lodged in a thinking which would *suspend* and *interrupt* this sacrificial structure, this sacrificial desire to *return* to the *origin*(*s*) of thinking?

Before returning to your provocative proposition – namely "that the subject *always and already* is there in the *speech act*, and it does not require any explications that would enable it to operate in a certain fashion after the fact" – we ought to develop the groundwork and go back to what we understand by and through the Greek concept of *hypokeimenon*.

This concept is defined in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* as a *substrate*, that which "stands under" and thus institutes a "base". Of course, Aristotle does not determine this concept out of context. He determines it whilst defining the concept of *ousia*, "substance", which comprises *four* intrinsically linked significations: substance, *ousia* is (1) the *quiddity* of a being, the *essence* of a thing, (2) a universal, (3) a genre, and lastly (4) a "*substratum*", the *underlying base* of a thing, *hypo-keimenon*.

What is highly interesting in Aristotle's typification of *hypokeimenon* is not only that it informs the general concept of *ousia* (and, in this sense, the concept of *hypokeimenon*, although *necessary*, is *not in itself sufficient* in the metaphysical determination of *ousia*), but also and more profoundly that it reveals *ousia* in and through its *fundamental function*. It reveals *ousia* in its *fundamental function* of *sustainment*, and thus of *sustainability*, of *material support* which receives its Form (*eidos*) in and as a being or an entity. In Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, *hypokeimenon* can thus be thought as the

substantial place in which or on which the Form (*eidos*) is posed; in this sense, it is a receptor, a receptacle, and by extension, the unifying gathering element which, as *material substratum*; lie the predicates informing present things, beings, entities. This is why *hypokeimenon* suffers itself *no* change or modification; it maintains itself with itself and remains always and already close to itself, self to itself, unchanged and unchangeable. In itself, thus, it is *not* a predicate, but that which supports and sustains predicates; it is always *predicating*, and thus *presencing* that which is present, *presencing present beings* in their *being present as things*.

It would be immensely complex to retrace here all the multiple intricacies of the historical development which saw the Aristotelian concept of *hypokeimenon* take on the name of the *soul* (*anima*) and by extension, at the birth of Modernity, that of the "subject". Similarly complex would be to describe the multiple shifts the concept of "*subjectivity*" has undergone within its own history throughout Modernity, from Descartes, Kant, to Nietzsche and Husserl. We must also recall that the concept of "*subjectivity*" is broad and in itself a "ground" of different orientations which imply at least inflections in the immediate definition we could give of this concept here and now. And in this sense, we ought to say that "*subjectum*" is primordially a metaphysical category, certainly, but it also conveys a moral, a political and a juridical sense. And naturally, it conveys an undeniable grammatical or logical meaning. Indeed, this grammatical or logical signification is central to the very exercise of philosophy, if something intimately allies the idea of the "subject" to language and speech. Indeed, in the *Categories* – as we were just beginning to draw out from the metaphysical definition Aristotle gives of the *hypokeimenon* – and when explicating the *categories* of Being as well as indicating the grammatical categories to which these correspond, the "subject" is not surprisingly thought by and through the first *category* of Being. Indeed, the "subject" of a phrase is the term to which one associates a predicate. In this sense, and since all phrases are ultimately reducible to the "subject-predicate" form, the "subject" is defined as that *essential individuality* which sustains itself through change and which thus marks its *invariable substance*. One must here carefully consider the relation between Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and *Categories*: for indeed, as the *hypokeimenon* is the *material substratum* on which

accidents are clutched onto, so to speak, similarly the *subject* is that underlying "thing" on which all predicates will be attached or referred to. Which forces the question: through which modality will the *subject* act itself out in History? Through which modality will the *subject* give itself in its History? And furthermore, which sacrificial operation here engages this consecration in History? In other words, in which sense is the *subject* acting itself out in its History whilst also confounding itself with a sacrificial operation and the reiteration, the repetition, the incessant *givenness* of itself in and as sacrifice? And lastly, what are the consequences – philosophical, political, ethical – of this operative modality which signs and countersigns the very act of *subjectivity* in History?

G. Z.: You are spot on when you infer that there is a *connection* between the concept of *hypo-keimenon* as defined by Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* and Hegel's subsequent take on the subject and subjectivity. There is indeed an underlying affinity that can be traced in their conceptual systems. This commonality lies precisely in Aristotle's view that the *hypo-keimenon* is both that which "stands under" and a substance which serves the role of a *foundation* for everything else that comes after it; in other words, it is *always and already* there, self-contained, that which causes everything else to come into existence, and hence playing a role similar to that of the "unmoved mover", to put it in Aristotelian terms. Hegel's way of thinking about the subject comes quite close to Aristotle's account of the *hypokeimenon*. For him, as is the case for Aristotle, there is in fact no irreducible difference that should play a pivotal role in the definition of the 'subject'. By that I mean the aforementioned 'subject-object divide'. It is indeed clear that for Hegel this so-called distinction is nothing more than a false dichotomy. He shares Aristotle's position that the subject and the object are inherently intertwined which goes to show that he also contends that the 'subject' is unified, a whole which does not need anything external in order to achieve recognition. Conversely, it is that which creates that *Otherness* within itself and uses it as a springboard for this process of awareness and self-actualisation which in the end determines its essence. Introspection and self-reflection are crucial for Hegel in that regard. That is precisely what can be found in the early sections of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. The subject and the object are in Hegel's view two sides of the same

coin. In other words, they are interchangeable and codependent, there is no absolute difference between them. The subject can be an object too and vice versa. Without the former there is no latter and the other way around. Without difference, there is no sameness either. The two concepts are thus equiprimordial according to Hegel, as are the *substratum* and the *substance* in the Aristotelian systematic framework.

The questions you pose are undoubtedly worth considering. What prompted the need for a fundamental divide between 'subject' and 'object', 'mind' and 'body', 'corporal' and 'mental'? Was that even necessary? My answer is indeed an emphatic no. Descartes did make a wrong premise in his *Discourse*. Even in psychoanalytic terms, what Lacan repeatedly maintains is that the body is mental too, that it is *imaginary*. To put it differently, according to him the body is perceived as a *form*, a *Gestalt*, due to the fact that we cannot observe the way in which it truly functions; what we see is only the outward appearance which is what we value as well. In Kantian terms, we can only ever grasp the *phenomenal* body, and not the *noumenal one*, *das Ding an sich selbst*, although it can be argued that this distinction is not the most productive either.

J. C.: The transformation from "*hypokeimenon*" to "*subjectivity*" can be approached in *at least* two orientations. We can read this *transformation* as the progressive and inevitable movement of a metaphysical thinking which reduces and forgets, conceals and supersedes, the *origin* from which thinking is called and summoned, and which leads therefore to the reassertion of a "fundamental" question, that which Heidegger had so radically labelled the "question pertaining to the meaning of Being" and which was then to be itself substituted, transferred and exceeded by what the same Heidegger qualified as the "thinking *into* the history of the truth of Being". This first orientation leads our thinking towards a certain thinking by which and through which is engaged a certain *surmounting*, a manner of *seeing again* as *seeing anew*, an *overcoming* which also means a *repetition* of our tradition of thinking and of questioning in order to reveal that which remains irreducible to this history.

But also, one could read in and through this transformation, this passage from "*hypokeimenon*" to "*subjectivity*" as producing the occurrence in history of *another* historical orientation, *at least one* other history on and around *what is called thinking*... Indeed, we could imagine at least *another* history which would imply a wholly other question irreducible to ontology and unassimilable to the history of ontology. How could this *other question* be formulated? And how would this question open to at least another history?

We would be tempted here to engage this *possibility* – capable of *interrupting* or *suspending* the history of ontology in and through the horizon of the *critical*, that is of *critique* and its inherent *duality*, theoretical *and* practical, which situates the *human* not in the truth, and thus as that entity which originally lies in and within the Parousia of Being – as an *orientation*, *a projection*, an *invitation* which *ventures* towards thinking how and why – *how* is it possible and *why* are we justified in claiming this possibility? – the *human* can be, may be, remains warranted in being *aligned to truth*? Which means, perhaps who we call human calls onto a before or a beyond the predominance of truth... which would both escape a relativism of "truths" and "falsehoods" *and* orient the human towards an idea of justice irreducible to truth and yet singularly directed towards singularity.

In this sense, the question is *not* what are the *origins* of "*subjectivity*" or of the "*hypokeimenon*", but rather: how is it possible for the *human* to even stand in truth? How is it possible for the *human* to even think its "origins" through the signifier of truth? Why is the *human* capable of appropriating itself as that being which stands in relation to truth?

Far from the long and historical debate on the relation between *anthropology* and *critique* in Kant's philosophy, we are here seeking to indicate a novel manner of reframing your question. That is, of *reinscribing* within your question – which seeks, and rightfully so, to determine or define the *origin*(s) of our subjectivity – a further question: in which manner can *we* justify our belonging to the idea of *subjectivity* and thereby in which manner are we permitted in justifying our alliance to truth? Or to speak to your last statement

on Kant: how can the *human* or what we call "human being" be, for itself, a *phenomenon*?

It would be important here to engage in this question and show precisely how it leads us to a certain *deconstruction* of the meaning of the *human being*, not only of *being human*, but also of that which allies the *human* to *Being*. And in many ways, it is this *deconstruction* which interests us wholly and entirely. There would be an important relationship between *critique* and *deconstruction* here to properly develop in order to deploy a wholly other idea of or than the *human*, a *who beyond the human*, a *who* irreducible to Being and irretrievable in or within the practical determination of the "ought-to-be" or the projection of the "may-be". Perhaps this *other idea beyond* the human being would here confront a *wholly other triad*, a radically *other* deployment of "concepts" than the ontological conceptual determination of "being", "ought-to-be", "may-be". What could "be" this triad? Perhaps it would deploy itself as "creation, revelation, redemption" and indeed require us to think wholly other performatives than those wrapped up and caught up in the ontology of *being human*. This shift is clearly inscribed in Rosenzweig and was developed by Levinas, also Benjamin and Scholem, with considerable differences between these authors. Today, we see in the work of Nicolas de Warren the most profound approach to the deployment of this *other* and *novel* "triad", which de Warren engages in rethinking the concepts of forgiveness, mourning, remembrance.

But to return to your proposition, "the subject *always and already* is there in the speech act, and it does not require any explications that would enable it to operate in a certain fashion after the fact", which you develop by posing key determinations of the "dialectic" on the *essence* of the dialectical process and the becoming, the *Aufhebung*. Your proposition is *truly speculative*. And indeed, it recalls that for Hegel the "Subjective spirit", the "soul"/"mind", is that which is always and already *in* nature, and thus *within* the real. Indeed, what is the "soul"/"mind" – which is not to be confounded with "Spirit" – for Hegel? The "soul"/"mind" is the *immediate presence of Spirit in and within the reality of nature*. The "soul"/"mind" is the *being-there* of Spirit in natural reality. In other words: the "soul"/"mind" is always embodied in the reality

of nature. This is why, always for Hegel, the classical "mind/body" problem lies on a false distinction. It lies on an erroneous typification, as if the "soul"/"mind" and the "body" were two distinct entities. For Hegel, this distinction is to be thought from the *relation* between the particular and the universal, that is from the always and already speculative movement allying, and ultimately reconciling, the particular and the universal. The "soul"/"mind" is the *immediate universality* of the "body". Which implies that the "body" is the *particular otherness* or *alterity* of the "soul"/"mind". And therefore, the "separation" between "soul"/"mind" and "body", and by extension between "subject" and "object", is wound up in an essential unity which unfolds and deploys itself in a *movement* where the "soul"/"mind" is that which animates the "body" only if the "body" is already universalised, and thus *inhabited*, we could say even *haunted*, by the "mind"/"soul".

There would be much to develop here, but we do want to address your series of questions on the *essence* of the speculative dialectic. And precisely address these by our short bypass in what Hegel develops extensively in the Third Section of the *Encyclopedia*. For this dialectical development shows how Hegel understands the profound *unity* between the "soul"/"mind" and the "body" and thus explicates how and why the "soul"/"mind" is already intimately linked to natural determinations which seem to imprison it, but which in truth liberate it, manifest its freedom, *embody freedom*. This is an important dialectical development as it also indicates where, for Hegel, a singular rupture and breaking point is envisaged: that of *madness*. And your questions point to this point. You are suggesting an *otherness* so embedded in the *same*, in the Self, that the process of the dialectic, the *Aufhebung*, could *perhaps* fail, fail to function or perform. *Madness*, for Hegel, is precisely the monstrous occurrence of such a failure: an alienation of the Self within the Self without retrieval by the Self; a form of siltation which could empty and void out the Self in it-Self without any possible reappropriation of itself. As if the Self were, in itself, incessantly alienated from and of it-Self without return or reappropriation.

Certainly, what Hegel is engaging here is the possibility and actuality for speculative reason to *overcome* this madness in itself and thus become wholly and assuredly *therapeutic*. Spirit heals

itself and does so by healing also the "scars" of its madness. And for Hegel, this *therapeutic* of the Self in the Self for the Self, recovering its Self from its own-most alienation – this alienation *from* its Self but always *in* its own Self – bears both the names of *forgiveness* and that which *forgiveness* always presupposes: *sacrifice*. At the heart of this speculative dialectic where the Self determines its Self by forgiving itself lies a powerful sacrificial operation. Hegel understands very well how and why the Self in forgiving itself through the constitution of itself always implies a sacrifice and a self-sacrifice. That is a *sacrifice of singularity*. Speculative reason is always and already the incessant sacrifice of singularity in the name of comprehension, reconciliation, gathering, unification, recognition.

One question however: *what remains in this sacrifice*? Not what is reappropriated in the Absolute knowledge of Spirit as reconciliation, but: *who is left-over and remains unassimilable in this very process*? *Who* remains "*unsacrificiable*" through its "sacrifice", *who* resists its sacrifice, breaks or interrupts the temptation of offering itself, of giving itself up, of abandoning itself in "sacrifice"? And thus, testifies to that which voids out, empties out, excavates the very *logic of sacrifice* so central in the speculative dialectic.

G. Z.: You raise a number of fascinating and thought-provoking points. I would like to address your ingenious take on the topic of madness in Hegel's work and also the theme of sacrifice which you develop in your research. When we talk about the concept of madness in relation to Hegel's formulation of what it entails and how it affects the subject, it is important to keep in mind that for Hegel there is a constant tension, an ever-present movement between the universal and the particular. They work together and make self-consciousness possible. However, they are at the same time at odds with one another, a sort of everlasting conflict or opposition that resembles the mind-body dualism, for instance. Nonetheless, to return back to madness, there is a latent self-relation of a nominal universality within the self which is present in what Hegel calls 'the life of feeling' or *Gefühlsleben*. That form of universality becomes a "realised universality" in order for it to be distinguished from the more concrete form of particularity which is exemplified by the soul's corporeality. The inability of

the subject to refine what Hegel terms 'self-feeling' to *ideality* and to get the better of it is what according to his theory causes madness. The particular in Hegel is just a mediated and concrete realisation of the universal, its counterpart of sorts. When the self which is composed of both universality and particularity, body and soul, corporeity and mentality loses its grip on the external world which it inhabits and gets attached to a certain phase of feeling or fixed idea, a form of sensuality, it enters a state of insanity or mental derangement. In other words, this sensuous idea or feeling cannot be reduced to its particularity, instead it gets idealised as a sort of universal solution which imprisons the mind of the subject. However, we should note that it is the particularity of self-feeling which causes the problem in Hegel's view, and not the idealisation. In fact, if this inclination gets 'idealised' in the subject's free subjectivity, the illness can be avoided. The mind is 'free' according to Hegel. The problem lies precisely in what you aptly identify as 'alienation': between the subject and the world, between the subject's goals and her capabilities, between possibility and actuality. Ultimately, between the mediated particularity of the body and the immediate universality of the soul or the mind. The mind can only be contaminated if it is viewed as a thing, if it is equated with the soul. That is in fact what is at stake here; that is what old metaphysics implied as well according to Hegel. Hence, insanity is a disease of body and mind alike.

There is an interesting connection that can be made here between Hegel's take on insanity and the maladies of the 'objectified soul' and body of the subject, and Freud's view on neurosis, for example. For Freud neurosis entails a similar detachment of the subject from reality which has become too hard to bear. The *libido* has no other choice but to withdraw from the ego and its laws which have become too repulsive. However, this regression and withdrawal from reality is a sign of a normally functioning organism or to put it in Hegelese, a 'happy consciousness'. The fact that it gets ill and loses its awareness of its surroundings, does not presuppose a complete loss of health, but rather a contradiction in it which can still be overcome. It might even be *therapeutic*, a coping mechanism which may ultimately play a role in 'healing the wounds of Spirit through a self-protective retreat' from the particularity of self-feeling, of that which we want but cannot have. In the end, if

we get it, we will stop wanting it and it will lose its purpose. The loss of touch with what we can do is indeed necessary for us in relation to our sense of selfhood. It is the negativity that we must pass through in order to *lift* the tensions imposed by our inability to mediate our particularity, to translate our possibility into an actuality. It is here that we come to the question of *sacrifice*. What do we have to sacrifice to come to terms with ourselves? How can we reconcile our subjectivity with our objectivity? Is there a way out of this conundrum?

Both Hegel and Freud would respond positively to this last question. This form of inner contradiction is in fact highly productive. To put it succinctly, for Hegel an existent possibility is a Condition. Such a Condition is in Hegel's view a Condition only when there is firstly existence and secondly the need for this existence or immediate to be suspended to serve the actuality of something else. That is the key to our understanding of the necessity of madness and the importance of sacrifice. Every immediate actuality is a finite actuality whose vocation is to be consumed; it is inherently flawed. Every suspended possibility is a new actuality. The otherness within the immediate actuality contains within itself a possibility which is soon translated into another actuality. This new actuality in turn consumes the immediate actuality. Thus, alterity comes to play, though in truth there is no otherness in the first place as that is part of the essence of the first actuality. It simply gets affirmed by first being negated, getting healed after being sick first. Sacrifice is here essential vis-à-vis the overcoming of immediacy and the mediation of the self with itself. It is in this sense without doubt "the code of the road". Do you not think that Hegel taps into the workings of the unconscious long before the arrival of Freud, even though he does not use that exact term? Is there not a strong link between Hegel's take on insanity and Freud's view on neurosis, for example? Does this theoretic approach not prefigure Lacan's take on the repression of the drives which seek satisfaction, which in the end can be experienced, and how it results in displeasure when it is reached? Ultimately, the acknowledgment of the drives and the so-called symptom is what brings peace as is the case with Hegel's take on madness.

J. C.: We would phrase this *otherwise* – for we believe it important and essential to not conflate the authors of our traditions. Certainly, there are passages and links, filiations if you wish, but it is nonetheless particularly crucial to also think the *differences* between our thinkers here, Hegel and Freud. This is why we would remain somewhat careful in allying Hegel and Freud as closely as you seem to on what you call the "workings of the unconscious". A stronger alliance with Freud on the unconscious, it seems to me, would perhaps be through Fichte, Schopenhauer and von Hartmann, who wrote in 1877 a *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, whose first two grounding hypotheses, were firstly, and unlike Hegel, to *dissociate* the Idea, the Concept from its actualisation in actuality *and*, unlike Schopenhauer's blind force of the will, to infuse it, the will, with an *ideality*, and thus through an ideal process of realisation. In a certain sense, von Hartmann seeks to develop a philosophy of the *unconscious* by both introducing a radical difference in Hegel's speculative dialectic *and at the same time* introducing in Schopenhauer's an infinite differentiation of the will which remains irretrievable by reconciliation. We could even say that von Hartmann engages the philosophy of the *unconscious* by marking how the unconscious *cannot* be appropriated and reappropriated in the dialectical process of a speculative recognition and reconciliation of alienation *and* why the unconscious *cannot not also* deploy a *logos* of its own, an *ideality*, which can be deciphered and brought to a language of its own. It is a curious re-reading of both Hegel and Schopenhauer, but it certainly defines the *unconscious* as that which is radically other and deploys itself otherwise than either the reconciliatory comprehension of the speculative dialectic or the infinite differentiations of the will. Naturally, Von Hartman retrieves the Schellingian distinction between *existence* and *essence*. And for the former, *existence* and *essence* are unified in a totality, an *absolute unconscious*, on which conscious life, as difference, as differentiation, as that existence always standing *out*-side of its essence, is grounded and founded. Subjectivity is grounded on an *absolute unconscious*, an *abyss* thus, which also means that conscious life, consciousness, is never reconciled or even reconcilable with its *substance*. What is consciousness for von Hartmann? It is always and already *act* and *activity*. In other words, it is *project* and *projection*. And "as such" consciousness is always imperfect, finite and befallen into the incessant play of forces

incessantly opposing each other and which constitute, through the dynamic multiplication of *differenciations*, conscious life. On the other hand, the *absolute unconscious* is a "uni-totality" which, in itself, is "perfection", "purity" and "absolutely benevolence". It is associated with God, and with the "infinite wisdom" and "sapience" of God. One point however which must be made in this a-dialectical opposition, the *absolute unconscious* is *unconscious* for our conscious life; it remains as such irretrievable and irreconcilable, although not absolutely foreign, by and with our consciousness. But "in itself", the *absolute unconscious* is a *supra-consciousness*. And most particularly a supra-consciousness of *suffering*, of our *historical suffering as conscious lives* which urges von Hartmann to adopt a form of dynamic conception of the Cosmos which finds its eschatological realisation in, well, yet another modality of sacrifice, we would even say a form of *a-dialectical* and *apocalyptical sacrifice*.

But why are we retrieving von Hartmann here? To show that the idea of the *unconscious* presupposes at least this: its *otherness* irreducible to the process of alienation which always, for Hegel, carries with it the movement of its reappropriation. And of course, this non-dialectical retraction and concealment of the *unconscious* will be exemplified in Freud. Certainly, this is not to say that Freud leaves the *unconscious* to itself, so to say, that the *unconscious* is without grasp or language – but rather that the *unconscious* for Freud deploys another language than that which reappropriates the alienation of consciousness. To put it simply, the *unconscious* for Freud is irreducible to Hegel's idea of alienation. Why? For at least this: the *unconscious* is thinkable and explicable through its *own content* and *genesis*, that is, the dynamic of *repression* [*Verdrängung*] which it is indissociable from. And what occurs in this dynamic of *Verdrängung* is not that a "negation" which accomplishes itself in the "negation of the negation". On the contrary, *Verdrängung* is an active operation of *resistance*, *defence*, *denegation*, *disavowal* which, far from comprehending and reconciling itself with itself, maintains a distance and inscribes a detachment between the subject and that which is irreconcilable, or not fully conciliable, with subjectivity, its uncontrollable *drives* and *pulsions*. Of course, the dynamic of *Verdrängung* does not annihilate these *drives* and *pulsions* which are intimately woven in subjectivity, but *distances* these and, in this sense, *pushes them away* from their representation

by subjectivity. This is why *Verdrängung* also enacts a form of denial which culminates in an active forgetfulness. The modalities of this dynamic are highly complex, and it would be too long here to explicate fully. But one point must be marked which is also why Freudian psychoanalysis is not embraceable within Hegel's speculative system; that is, not without denaturing entirely both the spirit and the letter of Freud... For Freud, this dynamic acts out an *aggravation* of repression whereby the subject persistently and *drivingly* employs itself in *not* seeing that which it is resisting. And thus, the subject incessantly represses to the point of even desiring this repression. This complex dynamic does not incorporate or reconcile negation through a dialectic capable of comprehending it; indeed, it even ignores negation or negativity, the "work of the negative" as it incessantly produces that which negativity cannot encompass: an *incessant supplement*, an *overwhelming* of negation which cannot rely on negativity. Naturally, there would be a very important development to be deployed on how and why language is the very "essence" of this a-dialectical dynamic where the *other* is always *an*-other, a *supplementary other*, and furthermore, on the irreconcilable division within the subject through this uncontrollable language persistently exceeding itself as the *unconscious*. In this sense, the dynamic of *Verdrängung* in Freud opens to *another* thinking than the reconciliatory movement of the speculative dialectic, however infinite the process of alienation remains in this very dialectic. This is why Freud develops the possibilities of *interpreting* this dynamic in the subject however not as a *phenomenology*, but as an *archaeology* of the negative. And this *archaeology* points towards a knowledge, but unsurpassably finite, of the *human*. This point we ought to think through, and in the radical difference between Hegel and Freud. And firstly, regarding the concept of *alienation* in Hegel.

This concept comprises firstly the idea of *positivity*, that which is apposed onto the subject, occurs and arrives to the subject from outside the subject and thus which imposes itself on the subject. The young Hegel identified this *positivity* in the idea of the Law in both Religion (principally Judaism) and Morality (principally Kantian). But the concept of *alienation* also comprises the idea of "work" as that through which the realisation of the Self is actualised in materiality or what Hegel also calls "life". And lastly, certainly most

important for Hegel, *alienation* is objectivity in general, nature in general; the entire *Phenomenology of Spirit* shows how and where the Idea, the Concept, is objective *only* in and through *alienation*. It is this last typification of *alienation* which commands the others – and this is what we could call the economical Law of *alienation* in the speculative dialectic; a Law which is allied to the economical operation of *sacrifice* which preserves and keeps, retrieves and safekeeps that which it negates and annihilates. And indeed, it is because consciousness can alienate itself that objectivity, in all its forms, is possible. But for Hegel, this entire process of *alienation* marks the fate of the human, and it is through this fate that *alienation* can be and *is* overcome, surpassed and ultimately comprehended. This process of interiorization, reconciliation and recognition, can be deployed as it also means the actualisation of truth as whole and wholly embracing, unifying, identifying the differences of *alienation* into the sameness of their own-most possibility: Spirit. For Hegel, this movement is not fortuitous. It is not exterior to *alienation*: it arises and reveals itself in and within *alienation* as *its* possibility. This is why, the fundamental essence of the speculative dialectic is *Erinnerung*, that is *memory*, remembrance and commemoration within *alienation of that which makes alienation possible*, the recollection in difference of its own-most possibility: identity. It is in this subtle manner that Hegel suppresses, and negates, the exteriority of *alienation* in all its *positivity*: through the *remembrance* in *alienation* of its *possibilisation*: appropriation, reappropriation, the proper Self finding itself in its otherness. Spirit always finds itself in the process of its historical becoming – and it does so, as Spirit always actualises its possibility and its effectivity by recovering and uncovering, revealing and showing itself as its essential identity and self-identity. And thus, *alienation* is not exterior to Spirit, it is the very essence of Spirit. But this alienation is also, and essentially so, appropriation and reappropriation of itself: knowledge through reconciliation of difference in recognition of differences.

What would the *unconscious* of this absolute knowledge say? Could it speak a *logos* which would not be always and already recovered and reappropriated by this absolute diction where all contradictions find their possibility and actuality? Which words would it use, or *invent*, that are not always and already

contained and reappropriated in the process of this dialectic? And ultimately, which language could speak as absolute *singularity* and which would say the *irreducible singularity in humanity* without mobilizing its *sacrifice* always engaged in appropriating and converting *singularity* into a universality where it has always been determined and consigned to its past, to a past, to that which is in the past.

To recall Freud, we would ask: *who* speaks, without assurance, in the *unconscious* and thereby breaks, suspends, interrupts consciousness, the lived-present of consciousness, its narrative and its recollecting power of interiorisation which always appropriates through sacrifice its meaning and intentionality for itself, in itself and through *its* otherness? These questions echo those which we were seeking to instil in the speculative *machine*… and they each point to a certain unexpected return of Spirit to Spirit, a certain *spectrality* which at once returns to Spirit whilst at the same time it arrives as if it never had been or ever will be present to Spirit. And going to the limit of this *aporia* which we follow in pursuing Derrida's thinking and writing: of that which returns to Spirit *without* returning to Spirit – that is, as that which *returning* to Spirit occurs as a pure *futurity without* Spirit: *singularity impossible to transform into a past, impossible to convert into that which can pass into, be interiorised and reconciled with the past and yet occurring incessantly, exceeding and reiterating otherness beyond sameness, identity, appropriation, reappropriation.* Returning from a past which never had passed into a past and occurring without being framed in a comprehension or a horizon of temporality… Such would be the opening of a thinking of *singularity*… the *spectrality* of that which incessantly returns to our "*subjectivity*" whilst undermining and voiding out the very "ground" on which it could determine its occurrence. There could be a new formulation here at work which would perhaps resonate alongside the *cogito*… as if we were called from "I think, I am" *to* "I return/arrive unthinkable *other*, *spectral*".

G. Z.: Many thanks once more for accepting to partake in this enlightening endeavour, Professor Cohen. Your involvement and contribution are much appreciated!

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Brentano's Descriptive Psychology as an Alternative Transcendental Epistemology to Kant's

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Abstract

In his *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint and Descriptive Psychology* (1995a, 1995b) lecture series, Brentano presents philosophy as an exact science of cognition and contrasts it with the lower-level and inexact, hence contingent, natural science of empirical psychology. This conception of philosophy as descriptive psychology, however, contains metaphysical presuppositions and difficulties of which he is unaware. This paper investigates Brentano's new descriptive psychological science in the context of Kant's transcendental epistemology and proposes that Brentano's science of cognition is concerned with revealing the *a priori* features of human cognition which can justify the existence of universally valid knowledge claims. It argues that despite methodological innovations made in the attempt to develop a more empirical alternative to Kant's transcendental idealism, Brentano's theory of knowledge does not meet these conditions. In fact, Brentano restricts the scope of Kantian immanence and reduces it to a kind of realist view of the objective, knowable nature in both the epistemological and ontological sense. In general, this article calls attention not only to the historical and philosophical implications of Brentano's metaphysical limitations, but also to the early phenomenological movement, in particular to Husserl's transcendental phenomenology.

Keywords: Kant | Brentano |Husserl | Descriptive Psychology | phenomenology | epistemology | objectivity | subject-object relation | immanence and transcendence.

Introduction

Franz Brentano's position as a post-Kantian philosopher is quite unique. On the one hand, his notion of philosophy as a science seems to be distant from the post-Kantian tradition of his time both thematically and systematically, in the sense that, inspired by ancient Greek philosophy and particularly by Aristotle, he ostensibly advocates for philosophy as a perennial science (*philosophia perennis*). He conceives philosophy as the study of psychical phenomena[1]. With this sense of "a great mission," as Edmund Husserl recalls (McAlister 1976, p. 48), to "reconstruct" scientific philosophy (see Carl Stumpf, McAlister 1976, p. 12), Brentano explicitly distances himself from the post-Kantian German Idealists who claim to be continuing the quest for the scientific philosophy that Kant presents in the *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics* (2004, 4: 333, 362) as "speculative" (2004, 4: 260, 363) in the pejorative sense of the term[2]. On the other hand, Brentano's defense of such a descriptive science in his two published books *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (1995a) in 1874, and the lecture series on *Descriptive Psychology* (1995b) at Vienna University in 1888-89, clearly bears all the hallmarks of a transcendental philosophy in the Kantian sense of being concerned with the *a priori* (universal) conditions of possibility of experience. Albeit in Brentano's case, this manner of cognition is limited to a descriptive psychology "of our own psychical phenomena" that is not concerned with the "physical phenomena" of natural science (Brentano 1995b, p. 63-64). The perennial science of philosophy, therefore, which he wishes to establish, seems to fall within the scope of the post-Kantian tradition, despite its alleged methodological dissimilarities.

This article argues that Brentano's design for a perennial philosophy falls within the purview of an *a priori* Kantian epistemology not only thematically but also in a deeper, systematic sense, rooted in Brentano's understanding of the subject-object relation as the

1 See: McDonnell 2023, p. 47. For Brentano's peculiar doctrine of the "four phases" of philosophy as a science, see Tănăsescu 2022, p. 56-57, and Huemer 2022, p. 408-09.

2 "[T]his expression 'speculative science' is a gross misuse of the term 'science'. A Schellingian or Hegelian system is bare and void of all scientific character." See Brentano 1995b, p. 5.

inverse of Kant's picture of the knowable nature as such. This article has three sections. It first establishes the *a priori* epistemological status of Brentano's proposed "exact science" (1995b, p. 5-6) through an analysis of the methodological requirements and implications of this descriptive psychology, allegedly based on the "inner perception of our own psychical phenomena" (1995a, p. 22). It then characterises his descriptive psychology as an alternative transcendental theory of knowledge which shares the same thematic scope of the abovementioned Kantian lineage without however subscribing to Kant's transcendental idealism. The final section investigates Brentano's deviation from Hume and Kant on the idea of causation, which underpins his specification of nature as a preconfigured absolute, as something that exists independently of any subjective experience. Overall, Brentano's methodological innovations must be appreciated alongside the limitations in his metaphysical views, which consequently shape his epistemological approach to the subject-object relation as solely pertaining to a deterministic and mechanical view of nature in the Kantian fashion.

1. The A Priori Status of Brentano's Proposed "Exact Science"

Brentano draws a distinction between two basic domains of psychological research: a "descriptive" (1995b, p. 137-38) domain whose subject matter is our consciousness "as such [*in sich selbst*]," and its "psychical phenomena" (1995a, p. 26), and a "genetic" (1995b, p. 137-38) domain whose interest lies in investigating the causes of the above phenomena by deploying the method of the modern natural sciences. The genetic domain explores the generating processes and causal laws of consciousness that lie outside of our direct conscious experience. The descriptive approach entails seeing consciousness itself in its operations and activities as self-evidently given (Brentano, 1995b, p. 4). Brentano thus distances his view of philosophy, as descriptive psychology or "psychognosy", (1995b, p. 3). from the modern natural science of genetic psychology and its reductive reading of consciousness. In fact, following genetic psychology, consciousness is nothing but a combination of physicochemical processes (Brentano 1995b, p. 5-6). As he remarks in his *Descriptive Psychology* lectures at Vienna University,

> "[Descriptive psychology] teaches [us] nothing about the causes that give rise to human consciousness [...] [and will] never mention a physico-chemical process in any of its doctrines [*Lehrsatz*]. [...] For, correct as it is to say that such processes are preconditions for consciousness, one must resolutely contradict the person who, out of a confusion of thought, claims that our consciousness in itself [*in sich selbst*] is to be seen as a physico-chemical event, that it itself is composed out of chemical elements." (Brentano 1995b, p. 6)

For Brentano, mind and consciousness are not the brain, nor are they reducible to or equivalent to the brain or any scientific investigation of its activities. Despite having some natural-materialistic assumptions regarding the origins of consciousness, Brentano's emphasis here is that there is consciousness *as such*, irreducible to a physico-chemical or natural-scientific construction. Consciousness as such cannot be localised in terms of sequences of physico-chemical phenomena, nor can it be idealised into one single unified entity; notwithstanding the fact that the distinct consciousnesses of distinct individuals seem to share certain commonalities. This consciousness in itself, as an irreducible matter for reflection, can immediately be recognized by any thinking subject engaging in a reflection on the state of one's own thinking processes, for it is present to the mind or perceived at once (McDonnell 2023, p. 55). For this very reason the thinking subject can and must acknowledge the factual state of that conscious experience itself as evidently true without any need to resort to a theoretical reference to bio-chemical processes in the physical world. Nor does the subject feel the need to posit a metaphysical reference to the existence of a soul as the substantial bearer of conscious activity, "[For] [w]hether or not there are souls, the fact is there are psychical phenomena" (Brentano 1995a, p. 18)[3]. Following Locke, then, Brentano believes that because consciousness is the perception of what happens in one's own mind, all conscious experience is in and of itself perceived. Hence in the moment in which they come into existence, our conscious experiences are always phenomena. Therefore, the terms "conscious act," "consciousness," "psychical act," "mental act" and

3 Brentano, 1995, p. 18

"psychical phenomenon" are all "synonymous expressions" in Brentano's understanding of psychology[4].

According to Brentano, however, there is a fundamental difference between descriptive psychology and genetic psychology. Descriptive psychology is an exact science that formulates *universally necessarily true* statements about consciousness as such. Genetic psychology is an inexact science as it deals in empirical matters of fact about which we can produce contingently true statements, but never necessarily true. By an exact science, therefore, Brentano means those "sciences which *can* formulate their doctrines sharply and precisely," (1995b, p. 3) such as, for instance, geometry. In fact, "a mathematician doesn't say: the sum of the angles of a triangle is often, or usually, equal to two right angles. But he says that this is always and without exception the case"[5]. According to Brentano, so-called exact science is characterized by necessary self-evident truths. By comparison, "others [other sciences] are forced to content themselves with undetermined and vague formulae." (1995b, p. 5). A similar science must "diminish the precision of all its doctrines, by using terms like 'often' and 'mostly,' in order for them to be true" (Brentano 1995b, p. 5). In this case, sciences like these are "inexact", for they deal and can only deal in probabilities, however highly probably they may be, or in inductive empirical generalisations that again may well be true but are never necessarily true (Brentano 1995a, p. 6).

On Brentano's account, the mathematical and normative sciences of logic, ethics and aesthetics, as well as his new science of descriptive psychology, belong to the exact sciences. Other sciences, such as modern natural science and history, belong to the inexact sciences. From an epistemological perspective, in dividing the sciences into exact and inexact, Brentano is following Hume's celebrated epistemological division of all knowledge-claims into those that are concerned with "matters of fact (and existences)" and those that are concerned with "relations of ideas" (Hume 1975, p. 25, 41). The former knowledge claims constitute the empirical

4 See Brentano 1995, p. 102; also Cf. McDonnell 2023, p. 55.

5 Brentano 1995b, p. 5, my emphasis. Nowadays this claim enjoys universal application only within the Euclidean geometry model; and yet it is still undeniable that within this model, this claim is always true without exception.

sciences; the latter constitute the mathematical sciences. What is of interest and novelty here though, is that Brentano believes that we can have necessarily true knowledge-claims about the facts of consciousness in his new science of descriptive psychology. In this, he deviates from Hume and moves closer to Kant.

Notably, Brentano also praises "the law of inertia and so many other postulates and doctrines" in "(Newtonian) mechanics" as "sharp and exact" formulations of natural scientific investigations (Brentano 1995b, p. 5). One should not be led to think, however, that the criterion distinguishing exact and inexact sciences lies within the ways in which knowledge-claims are *formulated* or *presented* within their corresponding scientific system. It is true that Brentano grants that Newton's first law of motion and other laws in mechanics "are formulated in a sharp and an exact manner" (1995b, p. 5). Yet this is just to acknowledge that Brentano himself may have placed high hopes on the knowledge-claims of rising modern natural sciences in general, and the emerging new science of empirical psychology in particular. Nevertheless, it is quite another thing to read this passage as stating that the criterion distinguishing exact and inexact sciences lies within the ways in which knowledge-claims are *formulated* or *presented* within these sciences. This epistemological thesis has no basis at all. In fact, according to Brentano, whether or not a scientific doctrine can be rendered exact in the above sense does not depend on *how* it makes knowledge claims about its objects within its mode of science. Rather, it depends on how it *can* make such knowledge claims, namely whether they can be rendered necessarily true or probable. An expression like "always and without exception" implies that the validity of the embedded knowledge claim is epistemologically *a priori* and therefore cannot be affected by any upcoming *factual* state of affairs that a thinking-experiencing subject might be capable of witnessing. When Brentano says that modern natural-scientific hypothetical laws "are formulated in a sharp and an exact manner", the exactness he speaks of pertains to the level of precision of natural scientific reasoning, which proceeds by way of observation, hypothesis and experimentation. Brentano does not therefore mean to claim that natural scientific laws are like pure mathematical laws.

The predictions of weather forecasting, for instance, are not always or necessarily true. Nor are they always accurate with respect to the estimated and as yet-to-come state of affairs, "like the relative temperature of a summer or a winter month" (Brentano 1995b, p. 5). Similarly, we would not and do not expect this kind of exactness or certainty from meteorologists.

A meteorological hypothesis, therefore, can never obtain the kind of objective universality and certainty that is found in mathematical science with respect to its operational domain. If we were to transpose Brentano's *principle* of exactness and universality onto Newtonian mechanics, for instance, we should admit that Newton's theory is not as universal or as exact as it claims to have secured itself to be. In fact, it has partly been falsified. Discoveries and new observations are made that verify or falsify a hypothesis. Or it might happen that new hypotheses might explain more than the previous hypothesis, and so forth.

The methodological implication of Brentano's distinction between exact and inexact sciences is that precisely because all the natural-scientific falsifications of previous hypotheses are built upon empirical evidence of objects within a deterministic presupposition and understanding of nature as an "absolute" given, they are in themselves [*in sich selbst*] "inexact" (Brentano 1995a, p. 98-99). Accordingly, genetic psychology too is in this sense an inexact science. Like all other natural scientific investigations, it is built upon verifications of hypotheses originated from observations of natural phenomena in various experimentations (Brentano 1995b, p. 1). As stated by Bergman, such a natural scientific investigation depends upon the "induction in the narrower sense" which "derives a general law from one or several experienced facts" in which "the cognition of the law is not absolutely certain, but only probable, because we have no immediate insight into the reason for the fact" (Bergman 1976, p. 214).

This does not, however, as Brentano notes, discredit the significance of natural science. Nevertheless, the limits of inexact science motivate Brentano to seek alternative routes for meeting the epistemological requirements of his philosophy as an exact science. If the phrase "it is always the case that" is correct with

respect to the content of its associated knowledge claim, then said claim is epistemically universal and therefore a priori in the Kantian sense that its truthfulness does not, in principle, depend on any empirical verification. It is confirmed by any experience, and it can never be refuted by any further experience. Quite the contrary, whenever the claim embedded in the use of "it is always the case," is the case, then it must be the case. In sum, this a priori sense of epistemic universality is epistemologically unattainable for the scientific results of the rising natural sciences.

Brentano is therefore correct to note that, because of the epistemological status conferred by its methodology, philosophy as an exact science (i.e., his new science of descriptive psychology) is to be distinguished from an inexact science (e.g., genetic psychology). With his emphasis on the *a priori* status of his new descriptive-empirical *science of consciousness*, Brentano has moved into the Kantian epistemological vocabulary of the so-called "pre-conditions of possibility of experience" (1998, A27/B43, A31/B47). By so doing, Brentano has distanced his empirical standpoint from the kind of empirical standpoint that is found in the natural sciences. Why and how Brentano is still willing to characterize this philosophy of descriptive psychology as a form of empiricism will be discussed next.

2. Brentano's Descriptive Psychology as an Alternative Transcendental Epistemology to Kant's

According to Brentano, the *a priori* nature of descriptive psychology is determined both by its subject-matter and by its methodology. Methodologically, descriptive psychology finds its "experiential basis" in "the inner perceptions of our own psychical phenomena". For:

> "[P]sychology, like all natural sciences, has its basis in perception [*Wahrnehmung*] and experience [*Erfahrung*]. Above all, however, its source is to be found in the *inner perception* of our own psychical phenomena [*der eigenen psychischen Phänomene*]. We would never know what a thought is, or a judgement, pleasure or pain, desires or aversions, hopes or fears, courage or despair, decisions and voluntary intentions

> if we did not learn what they are through inner perception of our own phenomena. Note, however, that we said that inner perception [*innere Wahrnehmung*] and not introspection, i.e. inner observation [*innere Beobachtung*], constitutes this primary [*erste*] and indispensable source [*unentbehrliche Quelle*] of psychology." (Brentano 1995a, p. 22)

Inner perception as the source for psychological research indicates our mental awareness in the active *perceiving* of our thoughts, judgements, feelings, etc.[6] It thus denotes the simple empirical fact of one's own actual consciousness. This latter point plays a rather important role in the elaboration of Brentano's new science of descriptive psychology. Since, following Locke, we have direct access to the contents of consciousness, we can rule out the hypothesis that the unconscious has any explanatory role in our knowledge of consciousness. Instead, Brentano can argue that there is a built-in automatic perception of the contents of consciousness that is simply part of and immanent to consciousness all the time we are conscious. In this sense, "conscious acts", Brentano's technical term "psychical phenomena", and our "experiences" are all synonymous expressions for Brentano (1995b, p. 25, 63); and whenever a truth is grasped about our experiences or psychical phenomena, this is an immediate and direct grasp of the existence of a psychical phenomenon, namely an inner perception (the German term *Wahr-nehmen* is literally translated as "truth-grasping"). Brentano in fact, draws a fundamental distinction between "inner perception" and "inner observation", what he calls "introspection" (1995a, p. 22). The former indicates what is being directly experienced by and in the psychical act in itself (*in sich selbst*, see Brentano 1995b, p. 25). According to Brentano, the latter instead is impossible. An act of inner observation would lead to an infinite number of acts of inner observation, i.e., an act of inner observation observing the previous act and so forth *ad infinitum*. Outer observation is, of course, possible; but, for Brentano, this can only take place within memory. Since our memory is fallible such outer observation is not inner perception or ever necessarily true.

6 See Brentano 1995, p. 22, 28, 32; also Brentano 2009, p. 11.

For instance, my direct perception of touching a surface, within which my tactile feelings manifest, is connected to yet nevertheless distinct from my subsequent observations of those feelings (Brentano 1995a, p. 30). If, moreover, I turn my attention to my own anger, this anger in its original mental state would immediately be negated or at least undergo some modification in that process. No immediate knowledge of what anger is can be obtained that way. Yet the inner awareness of the *fact* that there are psychical phenomena or experiences is part of what it is to have psychical phenomena or experiences. In this sense, inner perception is an active process of both being aware of and being directed to the state of consciousness of the mentally active subject. The thinking subject is always able to become aware of both, the object of his thought, in his thinking, and the correlated act of thinking that object. Inner perception therefore can offer us, in further reflections, content accessible through descriptive psychological investigations. What guarantees its legitimacy is the fact that:

> "[E]very psychical phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional [or mental] inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a content, direction towards an object [which is not to be understood here as meaning a thing], or immanent objectivity." (Brentano 1995, p. 88-89)

Here, Brentano touches both sides of the subject-object relation for a thinking subject. From the objective side, the concept of intentionality is set to characterise the mode of being which is enjoyed by the object in the psychical phenomenon or mental act- experience itself ; namely as "an immanent objectivity" or "mental" or "intentional" object which is intended by the act.[7] From the subjective side, intentionality is set to capture the kind of relatedness ("Richtung"; see Brentano 1995b, p. 76) or directedness ("Beziehung"; see Brentano 1995b, p. 13) of that act-experience towards its immediate intentional, mental or immanent object. In Brentano's terms, "there is no hearing unless something is heard [...] no believing unless something is believed [...] no hoping unless

7 See below the discussion on Brentano's double understanding of physical phenomena in section 3.

something is hoped for [...] and so on, for all other psychological phenomena" (1995a, p. 88-89; 2009, p. 14). Brentano, therefore, identifies two distinguishing features of our psychical phenomena or conscious mental acts. This is confirmed by a famous 1875 passage in *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* in which he re-introduces the scholastic concept of the intentional in-existence of an object. One feature concerns the immanence of the objects experiences in consciousness and the other concerns the directedness of the acts of consciousness towards their intentional objects. These two theses of intentionality are taken together by him to mean the intentional relatedness of my actual consciousness to its intended object (Brentano 1995a, p. 97-98).

Since apodictic certainty can be directly obtained from within our actual experience through reflecting directly on the contents of consciousness and its objectivities, we can thus understand why, for Brentano, the directness and directedness of any presentative psychical-act makes the inner-perception of those experiences a legitimate justification, or source, for the status of descriptive psychology as an "exact science" (Brentano 1995a, p. 30). Like Hume, Brentano thinks that access to consciousness is peculiarly direct and certain, compared to any other form of knowledge (1995a, p. 16-17). Therefore, it gives the mind a "content of reflection" as Husserl puts it in his *Logical Investigations* (1970, p. 815).[8] Like Descartes, Locke and Hume, Brentano also believes that the way we come to a knowledge of our mind is through direct reflection on it. Since inner perception means turning one's attention directly towards one's own experiences, this inner perception also constitutes the *method* to be deployed in Brentano's new science of descriptive psychology. It is, as Brentano stresses, the "ultimate and indispensable [methodological] source" of our knowledge of our consciousness (1995a, p. 32).

The concept of inner perception also plays a *methodological role* in Brentano's project of an exact science. Descriptive psychology, as is shown in the name, aims at *describing* the inner perception, the direct experience of psychical phenomena, with precision. For Brentano, then, the directness of this *description* of the inner perception makes the *investigation* that is conducted from

8 Also see Brentano 1995, p. 16-17.

within the inner perceptions of our own psychical phenomena an investigation that is always valid. No matter what I (as an individual thinking subject) doubt about my own thinking, or how I doubt my own thinking, contents will befall me. So, there remains something indubitable and infallible, including the content of this doubt as perceived within this very doubt-process. This is precisely why Brentano can say: "[T]here may or may not be souls [as the substantial bearer of mental activities], but there are psychical phenomena [as directly perceived by inner perceptions]" (Brentano 1995a, p. 88). Thematically and methodologically, inner perception is examined as referring to the inner awareness of conscious experience, combined with an inner reflection on that experience as perceived. Brentano is, therefore, able to clarify and justify his empirical, namely experiential, standpoint. On Brentano's view, it is at least *possible* to identify and measure up the presence of the above experiential standpoint in the philosophical examination of various accounts of the human soul, the mind, or psychical phenomena, that have been proposed by philosophers down the ages: for example, Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, and modern "English empiricists", down to contemporary philosophical (e.g. the Mills) and natural-scientific (e.g. Fechner, Wundt) attempts.[9]

Therefore, the task set out for descriptive psychology is, according to Brentano, to list "fully the basic components out of which everything internally perceived by humans is composed, and *the ways* in which these components can be connected" (Brentano 1995b, p. 4; my emphasis). Thus, for Brentano, inner perception carries what we can call the "descriptive mark" which is of critical importance to an exact scientific project that claims to seek the universal truth.[10] This is precisely what Brentano means by "empirical standpoint" here: that is, an *experiential standpoint of a priori epistemological significance*, carrying out a descriptive psychological analysis based on intuitive inner experiences. As commented by De Boer, in seeking to establish descriptive psychology as an exact science based on "exhaustive induction," Brentano in fact "employs a method that is never used in the natural sciences and is more akin to that of mathematics" (De

9 Brentano makes such an attempt in Brentano 1995, p. 177-93.
10 See Husserl 1970, p. 778.

Boer 1976, p. 106). Viewed in such light, Brentano's new descriptive psychological science seeks an *a priori* epistemological status which is, for instance, characteristic of the Kantian critique. In fact, it seeks to be a universal theory of understanding that explicates the mental experiences of an active thinking subject, and not just those experiences as addressed and described by Kant's science of natural and moral phenomena, hence without any recourse to the concepts of inexact science and through the formulation of exceptionless principles.[11]

The critical question emerging from all of the above, therefore, is this: what is it that makes the outcome of the investigation of inner-perception *always* valid? Brentano must find a way to justify why a description that is true of an actual particular experience or psychical phenomenon is true of all of those possible experiences; that is true and necessarily true of the *structure* of that intentional consciousness itself. For Brentano, however, there lies a big obstacle here, as he thinks that what renders his position an empirical science is that it is based on the *particular experiences of an actual mentally active subject*. Inner perceptions are all of particulars: particular colours or sounds or odours, or of thinking this or that, or willing this or that, and so forth (Brentano 2009, p. 12). As much as he wants to be consistently in agreement with Aristotle on this particular point, the following question has yet to be answered: what then makes the *outcome* of such a descriptive method a *universally* valid one, despite the evidential basis of descriptive psychology being provided by individual experiences of particular subjects? The experiential approach used in Brentano's "exhaustive induction" (1995b, p. 74) method cannot only be true of the particular objects encountered by the thinking subject, if any knowledge claim of *a priori* status is to be formed, even though this possible knowledge claim is formed from the experience of the particulars.[12] Brentano, however, is aware of this difficulty, and he argues that the solution lies within the universality of thoughts characteristic of induction in the broad (not narrow) sense, such that:

11 In this sense Brentano also calls this descriptive psychology a pure psychology, a very Kantian expression. See Brentano 1995b, p. 3, 4, 7.

12 Cf. Kant's distinction of the origin of knowledge between "starting with experience" and "arising from experience" in the *Critique of Pure Reason* 1998, B2.

> "[T]hey [intuitions] are *restricted to generalities* to such an extent that it is *a matter of dispute* whether what within us thinks corporeal or spiritual. [...] How does it happen that despite the fact that intuitive thought is so thoroughly universal, we can still very firmly maintain that *everything which is must be individual*? The answer is that the concept of there being two things implies that we do not mean by the one what we mean by the other, [...] when one is thought of in terms of *an exhaustive definition, it must be presented in some way that the other is not*." (Brentano 1995a, p. 311-314)

We can clearly see Brentano's strategy here as putting emphasis on the presentation or formulation of a knowledge claim. For Brentano, thinking is an act of abstracting things (in the sense of defining an object to be this or that) and is thus universal. Instead, the entities that are the contents of thinking-acts, elements of thoughts, are merely empirical, namely, experientially individual (Brentano, 2009, p. 24). Indeed, as Brentano correctly argues, "we can go even further and say that the individuating attribute must be a positive determination, *one which was merely negative would itself be universal and hence could not possibly be an individuating factor*" (Brentano 1995a, p. 314). For instance, the conversion of "colour implies spatial extension" into the negative particular existential judgement, "there is no spatially unextended colour", or into the hypothetical particular existential judgment, "if a colour phenomenon (or coloured thing) exists, it must be spatial", *is epistemologically valid*, as these two statements are universal. Brentano, therefore, thinks that his philosophical conversion of universal judgements into either negative existential particular judgements or hypothetical existential particular judgement suffices to fulfil the condition of universality needed for descriptive psychology. Furthermore, in his view this method is also an expression of the "empirical standpoint, for it is both, "descriptive", because of intuitive universality, and "empirical", because of its experiential individuality.

Aside from the technical obstacles, it is nevertheless clear that, in Brentano's view, he has reached the point from which his descriptive psychology can arise "as an autonomous enterprise, if not as a separate one", separate from empirical psychology or all

modern natural sciences.[13] This is Brentano's way of establishing an *a priori* theory of understanding: starting from conscious experience (presented as psychical phenomena), with its validity as well as universality fully vindicated in intuitive experience (via reflective inner perception). Descriptive psychology, as Brentano's configures the discipline, is therefore thematically a post-Kantian and post- Humean scientific-philosophic line of inquiry into human cognition. It is also systematically a transcendental epistemology, concerned with the *a priori* elements structuring conscious experience (as contingent connections within experience). Viewed in Brentano's light, therefore, descriptive psychology gives us both, an alternative to Kant and Hume, as well as a form of post-Kantian idealism like those that had flourished in the 19th century.

3. Kant's Shadow in Brentano's Understanding of the Subject-Object/Thing Relation

Although Brentano's scientific project does not subscribe to Kant's transcendental idealism or any of its derivatives, it does not go beyond Kant's epistemological scope either. Thematically it fits well into the Kantian "pre-condition of possibility quest" for *a priori* universal knowledge. Nor does it go against the Kantian immanentist theory of a mechanistic and deterministic nature. The latter is due to Brentano's double understanding of the "physical phenomena" as both immediate objects of sense knowledge as well as those objects that are examined in natural science. Moreover, according to Brentano's theory of causation, natural science must assume the existence of an absolute world. The discussion below will show this latter point.

Brentano's understanding of causation deviates significantly and systematically from both Hume's and Kant's. For Hume, causes and effects are discrete mental events, with no necessary connection between them. For Hume, there is only a mental association of one with the other "for the effect is totally different from the cause, and consequently can never be discovered in it" (Hume 1975, p. 28). Whatever objective states of affairs we claim to know are but matters of fact, and as such there can be no necessary connections. There can only be *contingent connections*, namely connections made by us, the experiencing subjects. These

13 On this observation see Spiegelberg 1994, p. 35.

connections are psychologically unavoidable (because this is the way our mind actually works) but epistemologically unjustifiable. Following this view, our knowledge of nature is the product of the association of the succession of two discrete arbitrary events and of an alleged causation in "binding them together" which can turn out to be entirely false.[14] The same situation applies also to the experiences of the subjects themselves. Whatever cognitions we have of ourselves, these are, according to Hume, no more nor less than "a bundle of perceptions" (Hume 1896, p. 252). There is no substantial bearer, as it were, of an identical self that can be established necessarily *a priori*, nor an object corresponding to the idea of a self that we can psychologically generate and construe.

Kant, on the other hand, attempts to establish that the causal relation is somewhat objective and is not merely a matter of contingent empirical or psychological association. Kant's argument for causation as a response to Hume's challenge is not without controversy. Yet his general approach to Hume's attack on the conception of causality is rather unequivocal. In fact, Kant subsumes the problem of the connection between cause and effect under his larger epistemological project concerning the possibility of synthetic *a priori* knowledge, which is essential to mathematics and mathematical physics.[15] Unlike Hume, Kant understands experiences not as arbitrary but as necessarily connected: "experience is possible only by means of the representation of a necessary connection of perceptions" (1998, B218). This normative necessity also applies to the subjective "I think," as it "*must* be able to accompany all my representations" (1998, B131; my emphasis). Kant therefore considers causes and their effects as distinct but necessarily related events, which are of objective-scientific significance (hence the famous distinction between "appearance" and "thing-in-itself" (1998, Bxxv-Bxxvi). Causal relations are of the objects themselves, but only to the extent that the objects are themselves prefigured as "appearances" for human cognition governed by necessary laws. The natural sciences as conceived through Kant's categories may, thus, produce necessarily true knowledge claims about nature insofar as this knowable nature is preconfigured to fit, as it were, this chain of scientific inquires

14 Cf. Hume 1975, p. 29; and Hume 1896, p. 196.
15 Cf. Kant 1998, B19, B124, B127; and Hume 2004, p. 4: 310-13.

(Kant 1998, B163-165). Natural science for Kant can thus obtain completeness within and despite epistemic immanence. But it can never touch the unknowable, i.e., things in themselves.

Brentano's stance on this issue deviates from both Hume and Kant. He believes Hume to be correct in saying that the causal relations are products of our psychological associations. Yet he further thinks that since we *unavoidably* associate the very idea of a cause with an effect, there is a sense of necessity and co-existence which is not only an empirical or psychological matter of succession. Unlike Kant's idealistic reading, however, Brentano also thinks that this necessity does not belong to the *a priori* structure of our capacity to have knowledge, but to the existences *as such*, the existence of the cause and the existence of its effect, "in themselves" [*in sich selbst*]. We may not know how causation works or why it works at all. That would be a matter for metaphysical and theological speculation. But we know *for a fact* that it works simply because we require it to make sense of *both* psychical and physical phenomena, as well as any cause and its effect, such that:

> "[I]n every conclusion we notice that it is produced by the thought of its premises, in every choice it is affected by its motives. Also, every mental act, such as our seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, is maintained not by analogy to the law of inertia but only by a continually renewed causation." (Brentano, 1987, p. 287)

Brentano, then, understands causality as neither a mere psychological association of distinct and discreet unrelated events produced by the experiencing subject (as is the case for Hume), nor as a necessary connection of objects available to cognition in the way they are represented to the knowing subject (as is the case for Kant), but as an "absolute" law which is independent of our experiences of both the psychical and physical realms. Whether or not we know or can know about such causality, causality exists and persists throughout the course of our endeavours in the world.

For Brentano, causation cannot be mere succession between the cause and the effect. For instance, even though I drink tea every morning before the sun goes up, it would be nonsensical to say

that me drinking tea causes the sunrise, as no evidence for it could be found whatsoever. For Brentano, the cause must in some way facilitate the existence of its effect, thus must follow what he calls "the laws of co-existence and succession" (Brentano 1995a, p. 98-99). Brentano gives the example of directing a pen for writing (Brentano 2022, p. 449). My willingness to write "causes" a bodily (material) action, which makes contact with the external world thereby bringing a physical phenomenon into existence. A parallel example we can give is this: I want to drink tea, and then I go and drink tea; now I drink tea, and then my body gets warm. The condition is at least partly responsible or productive of the outcome, and as such in reflection we can say, with a varying degree of exactness, that the former causes the existence of the latter. Normatively valid judgements, such as deriving the existence of conclusions from the premisses of a logically valid argument, are directly visible in the sense that they are directly perceptible in inner perceptions. Physical causations, by comparison, are not directly visible. We can only have indirect and imperfect knowledge of them. Thus, for Brentano, nature itself can be regarded as conditioned by its own absolute laws. Natural sciences, however plausible they may become, can in principle only produce incomplete truths relative to this absolute nature.[16]

Far from rejecting modern natural science and the truth-claims of natural science, however probable they are and must be, Brentano elaborates his view of philosophy like Kant, from "*within* the continual rise of the natural sciences." (McDonnell 2023, p. 54, my emphasis). In a thematic sense, his objective is to do justice to psychology both as a natural-scientific investigation and a descriptive-experiential philosophical inquiry. In a systematic sense, moreover, Brentano accepts a naturalistic position as regards the objects that transcend consciousness. To "be fair to Brentano's position" here, therefore, we must, as McDonnell explains:

> "[R]ecognize *two different* meanings that Brentano operates for the one term of "physical phenomena" in PES [*Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*]. "Physical phenomena", in sense 1, are Lockean so-called secondary qualities, that is, sensorially perceivable

16 Cf. Stoenescu 2022, p. 228, 242.

> qualities (colours, sounds, odours, warmth etc.) which exist as the objects *of those actual experiences*. These exist only *as long as the actual experience occurs*. They thus enjoy *only* phenomenal existence [...] "Physical phenomena", in sense 2, are the theoretically-constructed objects of natural science (light particles, sine waves, forces, etc.). When considered from a natural-scientific-theoretical point of view, *these* "physical phenomena" enjoy *actual* existence in a world that is hypothesized by the natural scientist as one that is "extended in space and flowing in time," whether we are made aware of their actual existence through natural-scientific means, or not." (McDonnell, 2023, p. 59)

We can use the following example to illustrate Brentano's position here. I, the experiencing subject, see a black iron door out there in front of me, and as such it is perceived as a physical object external to myself. But its blackness or tactility have only *phenomenal existence* insofar as this door is now present to me, the subject who is actively experiencing it. Still, if I acknowledge that this door is in fact made up of atomic particles (and is seen as it is because of the light, my retina, etc.), I must also acknowledge that these imperceptible particles do actually or really exist independent of my experience whatsoever. This implies that the *law* that expresses these facts is itself absolute, albeit in an inexact way; which nevertheless tells us something about what this physical phenomenon (the black iron door) *really* is (namely, atomic particles). Brentano's determination of the relation between the experiencing-thinking subject and the object considered as external to the subject (in the real, actual, or physical sense) therefore produces an interesting and important mismatch between him and Kant in both the epistemological and ontological sense.

For Kant, the meaningfulness of a thing is determined *a priori* for us according to our epistemic capacity. We cannot step outside of that. Furthermore, every appearance has a corresponding thing in itself, despite the fact that the latter cannot be cognized as a meaningful object of knowledge (Kant 2004, 4: 315). The object is devoid of epistemic meaningfulness *whenever it is understood as* "in itself". That is to say, for each natural scientific theoretical

construct there is an entity-like co-subsisting being in-itself [*an sich*] that is external to my mind and not knowable through natural scientific means. Yet the connection between phenomena and noumena is not cut off. In fact, the thing-in-itself must at the same time be acknowledged as metaphysically "thinkable", which is why Kant names it a "noumenon" (Kant 1998, Bxxvi). For Kant, then, the existence of this thing-in-itself is ontologically and epistemologically transcendent to the subject's capacity of knowing anything sensible or intelligible, but it is also in *a peculiar, objective sense* which is immanent to the knowing subject's *cogito*, i.e., thoughts, simply because it is completely accessible via natural scientific means.

For Brentano, on the other hand, only the natural-theoretical-constructed claims of science, deliver knowledge of what constitutes real or actual existence *within* the partially knowable mechanistic nature, albeit without perfect certainty. This means that a physical object posited by a natural scientific construction is, according to this design, in-itself both existing outside of human consciousness, and yet epistemically internal to human cognition. Nature and the natural world are, for Brentano, in themselves not relative to *a priori* conditions of objective knowability, as it is for Kant. Rather, for Brentano natural sciences are objective relative to absolute nature: they produce significant yet temporary results that are always ready to be falsified or modified by new experiences of the objective world 'out there'.

Precisely because of this, for Brentano, the *meaningfulness of everything* that exists in the world, in this naturalistic sense, is pregiven within the unquestioned *natural ways* of understanding nature and the world. The objects posited by the natural sciences are real and absolute, albeit fallible; and yet there is no incoherence. This framework turns the Kantian picture upside down. Transcendence in the genuine Kantian epistemological sense never manifests here. Rather, the unknown for Brentano, becomes an immanent part of the known. Brentano's understanding of the scope and philosophical locus of the subject-object relation is, in this epistemological sense, internalized into the

Kantian epistemological immanence theory pertaining to Kant's mechanistic view of nature.[17]

Conclusion

As McDonnell remarks, for Brentano "nature, insofar as it is known and capable of being known through natural-scientific means, not the existence of nature outside of this scientific parameter [which would amount to an autonomous, self-standing epistemic region], is solely Brentano's focus here as it was for Kant in his *Prolegomena*." (McDonnell 2023, p. 61-62). Yet this delimitation applies to Kant only *methodologically*, with respect that is to the ways we, in our knowing capacity, "set the rules for nature" to achieve our scientific objectives; *but not thematically*, for Kant's natural-scientific determinism in the *Prolegomena* is accompanied by a concern for the meaningfulness of that which is metaphysically transcendent. In fact, this same concern motivates him to "make room for [personal religious] faith" (Kant 1998, Bxxx).

Brentano's metaphysical delimitation to nature in the above sense as part of his descriptive psychology must be distinguished from his methodological innovation towards an *empirical a priori*, as we have called it. Though his student Husserl is able to carry forward this *a priori* scientific-philosophical inquiry via a modified descriptive-eidetic phenomenology, Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, with its concerns for the experiences of a possible valid logical consciousness as such, are nevertheless still conducted from within and conditioned by such an epistemologically internalized objective transcendence. The metaphysical presuppositions of maintaining such an objective, independent and absolute transcendent natural world remain *unquestioned*, until Husserl's famous transcendental breakthrough.[18] Brentano, on the other hand, would not recognize any of these "new seminal motives" (Husserl 1976, p. 51) that his own philosophy gives birth to. By the time Husserl has publicly demonstrated his transcendental phenomenology in 1913, Brentano has further polarized his sense

17 This point can further be vindicated by Brentano's rare use of the term transcendent to characterise "everything which exists" as well as the common interpretation of the term "transcendent" as physical things external to consciousness. See Brentano 1995, p. 8, 257, 293.

18 Cf. Willard 2002, p. 69, 75-76; and Zahavi 2002, p. 104-05.

of absolute nature, towards a form of reism in which "there is nothing other than things [*Reales*]" (1966, p. 68).[19]

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19 For a discussion on Brentano's later philosophy of reism, see Kriegel 2015, 153-180.

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Hermeneutic Invisibility: Subjective-Objective Intertwinement in Migrant Orientation

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Abstract

This paper contributes to the critical phenomenological-hermeneutic examination of the subjective-objective intertwinement by following several migrants' stories of their lived social experiences of belonging, home, and identity. The concept of hermeneutic invisibility is proposed as helpful in revealing and interpreting various manifestations of the subjective-objective intertwinement. Hermeneutic invisibility is understood here as a systemic lack of understanding of someone's embodied and socio-politically situated perspective from which they interpret and communicate their experiences. The paper proceeds to explore hermeneutic invisibility in connection with Sara Ahmed's critically phenomenological idea of orientation and, more specifically, migrant orientation, which is understood as a spatio-temporally and socio-politically shaped reality of living in the process of arrival. This shows how dominant public narratives can render migrants' perspectives hermeneutically invisible by preventing a sense of arrival and perpetuating the lived experiences of liminality. Ahmed's concept of migrant orientation helps to understand the ongoing experiences of hermeneutic invisibility of people who have not migrated themselves but still live in the process of arrival – later-generation migrants. Attending to migrants' experiences and perspectives highlights that the dynamic of hermeneutic invisibility can unfold in both directions: towards the migrant in their efforts to 'arrive', sometimes doubting the validity of their interpretations, as well as towards the dominant public narratives that privilege some perspectives on the meaning of belonging and marginalise others. Finally, hermeneutic invisibility is discussed

in conversation with Miranda Fricker's critically hermeneutic framework of epistemic injustice. Following migrants' stories of different experiences of hermeneutic invisibility sheds light on the potential of this concept to expand Fricker's account. By drawing on the two forms of epistemic injustice (testimonial and hermeneutical), hermeneutic invisibility highlights their deeper systemic intertwinement in at least some of the lived experiences of people whose embodied hermeneutic perspectives are socio-politically marginalised.

Keywords: hermeneutic invisibility | migrant orientation | epistemic injustice | Sara Ahmed | Miranda Fricker

> "We are fully dependent on each other for the possibility of being understood and without this understanding we are not intelligible, we do not make sense, we are not solid, visible, integrated; we are lacking."
>
> María Lugones (1987, p. 8)

Introduction

In this paper, I aim to contribute to the phenomenological investigation of the intertwinement of the subjective and the objective in our spatio-temporally and socio-politically situated lived experiences. While the subjective-objective intertwinement can be explored in various lived situations, my focus here is on migrants' experiences of belonging, home, and identity. I propose the concept of *hermeneutic invisibility*, defined in a dedicated section, and argue that it helps us understand some manifestations of the subjective-objective intertwinement revealed in migrants' experiences. Throughout the paper, I introduce and follow several accounts of migrants' ('subjective') experiences lived in specific contexts of spatio-temporal and socio-political ('objective') reality. I draw these accounts from selected secondary sources: two empirical studies (George and Selimos 2019; Anthias 2002), one novel (Shafak 2021), and one autobiography (Çevikkollu 2023). Although any such choice contains an element of arbitrariness, my selection is motivated by the prospect of covering a range of diverse migration situations, including cross-generational ones.

Such a selection helps to illustrate that the ideas discussed in this paper can be usefully applied across various migration contexts.

Methodologically, my approach to interpreting migrants' experiences is situated in the contemporary philosophical projects of critical phenomenology and hermeneutics. I bring them together by engaging with Sara Ahmed's (2006) phenomenological concept of migrant orientation and Miranda Fricker's (2007) hermeneutical framework of epistemic injustice, introducing and exploring each in their respective sections. Both thinkers' ideas investigate the subjective-objective intertwinement in different lived contexts, approaching it from various perspectives. By critically foregrounding the dynamics of subjective-objective intertwinement, I shall bring them into productive conversation with the concept of hermeneutic invisibility to improve our understanding of migrants' experiences. Specifically, this allows me to unpack the socio-political dynamics underpinning the phenomenon of hermeneutic invisibility. Furthermore, I argue that hermeneutic invisibility can expand Fricker's framework by revealing the mutually informing connections between both forms of epistemic injustice she distinguishes, namely testimonial and hermeneutical injustice.

1. Phenomenological Approaches to Subjective-Objective Intertwinement

One possible way to define objectivity and subjectivity is by contrast. According to this approach, anything that depends on a subject's mind and perception for its existence (such as the smell of a rose), while the objective is that which exists independently of a subject (such as the length of a rose). The subjective cannot be measured and understood reliably because it cannot be measured objectively, that is, independently of a subject. This view insists on a clear separation between the objective and the subjective. The arguments I present in this paper follow a different approach, that of phenomenology, which offers a way of seeing the subjective and objective as intertwined. The phenomenological approach focuses on lived experiences, theorising them as always already spatio-temporally and socio-politically situated. Edmund Husserl, the principal founder of phenomenology as a philosophical discipline, argued that the structure of our consciousness is

intentionality (West, 2010). In its various modes such as perception, conceptualisation, and others, consciousness is directed toward an object, intending and constituting the objective which appears as intended, namely a correlate of the act of intending (Taminiaux 1994). Thus, for Husserl, objective knowledge of a rose, for example, is impossible without acknowledging the role of subjectivity constituting it (e.g., see Moran and Cohen 2012, p. 229-230).

Crucially, constitution does not mean that the object depends on our consciousness for existence. In phenomenology, constitution is a process of making an object appear to us in a respective way, not a process of creating an object in an isolated mind (Zahavi 2019). Intentionality constitutes the object, making it appear to us as intended and it does so by working on the raw materials it receives from the world, for consciousness is essentially embodied. Thus, intentionality as the structure of consciousness, means that I, as the intending subject, and the intended object are intertwined. Viewed phenomenologically, the objective and the subjective are approached in mutual correlation. The object appears as intended by an intending subject. The appearance of an object situates me as an intending subject. The starting point of all my acts of intending is my lived body (*Leib* for Husserl, e.g., see 2000, §36-37), which grounds me as this spatio-temporally situated intending subject: I, here and now (Moran and Cohen 2012).

Martin Heidegger expanded Husserl's work on the intentionality of consciousness by engaging with it ontologically. He posited that our way of being, namely *Dasein* (2010, §9), is fundamentally characterised by the intertwinement of intending and the intended. We exist in the sense of being-in-the-world, always in some context of relational involvements, in intertwinement, thrown into a spatio-temporal and socio-historical world (Heidegger 2010). In other words, we are always oriented in particular ways and responding to others' orientations towards us. Therefore, as living, experiencing subjects, we are intertwined with the world on a variety of levels: embodied, affective, interpretative, intersubjective, social, and historical. From a phenomenological perspective, the subjective-objective intertwinement is our fundamental way of being before we analytically separate the subjective and the objective into distinct, opposite categories. Each self is relational in developing

and maintaining itself in intricate interactions with others. However, as migrants' stories will illustrate, the relationality of self does not unfold in an assumption-free and value-neutral context. Undoubtedly, many ideas of other crucial phenomenological thinkers deserve separate attention, which is outside the scope of this paper. For example, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's later work on flesh as the chiasm explores how we are entangled with the world on an embodied level (Merleau-Ponty 1968). This presents a fruitful avenue for further research in the context of migration, particularly in conjunction with the concept of hermeneutic invisibility.

Contemporary philosophical research areas of critical phenomenology and hermeneutics build on their common phenomenological heritage by critically foregrounding and unpacking different power relations shaping our experiences and interpretations. As developing philosophical projects, they do not have fixed definitions and contain multiple interpretations of what makes them 'critical' (e.g., see Salamon 2018; Guenther 2021; Kearney 2015). Nevertheless, all these interpretations are committed to engaging in socio-political critique, applying it to their investigations of the subjective-objective intertwinement in multiple lived contexts. Critical phenomenologists attend to various forms of systemic marginalisation (such as racism, colonialism) that co-constitute the spatio-temporal and socio-political conditions forming our embodied lived experiences (e.g., see Ahmed 2006; Yancy 2014; Ngo 2017; Al-Saji 2024). Critical hermeneutic thinkers investigate how different socio-political conditions, particularly in their marginalising manifestations, co-constitute meanings that shape our lived experiences, including self-understanding and exercising our agency (e.g., Kearney 2015; Scott-Baumann and Marcelo 2018). In particular, Fricker's epistemic injustice framework (2007) continues to inspire rich philosophical work at the intersection of systemic socio-political marginalisation and the hermeneutic wrongs inflicted on those marginalised, influencing their lived experiences (e.g., see Anderson 2023; Catala 2025).

By engaging with Ahmed's idea of migrant orientation and Fricker's framework of epistemic injustice, I situate this paper in the phenomenological tradition and, more specifically, in its contemporary critical projects that engage in socio-political

critique of the power relations co-shaping the subjective-objective intertwinement. My contribution is the idea of hermeneutic invisibility, which I introduce in the following section and employ to interpret migrants' experiences in subsequent sections. This will allow me to illustrate some of the dynamics of the subjective-objective intertwinement lived in different migration contexts.

2. Hermeneutic Invisibility

One of the manifestations of the subjective-objective intertwinement revealed in migrants' interpretations of their experiences is the phenomenon I refer to as hermeneutic invisibility. By hermeneutic invisibility, I mean a systemic lack of understanding of someone's embodied and socio-politically situated perspective (or lack of effort to understand it) from which they interpret and communicate their experiences (or attempts to do so). This can be done deliberately to silence and exclude perspectives and interpretations contradicting a dominant narrative.

However, a much more quotidian and pernicious form of hermeneutic invisibility occurs when one unwittingly maintains dominant narratives that normalise the experiences of some while marginalising others. This is done by habitually repeating different social practices and interpretations that appear to us non-problematically as common sense. Nevertheless, this seemingly value-neutral familiarity is the effect of the close interaction between normativity and habit formation, which I explore in the section on Ahmed.

For those who experience hermeneutic invisibility, it can prompt a sense that their experiences, values, beliefs, ideas, orientations in life, are somehow wrong, empty, or not worth an attempt to be socially understood. Given the systemic character of these circumstances (shaping a socially objective reality), a person can feel hermeneutically invisible to others and, to an extent, even to themselves. They can start doubting themselves as a capable knower and hermeneutic agent able to come up with valid interpretations of their own experiences. While hermeneutic invisibility is not exclusive to migrants' experiences, in the following sections I attend to migrants' stories to reveal how hermeneutic invisibility can unfold at the intersection of questions

of particular relevance to migrants: the connections between one's sense of belonging, home, and identity. Throughout, I will bring hermeneutic invisibility into productive conversation with Ahmed's notion of migrant orientation and Fricker's framework of epistemic injustice.

In a recent work on epistemic injustice, Amandine Catala (2025) builds on Fricker's framework and offers a more nuanced interpretation of the different forms and conditions of hermeneutic injustice. While a detailed engagement is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that Catala's expanded understanding of epistemic and, specifically, hermeneutic injustice has thematic parallels with my idea of hermeneutic invisibility. Her approach to epistemic injustice as a dynamic phenomenon that situates epistemic power and agency is a promising avenue of further research to critically investigate the subjective-objective intertwinement in the lived experiences of migration and beyond.

3. David's Story

David was a participant in an empirical study investigating immigrant settlement experiences in Canada (George and Selimos 2019). He came to study in Canada with the goal of staying and finding a job in his profession upon graduation. He was a young man from an upper-middle-class family in Nigeria, and his ambition was to become an investment banker. David associated successful integration in Canada with developing a diverse social network and finding work. For him, these two social experiences were crucial in order not to feel like an outsider. More specifically, for him work represented "the way you fall into society" (George and Selimos 2019, p. 133). However, on both accounts, he was confronted by systemic exclusion and discrimination.

Struggling to expand his network beyond the Nigerian community and even being ignored by people on the streets when he asked for directions contradicted David's expectations of a welcoming Canada and his formative social experiences growing up in Nigeria. Continued failure to find work he qualified for, even being laughed at during one interview when he said he wanted to be an investment banker, contributed to David's sense of being confused and overwhelmed. He was trying to understand the system and

place in which he found himself, in this unfamiliar socio-political environment that systemically marginalised him on account of both race and immigrant accent. He felt that "unless I change the way I sound, I'll always be (sic) seen as an Other, I'll be seen outside of the system" (George and Selimos 2019, p. 133).

David started to interpret his experiences not merely as subjective (isolated) instances but as manifestations of the socio-political (objective) reality for him in Canada, namely systemic exclusion and marginalisation based on his social status as an immigrant from Nigeria. One of the harmful expressions of this subjective-objective intertwinement in David's lived experiences in Canada was that he began doubting himself as a capable hermeneutic agent: "I need a break […]. I need to move somewhere where I can just be sure that it's not me […]. Everybody keeps telling me … it's just my personal experience. Every now and then I'll talk to an immigrant … like an immigrant from like Nigeria, then they're like, 'Yeah no. It's not you. It's everywhere. This is what I'm experiencing too.'" (George and Selimos 2019, p. 133).

David's story shows that hermeneutic invisibility can manifest in degrees. He reflects on his experiences of exclusion and discrimination in Canada. Not satisfied with the dominant local narrative (of "everybody") that dismisses them as just his personal experiences, he considers them essential to better understand. David's persistence in his hermeneutic efforts is partly supported by the validation of his interpretations in the stories of the Nigerian immigrant community, which share his experience of being marginalised in the dominant narrative. However, what if he is wrong? What if all the other immigrants from Nigeria are misunderstanding their experiences? After all, isn't that what everybody keeps telling him, that these are not systemic (objective) issues but just his personal (subjective) experiences?

The belief-shaping and normative force of dominant narratives that dismiss any interpretations that do not fit their socio-political relation systems (the objective reality), thereby rendering such interpretations hermeneutically invisible, is difficult to recognise, let alone challenge. David's interpretation of his experiences in Canada does not fit the dominant local narrative, which dismisses

his experiences as isolated instances, thereby rejecting racist and anti-immigrant discrimination as forming a part of Canadian socio-political reality. This dismissal and rejection work to obscure the subjective-objective intertwinement that shapes David's experiences in Canada. The fact that other immigrants from Nigeria share David's understanding provides only partial support because they can be hermeneutically dismissed by following the same principle: they are all isolated, subjective instances, misunderstandings not representing the objective socio-political system. Thus, David's self-doubt as a hermeneutic agent and uncertainty about whether his interpretations of his experiences in Canada are wrong are conditioned by the dominant narrative's explanation of his experiences as "just his own". This explanation builds on the underlying assumptions informing the dominant narrative that privileges and normalises some experiences and their interpretations (here, non-racialised native Canadians) while marginalising and excluding others (racialised, migrant).

Therefore, David's doubt of his abilities as a knower and interpreter is conditioned by the socio-political environment in Canada that systemically marginalises immigrants from Nigeria through various discriminatory practices. While David recognises some of these practices, the roots of his experience of self-doubt are hermeneutically obscured both from David and others who habitually follow the dominant narrative's explanations of his experiences.

4. Sara Ahmed and Migrant Orientation

David's doubts also extend to his uncertainty of whether Canada could be a place where he might feel he belongs and is part of the system (George and Selimos 2019). Ahmed's ideas of orientation and migrant orientation can help us better understand David's and other migrants' experiences of hermeneutic invisibility.

Ahmed uses the concept of "orientation" to explore "how the bodily, the spatial, and the social are entangled" (Ahmed 2006, p. 181). For example, the social space of investment banking in Canada is mainly inhabited by white male bodies, whose ways of being in that space shape and orient it in line with their embodied experiences and interpretations. David's wish to become an

investment banker, expressed at a job interview, caused laughter in the bank employee's reaction. Why? David has the necessary professional qualifications and does not lack the ambition and eagerness to learn. However, the image of a Nigerian immigrant with an accent being an investment banker in Canada must have appeared to the bank employee so out of place, so misaligned with the orientation of that social space shaped by white Canadians, that the interviewer interpreted David's wish as a joke or naive absurdity. Thus, spaces are socially oriented by the bodies that inhabit them and by their ways of inhabiting. This means that some bodies are oriented towards inhabiting some social spaces more than others.

One of the effects of the entanglement of the bodily, the spatial, and the social is the development of self-reinforcing patterns. They can become habitual and difficult to notice. However, as we have just seen, habitual social patterns of acting and interpreting are not value-neutral, even though their very sense of familiarity can create the false impression that they simply reflect how things are in the natural or common-sense situation. Ahmed (2006) links habits and normativity as closely intertwined phenomena. Habitual ways of acting and understanding develop in spatio-temporal and socio-political contexts. Habits form through the "repetition of bodily and social actions over time" (Ahmed 2006, p. 66), which shapes what is considered the norm. In turn, the norm reinforces further repetition of the same actions that align with it. Given the force of the habitual familiarity of specific ways of acting and thinking, it can be very hard to notice that we may be maintaining a socio-political framework that renders some experiences and interpretations hermeneutically invisible. At the same time, if my experiences and interpretations do not align with the dominant and normatively habitual narrative, I can struggle to make sense of my experiences to myself and others.

As for migration, the effects of hermeneutic invisibility can extend to the questions of belonging and identity. For David, a sense of belonging is connected to being part of the Canadian system, which depends to a significant degree on the ability to actualise himself professionally and on the development of a diverse social network. If he cannot attain the employment he qualified for and cannot

establish friendships beyond the Nigerian immigrant community, who is he in Canada? Where does he belong? Ahmed defines her concept of "migrant orientation" as "the lived experience of facing at least two directions: toward a home that has been lost, and to a place that is not yet home" (Ahmed 2006, p. 10). To be oriented in the world as a migrant means to have an embodied experience of being between homes. It is a liminal hold on the world, a position from which one's experiences of and in the world unfold. In keeping with Ahmed's understanding of orientation more broadly as an entanglement of the bodily, spatial and social, it is crucial to recognise migrant orientation as a socially shaped reality within a relational framework. Thus, David's orientation in Canada as a migrant is not a value-neutral description of his status or who he essentially is. Instead, it is conditioned by the Canadian dominant socio-political narrative's way of relating to David, placing and interpreting him within that narrative as a Nigerian immigrant.

The phenomenon of liminality characterising specifically migrant orientation is related to the experience of home. For Ahmed (2000; 2003; 2006), home is the effect of processes and histories of arrival. A place becomes home as a result of various home-making practices. If I move to a new place, it will take time for me to inhabit and orient it, and myself in it, to feel I have arrived and am at home. Therefore, being oriented as a migrant can also be interpreted as living in the process of spatio-temporal and socio-political arrival. As highlighted by the idea of orientation, my ability to arrive somewhere depends not only on me as an isolated individual. According to Ahmed and other critical phenomenologists (e.g., see Magrì and McQueen 2023), there is no such thing as an isolated individual. Some places are oriented by some bodies so that they will make it easier for similar (normatively aligned) bodies to arrive and feel at home. In contrast, others will be prevented from developing a sense of arrival.

David's uncertainty about Canada being a place where he can be part of the system and belong may be understood as being unsure if he can fully arrive in Canada. As we have seen from David's experiences of systemic exclusion and discrimination, the dominant socio-political narratives work to create conditions that enable the arrival of some while deterring the arrival of others.

David's self-doubt and hesitation about his understanding of what it means to be part of the Canadian system and whether he can experience belonging there show that migrant orientation, especially when lived as a systemically perpetuated process of arrival, can be the locus of (degrees of) hermeneutic invisibility.

5. Later-Generation Migrants: Çevikkollu, Ada, Christine, and Yianna

The dynamic of hermeneutic invisibility unfolding in migrant orientation is revealed in several later-generation migrant stories I explore in this section. By later-generation migrants, I mean people who grew up where their families migrated to and who continue to be at least partially oriented as migrants. Living in the process of arrival can extend across generations and be experienced even by those who have never migrated. Thus, unlike first-generation migrants, who might have felt at home and experienced belonging before migrating to a new place, later-generation migrants can grow up dealing with feelings of uncertainty and self-doubt about how to make sense of their identity and belonging in a place where they were born but did not feel entirely at home. These manifestations of hermeneutic invisibility experienced by later-generation migrants foreground temporality as both an essential structure of our lived experiences (unfolding across generations) and as itself shaped by the dynamics of the subjective-objective intertwinement (such as living in perpetuated transience and an ongoing process of arrival).

Several critical phenomenologists have attended to the temporal dimensions of systemically marginalised embodiment outside the context of migration. For example, building on Frantz Fanon's (1967) idea that a racialised and colonised person is prevented from transcending the supposed essence that is systemically imposed on them by the dominant group, Helen Ngo (2019) argues that these forms of marginalisation also structure one's experience of time. In racialised temporality, a person finds themselves always already too late in the world that has predetermined their place, foreclosing other possible futures. These insights help investigate how temporality figures in later-generation migrants' experiences of hermeneutic invisibility, revealing the shaping role of the subjective-objective intertwinement.

5.1. Çevikkollu's Story

Fatih Çevikkollu is a German actor and comedian working in the political and social satire genre. In his recently published book, *Kartonwand* (2023), Çevikkollu analyses his Turkish family's biography as it unfolded in the socio-political context of living and growing up in Germany as a family of so-called "guest workers". Motivated by the gradually deteriorating mental health and eventual passing of his mother, one of Çevikkollu's primary goals in the book is to explore the connection between migration and mental traumas or disorders. Here, I focus on some of his personal stories that reveal the dynamic of hermeneutic invisibility unfolding in later-generation migrants' experiences.

Çevikkollu was born in Germany to Turkish parents who came to work in Germany as part of the recruitment agreement signed by the West German and Turkish governments in 1961 (DOMiD n.d.). The family's goal was to work for a couple of years in Germany, earn money, and return to Turkey to build a better life at home. It was a "work now, live later" plan, and children were not part of it. The dominant socio-political narrative in Germany also maintained the narrative of transience and imminent return. According to Çevikkollu, German society perceived these workers as temporary help to build their economy, and once their help was no longer required, they should be sent back (2023, p. 17-18).

The term "guest worker" ("Gastarbeiter" in German) entered public discourse and communicated the dominant attitudes towards migrant workers, delimiting their tasks and social position (Çevikkollu 2023, 17). These attitudes were institutionalised through the temporary residence permit that had to be regularly renewed and could be easily revoked. Thus, the socio-politically (objectively) imposed narrative of the transitory status of the guest workers reinforced the migrant worker families' (subjective) narrative of "this is temporary, we will soon return". This dynamic worked to exclude migrant workers from German society, preventing them from arriving and developing connections of belonging in Germany. While it had a detrimental influence on migrant workers' own experiences, their children's lived experiences were new and unfamiliar both to their parents and to the broader public discourse.

Despite having grown up in Germany and being fluent in German, many of the migrant workers' children could not make sense of their experiences (characterised by migrant orientation) as their perspectives were not part of the dominant narratives in the broader public or at home. These perspectives remained hermeneutically invisible to themselves and others for a long time before serious attempts at understanding started to be made (for example, through Çevikkollu's book). Çevikkollu describes the story of a temporary stay and an imminent return as a potent and life-shaping lie that was repeated both in the private context of his family and on a broader social level (2023, p. 201). It is a powerful example of the subjective-objective intertwinement: the objectively (socially, intersubjectively) created and maintained lie informed his (subjective) life for many years, making belonging a life-long theme.

The narrative of transience meant that Çevikkollu, like many other children of migrant workers, spent much of his pre-school years being sent back and forth to his parents in Germany and grandparents in Turkey. His memory of this period is fragmented and filled with blank spots. Eventually, as it became clear that the family's imminent return to Turkey was challenging to implement and had to be postponed, Çevikkollu was sent to a school in Cologne. Nevertheless, throughout his childhood and youth, Çevikkollu grew up hearing the story of return and preparing for it. All the best new household purchases were packed into carton boxes and stored along one wall in their apartment, waiting to be shipped to Turkey where they would be used at home (hence, the title of the book, *Kartonwand* or "a wall of carton boxes"). The return, however, never happened.

Çevikkollu's research for and writing of this book can be seen as an effort to overcome hermeneutic invisibility, to attend to the obscured perspectives, experiences, and interpretations. In a brief example of this dynamic, he mentions his discovery of an experience lived by his daughter but unfamiliar to himself (Çevikkollu 2023, p. 76). Çevikkollu's daughter has a Turkish name and grew up in a mixed German-Turkish family where everyone spoke German, and her father was the only one who spoke Turkish to her. She did not have any other Turkish experience besides the language. Today,

she feels like an imposter whenever Turkish people address her by her Turkish name. It feels like a façade behind which there is emptiness. As Çevikkollu puts it: "[Her] Turkish name is not filled with identity" (2023, p. 76, my translation of the original in German: "*[Ihr] türkische Name füllt sich nicht mit Identität.*"). Because he recognises and attends to his daughter's situated perspective and lived confusion about her Turkish identity, Çevikkollu can prevent the hermeneutic invisibility of some of the later-generation migrants' experiences from crossing over to another generation in his family.

5.2. Ada's Story

The following story comes from the world of fiction writing that engages with our lived experiences. In one of the storylines of the novel *The Island of Missing Trees*, the author, Elif Shafak, explores the conflicted feelings of a young woman, Ada, who is the daughter of a Greek Cypriot father and Turkish Cypriot mother (whose complex, tragic, and forbidden romantic union despite the postcolonial socio-political and civil conflicts in Cyprus is the novel's central theme).

Ada does not know much about Cyprus. She grew up and lives in London with her father, grieving the death of her recently deceased mother. This young woman's struggles to make sense of who she is are informed by the transgenerational traumas quietly carried through her family. They manifest especially poignantly as silences about the past and as protective absences of stories about the pain. Kostas, her father, is convinced he is doing what is best for his daughter when he says: "She's a British kid. She has never even been to Cyprus. [...] Why burden our children with our past, or the mess we've made of it? This is a new generation. A clean slate. I don't want her to be preoccupied with a history that caused us nothing but pain and distrust" (Shafak, 2021, p. 71).

Nonetheless, Ada feels these absences as nameless experiences that are confusing and difficult to understand precisely because of being hushed up, in short, hermeneutically invisible. At one point, Ada has a dialogue with her father, where she tries to express her conflicted and unclear feelings about her identity and belonging: "You and Mum moved to this country, but we're still migrating"

(Shafak 2021, p. 158). This shows how hermeneutic invisibility, reinforced by the subjective-objective intertwinement dynamic, influences our experience of temporality. Although Ada knows she did not migrate, she feels suspended in the process of migration, in the limbo of a perpetuated not yet arrived. With her best interests at heart, the father energetically tries to convince Ada that she is not migrating anywhere: "You were born and raised here. This is where you belong. You're British - with a mixed heritage, which is a great richness" (Shafak 2021, p. 158). This leaves Ada feeling unheard, her perspective and efforts to interpret her lived experiences ignored and effectively dismissed, instead receiving an explanation of how she should feel, according to her father's view.

Through Ada's character, we encounter an example of a later-generation migrant facing a situation where their experiences and point of view are made hermeneutically invisible by the socio-politically dominant narrative, here celebratory multiculturalism and inclusion that the father's character uncritically repeats and maintains. Reminiscent of the comments David kept hearing from everybody that the experiences of systemic marginalisation were just his personal experiences, Ada is prevented from fully arriving in England because she does not find a serious and respectful engagement with her views and interpretations either at home or in the broader public contexts.

Both Çevikkollu's and Ada's examples show that hermeneutic invisibility lived in migrant orientation as a manifestation of the subjective-objective intertwinement unfolds in both directions: 1) the subjective: towards the migrants who struggle to make sense of their belonging and identity experiences and start doubting themselves as capable hermeneutic agents; 2) the objective: towards the public discourse feeding the socio-politically dominant narratives that accept some interpretations of the connections between home, belonging, and identity and obscure or dismiss others.

5.3. Christine's and Yianna's Stories

In a study researching experiences that shape identity constructions among British-born Greek Cypriot youth, Floya Anthias describes observations about the difficulties of challenging dominant

narratives around racism. One of the interviewed participants, Christine, shared her thoughts: "We are white and European enough for people to claim they are not being racist to us because how could you possibly be racist to Europeans? Therefore, people are getting away with saying things to Greek Cypriots which they would never get away with saying to Jews who are basically of fairer skin and bluer eyes than we are [...] In broader anti-racist formats, it is difficult to fight for your specific rights when the slogan is black and white unite and not Greek Cypriot and white unite" (Anthias 2002, p. 506). Another participant, Yianna, echoed Christine's observations and commented on her work for a young women's group: "We have to justify why we want a group of young Greek Cypriot people, whereas some communities (sic) there is more of an understanding that they have specific needs" (Anthias 2002, p. 507).

Although Christine and Yianna were born and grew up in Britain, their sense of belonging, having fully arrived, is challenged by the covert racism they face in broader society. At the same time, their experiences are not recognised as instances of racist discrimination in the dominant socio-political narrative that claims to see them as Europeans, resting on the faulty but entrenched implicit assumption that one cannot be racist against Europeans (a broad collective identity label in need of its own critical unpacking). This assumption leads to questions like: since they are Europeans, why would they need a special community for young Greek Cypriot people, and why should the local municipalities cater to this strange demand by, for example, providing spaces and resources? After all, as Europeans, they cannot experience any racism here (in Britain), so what sort of special rights are they fighting for?

This position prevents Greek Cypriot later-generation migrants' perspectives and interpretations from entering the broader public discourse precisely because they contradict the accepted dominant narrative. The vicious circle of hermeneutic invisibility on the socio-political level (public blindness) of discriminatory experiences lived by those the dominant narrative has marginalised, maintains and perpetuates racist attitudes. Both Christine and Yianna are acutely aware of this dynamic and sensitive to the various forms of racism (for example, comparison with antisemitism and the black/white

relation). Their effortful critical discernment protects them from the adverse effects of hermeneutic invisibility extending to their personal sense of being capable knowers and hermeneutic agents. However, their experiences are still informed by the dominant socio-political narrative, which hinders a sense of being fully included and at home in the broader society in which they grew up.

6. Miranda Fricker and Epistemic Injustice

Migrants' stories I have explored in this paper illustrate the close intertwinement of the subjective and the objective in our lived experiences, always situated in and interacting with the spatio-temporal and socio-political environments. The examples of hermeneutic invisibility as ethically and politically problematic manifestations of such intertwinement reveal thematic connections to Fricker's framework of epistemic injustice.

Fricker (2007; 2008) distinguishes two forms of epistemic injustice: testimonial and hermeneutical. The former occurs when someone's testimony, information and knowledge they share, is dismissed by other(s) as unreliable or deemed unimportant based on a prejudicial attitude towards their social identity (Fricker, 2007, p. 28, 44, 145). For example, when David shares his interpretations of discriminatory experiences in Canada and hears everybody say that those are just his personal experiences, he suffers from testimonial injustice inflicted by those (namely, everybody) who dismiss the reliability and importance of his testimony based on their already existing prejudicial attitudes towards him as a racialised immigrant. On the contrary, when David shares his observations with other migrants from Nigeria, people who do not have a prejudicial attitude towards his social identity, his testimony is heard and recognised as valuable and valid. However, I contend that the varying degrees of hermeneutic invisibility revealed in David's and other migrants' stories suggest an underlying harmful dynamic beyond testimonial injustice, towards what Fricker calls hermeneutical injustice.

Fricker characterises hermeneutical injustice as a structural form of epistemic injustice that works before one tries to share their experiences with others. Hermeneutical injustice fosters a

gap in the dominant collective hermeneutical resources, which hinders a person's ability to interpret and make sense of their socially lived experiences (Fricker 2007, p. 147-175). This gap is created and sustained by the repetition of structurally prejudicial practices that marginalise a group based on their social identity and impede their hermeneutic participation in the dominant public discourses on various social experiences. Catala (2025) refers to this as hermeneutical marginalisation, which is at the root of hermeneutical injustice inflicted upon the members of non-dominant groups. This means that people identified with marginalised groups are systemically excluded from making their hermeneutic contributions to the dominant collective resources of interpreting socially lived experiences. Inflicting hermeneutical injustice on marginalised groups not only obscures their lived experiences from the dominant collective understanding (see the public blindness I mentioned earlier) but also creates conditions where people struggle to understand their own experiences (such as, for migrants, a sense of belonging, arrival, and home). This can evoke self-doubt and insecurity about one's capacity as a capable hermeneutic agent (as expressed in David's, Çevikkollu's, and Ada's stories).

Testimonial injustice manifests in interpersonal communication. This makes it easier to notice than hermeneutical injustice, which unfolds on deeper, structural levels of socio-political relations. However, according to Fricker, a person can be doubly wronged (2007, p. 159) when they experience both forms of epistemic injustice. In such situations, one faces the double struggle of understanding one's lived experiences with limited interpretative resources available in the dominant discourse(s) and communicating these vaguely comprehended experiences to others convincingly. All the migrants' stories explored here depict different lived expressions of this double wrong, revealed through the interpretative framework of hermeneutic invisibility. Furthermore, I argue that close attention to migrants' lived experiences and reflections on hermeneutic invisibility as a manifestation of the subjective-objective intertwinement allows us to expand Fricker's account of epistemic injustice through a more nuanced view of the interaction between testimonial and hermeneutical forms of injustice.

For Fricker, a crucial distinguishing feature specific to hermeneutical injustice is the systemically conditioned lack of relevant interpretative resources (words, concepts, meanings) that leads to hermeneutical harm inflicted on the systemically marginalised group. A person identified with such a group would struggle to make sense of their social experiences both to themselves and others. Put differently, if the dominant collective discourse(s) contain hermeneutical resources required for me to understand my social experiences and I have sufficient access to such resources, I am not likely to struggle with making sense of my experiences, even if I might suffer from testimonial injustice upon trying to convey them to others.

Indeed, as Çevikkollu's story shows, some social experiences lived by the children and grandchildren of migrants can be hermeneutically invisible even to their own families, whose experiences and perspectives differ. To become hermeneutically visible, these experiences call for a proper terminology, which can only be meaningful if it engages directly with the perspectives of those later-generation migrants who live these experiences. For example, Çevikkollu (2023) utilises the concept *Kofferkinder* (German for "suitcase children") to express the experiences of migrant workers' children spending their childhoods with and as suitcases transported between Germany and Turkey. This term was coined in the late 1980s (see Papoulias 1987, 2018; Alpagu 2024, p. 131), which was not possible before the experiences of migrant workers' children began to be discussed in the broader public discourse.

However, all the migrants' stories analysed here illustrate various experiences of systemic hermeneutic invisibility despite the words and concepts being available, accessible and used. David's doubt of the validity of his interpretations of the experiences of structural discrimination against him as an immigrant from Nigeria does not depend on the lack of interpretative resources. On the contrary, he uses the concepts available and accessible in the dominant socio-political narratives: Canadian system, citizenship, other (outside the so-called system), immigrant (from Nigeria), and so on. It is the systemic dismissal of the validity of his use of these meanings to interpret his social experiences that prompts his self-doubt. David's

embodied and socio-politically situated hermeneutic perspective is marginalised through systemically prejudiced attitudes towards him as a racialised immigrant in Canada. Due to this experience of hermeneutic invisibility, David struggles to understand his place in the Canadian system, whether he can fully arrive and feel he belongs there, and if his interpretations of these social experiences are valid.

While Fricker associates such epistemic wrongs with the lack of interpretative resources linked to hermeneutical injustice, the phenomenon of hermeneutic invisibility shows that these effects can also manifest when the interpretative resources are available, accessible, and used by those whose perspectives are marginalised in the dominant public narratives. Further, because hermeneutic invisibility draws attention to the systemically conditioned epistemic wrongs Fricker associates with hermeneutical injustice, these wrongs cannot be entirely equated with Fricker's idea of testimonial injustice just because of the availability and use of interpretative resources. Therefore, I propose that hermeneutic invisibility expands Fricker's account by drawing on both forms of epistemic injustice and highlighting their intertwinement in the lived experiences of people whose embodied hermeneutic perspectives are socio-politically marginalised.

In the context of migration, all the stories examined in this paper illustrate that the lack of relevant words and concepts is not always (or only) what makes migrants (including later-generation) struggle to make sense of their social experiences of belonging, identity, and home. Rather, the variety of manifestations of systemic marginalisation of migrants' embodied and socio-politically situated hermeneutic perspectives (making them hermeneutically invisible) can perpetuate migrant orientation, leaving a person living in a continued state of a structurally enforced process of arrival. Such manifestations can take different shapes: a collective dismissal of David's interpretation of his experiences as systemic discrimination; a collective and private reinforcement of a narrative of temporary work stay in Germany and imminent return home to Turkey, which then turns out to be a lie shaping Çevikkollu's and many other migrant workers' children's lives; a celebratory multiculturalism narrative that reproaches Ada's behavior by

insisting that she should instead feel proud of her culturally rich background, thereby devaluing her confusion and conflicted feelings of belonging and identity; a covert racism that Christine and Yianna face when they are asked to justify their interpretations of systemic discrimination experiences lived by the British-born Greek Cypriot young people.

The last example, Christine's and Yianna's stories, is particularly illustrative of the intertwinement of Fricker's testimonial and hermeneutical forms of epistemic injustice in migrants' lived social experiences. Despite not struggling to understand their social experiences, Christine and Yianna still experience systemic marginalisation of their perspectives. This obscures them from the dominant public discourse(s), and hence shapes Christine's and Yianna's belonging experiences by perpetuating a sense of being unable to finally arrive. To put it in terms of the subjective-objective intertwinement: their (subjective) perspectives, although drawing on collectively available interpretative resources, are nonetheless systemically prevented from entering the (objective) broader public discourse. In fact, they contradict the dominant narrative reinforced by that discourse, namely, that one cannot be racist against Europeans. Of course, as Christine and Yianna observe, this dynamic of making uncomfortable perspectives hermeneutically invisible only perpetuates discriminatory attitudes.

Conclusion

In this paper I have attended to migrants' stories of their lived social experiences. This has raised questions about belonging, identity, and home. It has furthermore allowed us to see some of the dynamics of the intertwinement of the subjective and the objective in our spatio-temporally and socio-politically situated experiences. The concept of hermeneutic invisibility helps to highlight and better understand the unfolding of various manifestations of this intertwinement.

Ahmed's critically phenomenological idea of orientation also aims to foreground the entanglement of the bodily, the spatial, and the social in various relational contexts. Connecting hermeneutic invisibility with her notion of migrant orientation, understood as a socially shaped reality of living in the process of arrival (being in a

liminal state between homes), brings the socio-political systemic conditions of arrival into focus. It illustrates how, by perpetuating the lived experiences of liminality and preventing a sense of arrival, dominant public narratives can render migrants' perspectives hermeneutically invisible. This shows that even people who have not migrated themselves can still be oriented as migrants, what I have referred to as later-generation migrants. Revealing different manifestations of the subjective-objective intertwinement in migrant orientation, hermeneutic invisibility can unfold in both directions: (1) towards the migrant in their struggles to arrive and perhaps doubting the validity of their interpretations; (2) towards the dominant public narratives that privilege some perspectives on the meaning of belonging and home, while marginalising others.

I have motivated the view that, through an attentive portrayal of migrants' stories, one can bring hermeneutic invisibility into conversation with Fricker's framework of epistemic injustice and that this move can help expand Fricker's account. It illustrates how both forms of epistemic injustice, testimonial and hermeneutical, are more closely interconnected on a deeper structural level than might appear. For example, Fricker associates one of the manifestations of the epistemic wrong of struggling to understand one's social experiences with the lack of interpretative resources conditioned by hermeneutical injustice. I suggest that this can also occur when a migrant has access to the relevant words and uses them to express their perspective, which is dismissed and devalued all the same. Such prejudicial practices marginalise migrants' perspectives, making them hermeneutically invisible, which can generate self-doubt about one's ability to understand the meaning of the social experiences one lives.

The lack of relevant concepts and meaning structures can be one of the systemic conditions (and consequences) of hermeneutic invisibility. However, as we have seen in the migrants' stories explored here, it does not always have to be the case. As a manifestation of the subjective-objective intertwinement, hermeneutic invisibility draws on both forms of epistemic injustice proposed by Fricker. It shows that even if interpretative resources are accessible, various expressions of systemic marginalisation of migrants' embodied and socio- politically situated hermeneutic

perspectives can enforce prolonged liminality. In this state, one lives in a structurally perpetuated process of arrival, unsure if and how one can experience belonging. Paraphrasing María Lugones from the opening quotation of this paper, if others refuse to understand us, we lack visibility.

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Stories Outside the Head: Against Reductionist Narrativism

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Abstract

This paper challenges the notion that a narrativist approach to personal identity over time can be subsumed under a metaphysics of psychological continuity that treats the possession of self-narratives as an internal dispositional property. I argue that this reduction fails on both explanatory and normative grounds. First, on a plausible account of what self-narratives are—public, context-sensitive representational artifacts typically realized in conversational practice—their intelligibility depends essentially on social and contextual norms. Accordingly, whether a subject "has" a self-narrative cannot be settled by appeal to that subject's psychology alone. Second, construing possession as purely internal misses narrativism's core requirement: that self-narratives be publicly attributable and responsive to uptake if they are to ground ownership, prudential concern, and responsibility. Instead of treating the possession of self-narratives dispositionally, I therefore posit a conception of narrative competence—a socially constrained skill of producing minimally coherent and meaningful self-narratives in context. The upshot is a dilemma for narrativists: either keep narrativism and accept that metaphysical assessments of personal identity over time partly turn on various social and contextual facts, or adopt an internalist view that renders the possession of self-narratives irrelevant to those metaphysical questions.

Keywords: Personal identity over time | ownership | self-narrative | reductionism

Introduction

Robert and Jeanine Schroer (2014) propose a Lockean-inspired account of personal identity over time that aims to satisfy two key demands: an objective and a subjective criterion. The objective criterion yields the facts that determine or explain our persistence, and the subjective criterion captures what constitutes us as agents capable of prudential concern and moral responsibility. To meet both criteria, they combine the standard psychological continuity view with insights from narrative identity theorists. On their account, our identity over time can be reduced to a particular psychological relation (i.e., objective criterion) that includes the disposition to produce a self-narrative which coherently organizes one's beliefs, memories, and intentions, including moral intentions, when prompted (i.e., subjective criterion). As such, their account purports to establish that a person's existence over time can be tracked in virtue purely of causal relations between one's mental states, while grounding moral agency through narrative self-interpretation.

The scope of my paper is internal to narrativism, the claim that personal identity can be explained in terms of the subject's ability to produce narratives. My central claim is that narratives cannot be explained exclusively in terms of psychological relations, for their intelligibility and conditions of applicability most importantly depend on contextual and social factors. I argue that the above attempt to reduce narrative identity to a psychological relation, what I call the Reductionist Narrativism Thesis, fails in its objectivity criterion. Specifically, I argue that, if the Schroers wish to provide a non-trivial role for self-narratives, they must conceive of them as public representational artifacts, whose success conditions fundamentally depend on socio-cultural and contextual factors. This externalism is furthermore essential for meeting a core demand: that publicly attributable ownership is necessary for satisfying the subjective criterion. Consequently, the disposition to generate self-narratives should not be viewed as an internal psychological trait, but as narrative competence, that is, a context-sensitive and partially socially constituted skill. I shall argue that psychological continuity is insufficient to explain narrative identity for we should be more importantly looking at external factors. Once we start relying on external factors, we

start seeing the limitations of the objectivity criterion adopted by narrativism.

1. Narrativism and the Lockean Challenge

"[A] person exists in the convergence of subjective and objective features." (Schechtman 1996, p. 134)

One way of answering the question of personal identity over time is that any such account must capture what I'm here calling the objective and subjective criteria of personal existence. The objective criterion answers a question about the metaphysical facts pertaining to our[1] numerical identity: the necessary and sufficient conditions (if any) that make it so that a person at t_1 persists to some later time t_2. On the subjective side, the conditions tracked by the objective criterion must also satisfy the Lockean intuition that a person is "[a] thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and considers itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places" (Locke [1694] 1975, p. 39). That is, an account of personal identity over time should not only present a robust objective criterion that can explain our persistence, it should simultaneously entail the subjective insight that we are aware of the fact of being identical to ourselves over time, and as such we are aware of the fact of being moral agents. In other words, the objective criterion must, on this interpretation of Locke, be directly tied to an awareness of "the ownership of actions and experiences relevant to our practical concerns" (Shoemaker 2016, p. 306). I will call this combination of subjective and objective criteria the Lockean Ideal Criterion:

> The Lockean Ideal Criterion (LIC): Any adequate account of personal identity over time must (i) provide an objective criterion, that is, a metaphysically informative basis for determining a person's numerical identity over time, and (ii) ensure the subjective criterion that individuals are aware of themselves as moral agents, and therefore track the fact that

1 For the purposes of this paper, I adopt the broadly Lockean assumption that any question about our numerical identity concerns the identity of a particular person. For a relevant critique of this thesis see Olson and Witt (2020).

> individuals are aware of their subjectivity as beings capable of moral responsibility and prudential concern.

While various authors strongly doubt the necessity of accepting LIC,[2] those inspired by the Lockean challenge, most notably Derek Parfit (1984), have argued that the best way to meet LIC is to posit that personal identity over time consists in the existence of sufficient psychological connections: causal relations between the various mental states of spatiotemporally distinct moments of a person's existence or person-stages. The psychological continuity accounts argue that personal identity over time can in principle be wholly determined by looking solely at the causal relations between a particular experience and a memory, between an earlier intention and a later intention when "a belief, or a desire, or any psychological feature, continues to be had" (Parfit 1984, p. 205). According to psychology continuity accounts these causal relations give us both an objectivity and a subjectivity criterion, for grounding identity over time in psychological connections not only gives us a determinate metaphysical basis but also purportedly preserves the existence of the same moral agent.

I shall be referring to psychological continuity accounts as the standard way of answering LIC. Some other theorists argue that the mere continuation of psychological facts is insufficient to satisfy the subjective criterion.[3] The central idea is that to constitute a persisting moral agent involves not merely having certain beliefs or memories, but also an awareness of this possession, namely the capacity to conceive of oneself as the owner of these beliefs and memories, or desires. Only if there is this relation of the self to the concept of ownership of attitudes, intentions, and experiences can these various facts be said to be accurately attributable to me. This stronger notion of ownership thus serves to explain the specific "relation that holds between a person and particular actions, experiences, or characteristics that are hers" (Schechtman 1996, p. 77).[4] Let us call this then the robust ownership condition:

2 Prominent critics of LIC include Eric Olson (1997, Ch. 3) and David Shoemaker (2016).

3 As explained below, these include the narrativists, but also Christine Korsgaard (1989).

4 Schechtman (1996) calls this the "characterisation" question.

> Robust Ownership Condition (ROC): To satisfy the subjective criterion, an adequate account of personal identity over time must tell us what explains the subject's capacity to attribute her actions and experiences to herself.

One account of ROC is developed by proponents of narrative identity, whom I shall refer to as narrativists.[5] Narrativists argue that what is missing from standard psychological continuity accounts is the active, interpretive role individuals play in shaping their conceptions and experiences through self-narratives. In their view, being the kind of agent who can take ownership of parts of one's continued existence requires firstly that a person's beliefs, desires, values, emotions, actions, and experiences "hang together in a way that makes what she says, does, and feels psychologically intelligible" (Schechtman 1996, p. 97). This intelligibility, in turn, is uniquely generated by creating coherent narratives about oneself, ones in which "the incidents and experiences that make up [a person's] life are not viewed in isolation but interpreted as part of the ongoing story that gives them their significance". Only in virtue of having such a story of oneself, namely a self-narrative, one can have the kind of "well-defined character" which can be held to be the owner of their experiences as a moral agent. Schechtman explains:

> "Without the sense of oneself as a persisting individual whose actions should cohere with one's beliefs, values, and desires (which should also cohere with one another) and whose current actions have implications for the future, one does not have the capacity for moral responsibility." (Schechtman 1996, p. 159)

I shall call the thesis that self-narratives are essential for constituting robust ownership the narrativist thesis:

> Narrativist Thesis (NT): Essential to robust ownership is the subject's ability to possess and generate self-narratives.

5 Prominent narrativists include Marya Schechtman (1996, 2007, 2011), Alasdair MacIntyre (1981), Charles Taylor (1989), Paul Ricoeur (1992), Anthony Rudd (2005), John Davenport (2012), and Jeanine and Robert Schroer (2014).

While narrativists may then have a constructive interpretation of ROC, a glaring question for these theorists remains how NT can adequately meet the objective criterion, of providing informative conditions for personal identity over time. As others have observed, narrativists have been largely ambiguous on this point.[6] While most prominent narrativists explicitly oppose psychological continuity accounts, it is often left unclear whether what they are offering is supposed to be an alternative answer to LIC, or a rejection of LIC's aims altogether.[7] More importantly, insofar as narrativists do state that their account also answers the objective criterion, as Robert Schroer notes it is typically left underspecified precisely why the continued possession of self-narratives cannot be "entirely explained in terms of the psychology of the person-stages that compose her" (2013, p. 451).[8] Following this criticism then, NT becomes redundant. As such, whether the narrativist thesis can be incorporated into a satisfying response to LIC that is distinct from psychological continuity accounts, and whether narrativists would want to satisfy LIC at all, are often taken to be open questions.

To address this issue, Jeanine and Robert Schroer (2014) present an account on which the narrativist thesis is subsumed under what they call a refined notion of psychological continuity, one that integrates the capacity to offer self-narratives as simply into the network of causal relations and presents it as a more specific causal relation that can obtain among mental states. They call their novel approach narrative continuity. It posits that personal identity over time consists in a relation of only those causally connected mental states of which we possess a narrative explanation, the ability to explain one's mental states in terms of a self-narrative. Thus, they aim to secure the "best of both worlds" with respect to LIC: an

6 See Schechtman (2014), Schroer and Schroer (2014), Stokes (2011), and Olson & Witt (2019) for different interpretations and discussions of the theoretical aims of narrativist theories.

7 Rejections of psychological continuity (in particular, Parfit's) are scattered throughout narrativist literature; see Schechtman (1996, p. 153), Rudd (2005, p. 415), MacIntyre (1984, p. 250), Taylor (1989, p. 49), Ricoeur (1992, p. 132–33), and Davenport (2012, p. 17).

8 A willingness to address the objectivity criterion can, for example, be found in Schechtman (1996, p. 149), Rudd (2005, p. 413), and Davenport (2012, p. 71).

informative objective criterion, grounded in the causal aetiology of mental states, while also meeting the subjective demands of ROC through the inclusion of self-narratives.

In this paper, I argue that NT cannot be successfully integrated into a *refined* version of psychological continuity. Specifically, I look to deny the following thesis, which I take Schroer and Schroer to endorse:

> Reductionist Narrativitism Thesis (RNT): The possession of self-narratives can be wholly explained in terms of a causal relation between (some subset of) the mental states of person-stages.

The reason I take RNT to fail is twofold. First, any conception of NT that ignores the relevant socio-cultural and contextual factors is counterintuitive and risks rendering the very notion of possessing a self-narrative otiose. Second, a purely psychological account of self-narratives cannot satisfy ROC, since robust ownership depends on the mutual intelligibility of self-narratives. I thus argue that NT requires that socio-cultural and contextual factors partly determine whether a subject continues to possess self-narratives, even when the requisite psychological relation holds. The upshot is that any narrativist response to LIC will likely fall short of providing sufficiently informative criteria for the objective criterion.

To wit, I am not looking here to defend some *alternative* narrativist account of personal identity over time, nor am I denying that there may be various other good reasons to critique Schroer and Schroer (see Olson & Witt 2019). Similarly, I am not looking to claim that any account of personal identity over time should satisfy LIC. My aim is solely to reject the sufficiency of a purely psychological relation for possessing self-narratives and to emphasize that the narrativist thesis should fundamentally depend on the socio-cultural and contextual conditions that make self-narratives intelligible. In what follows, I first outline the Schroers' rationale for adopting their reductionist narrativist account and sketch its main features. I then present my arguments for why this reductionist conception of narrativism fails.

2.1 Reductionism and Individual Supervenience

Schroer and Schroer aim to satisfy the objectivity criterion of LIC by developing a narrativist account that, as they put it, "embraces *Ontological Reductionism*" (2014, p. 453, original emphasis). On this view, which I will hereafter refer to simply as reductionism, questions about personal identity over time are questions about the facts about person stages and their causal relations. Their main reason for adopting this type of reductionism, I take it, is because any reductionist account of personal identity is simultaneously strictly objective. Let's unpack what all this means.

As was mentioned in the previous section, a person-stage is a spatiotemporally distinct part of a single person. To think roughly of what person-stages themselves are, Schroer and Schroer follow David Lewis (1976), in conceiving of these as entirely physical entities, beings which "walk and talk, possess beliefs and desires, and possess many of the other physical/spatial properties as persons." (Schroer and Schroer 2014, p. 447). In this view, an account of personal identity thus aims to define what it is that makes a particular set of person-stages constitute one numerically distinct person.

The claim that an account of personal identity over time is reductionist (in Schroer and Schroer's sense) can then be formulated as follows: facts about personal identity individually supervene on (some subset of) the psychological and physical facts about person-stages and their causal relations if and only if, in any possible world, whenever those psychological and physical facts about person-stages and their causal relations obtain, the corresponding facts about personal identity over time also obtain.[9] This is captured by what I take to be the standard definition of individual supervenience:

> Individual supervenience: A-facts individually supervene on B-facts if and only if, in every possible world, there cannot be a difference in the A-facts about an individual without some difference in the

9 For the sake of clarity, I will not here commit to any claims about whether psychological facts are themselves physical.

B-facts about that individual.[10]

To clearly see the difference between when individual supervenience holds and when it doesn't, consider the case of *shape* and *value*. Shape individually supervenes on the physical facts pertaining to an individual object, as any individual object with the same physical properties will necessarily have the same shape. In contrast, value does not individually supervene *just* on physical facts: an exact physical replica of the Mona Lisa may not have the same value in every possible world, since whether it has a particular value will also depend on broader social and historical factors.

In the same way, if personal identity over time depends on more than just the psychological and physical facts about person-stages and their causal relations, e.g., facts related to a particular social-historical context, then it cannot individually supervene on those facts about person-stages alone. And if personal identity fails to individually supervene in this way, then, by extension, personal identity over time fails to be reductionist in Schroer and Schroer's sense.

2.2. Strict Objectivity and Informativeness

The previous section explained how reductionism can be understood in terms of individual supervenience. I now want to show how a reductionist account of personal identity is more likely to satisfy the objectivity criterion because it provides informative answers about our persistence in every possible case. I will frame this informativeness in terms of strict objectivity:

> Strict objectivity: An account of personal identity over time is strictly objective if, in every possible case, facts about personal identity over time are in principle determinable by solely looking at the relevant psychological/physical facts about individual person-stages and their causal relations.[11]

This notion of strict objectivity is connected to informativeness in the following sense: if there are no psychological or physical

10 I broadly follow Jaegwon Kim (1987) and David Chalmers (1994) in conceiving of the relevant supervenience definitions.

11 The usage of 'in principle' in the definition of strict objectivity refers to the possible case of fission. See footnote 14.

facts to appeal to at all, then we will be unable to determine whether two non-simultaneous person-stages constitute parts of the same person. If personal identity over time also supervenes on diffuse, hard-to-specify world-level facts (e.g., historical or social conditions), what I will call *loose objectivity*, then the account will more likely struggle to determine whether two non-simultaneous person-stages are part of the same person. A strictly objective account, by contrast, guarantees that for any pair of non-simultaneous person-stages, we can, in principle, settle whether they are stages of the same person by looking at the relevant intrinsic psychological/physical facts related to those person-stages.

One way to highlight the advantage of strict objectivity over loose objectivity is through the classic case of body-swaps, where one person's brain is transferred into another person's body, and vice versa. Suppose we want to be able to say which post-swap person-stage is continuous with which pre-swap person-stage. If we say that personal identity over time depends on a multitude of diffuse, world-level facts, any of our answers would need to specify the relevant external factors in every body-swap case in order to come to a determinate verdict. By contrast, if identity depends solely on psychological/physical facts about individual person-stages and their causal relations, we have an immediate *internal* basis for judging the outcome of the body-swap: the relevant causal aetiology. Note that the point of strict objectivity is then not which answer to the body-swap case best matches our intuitions about body-swaps, but that, as Schroer and Schroer note, it always offers "viable responses to such cases" (2014, p. 467). This informativeness of strict objectivity, I take it, is Schroer and Schroer's main reason for adopting a reductionist narrativist account.

2.3 Narrative Continuity

Schroer and Schroer want a reductionist account of personal identity over time because it satisfies strict objectivity. The next question naturally is what kind of strict objectivity: what are the psychological or physical facts about person-stages which matter for personal identity over time? As we saw in the first section, they take for granted here the Lockean Ideal Criterion that these facts should try to capture what I called the subjective criterion:

that a person is an entity capable of prudential concerns and moral responsibility, namely a moral agent. Since many of Locke's later followers took this to mean that personal identity over time must consist in a psychological relation, a causal relation between mental states, Schroer and Schroer also adopt a view of "personal identity as a forensic notion built out of certain psychological elements." (2014, p. 447).

Nevertheless like other narrativists they also believe that a 'mere' standard psychological continuity approach is by itself insufficient for accurately satisfying what I called the Robust Ownership Requirement.12 That is, a psychological account of personal identity has to specifically capture "the idea that persons are actively self-interpreting and self-creating creatures via the construction of self-narratives" (2014, p. 450, original emphasis). I shall call their version of standard continuity narrative continuity. It takes the following form:

> The Narrative Continuity Criterion:
> An earlier person stage X and a later person stage Y are two stages of the same person iff:
>
> (1) There is narrative continuity (which is composed of narrative connectedness or overlapping chains of narrative connectedness) between some of the mental states/actions[13] of X and some of the mental states/actions of Y.
>
> (2) These mental states/actions are causally related to each other in the right way.
>
> (3) There is no branching (2014, p. 463)[14].

12 While the Schroer's never explicitly formulate an ownership requirement, they endorse (2014, p. 460) the necessity of what Korsgaard (1989) calls *authorship*, which involves a "view of myself as an agent" (p. 126).

13 Schroer and Schroer somewhat confusingly group both "mental states" and "actions" under the same rubric. As Witt (2020) points out, the latter are not themselves psychological facts but caused by them. For the sake of clarity, I will therefore use only the term "mental states" in the remainder of this discussion.

14 The third condition addresses *fission* cases. Fission cases are hypothetical scenarios where a single entity splits into two or more separate entities. The listed third condition above serves to prevent the absurd result that one person could be identical to two successors with which it is narratively continuous. To wit, this shows that supervenience on an individual set of person-stages fails in branching scenarios, since identity facts are not fixed by considering just that one pair of person-stages in isolation. However, I take that it does not undermine strict objectivity: even in fission cases, the verdict about how many persons exist is fully determined by the psychological facts and causal history of all relevant narratively connected person-stages. I will therefore ignore this complication.

On their account, narrative continuity is a relation consisting of a sufficient amount of narrative connectedness (or overlapping chains of narrative connectedness) between two or more person-stages. Narrative connectedness, in turn, consists of (a subset of) causally connected mental states and the possession of narrative explanations of these causally connected mental states. About this disposition, they state the following:

> "You can think of the 'possession' of a narrative explanation for some mental state/action as being underpinned by the subject's possession of (or the instantiation within the subject of) a complex dispositional property. Understood along these lines, the question of whether a person stage could possess a narrative explanation for some of its mental states/actions translates into the question of whether a person stage could instantiate the appropriate complex dispositional property, a property that, if triggered, would result in the subject offering a story-like explanation of some of those mental states or actions." (Schroer and Schroer 2014, p. 455)

As I interpret them, Schroer and Schroer believe that possessing the "complex dispositional property" responsible for generating narrative explanations about one or more of one's causally connected mental states, if queried, is required for personal identity over time because this capacity enables a subject to self-attribute specific experiences, desires, and beliefs. Without such a disposition, there could be psychological continuity without genuine self-attribution of mental states, which would undermine the persistence of a moral agent and thereby fail to satisfy the subjective criterion. At the same time, in order to remain strictly objectivist, as a refinement of psychological continuity theories, the disposition to offer narrative explanations must itself also supervene on psychological (and physical) facts. That is, if they want questions about a person's identity over time to be, in principle, answerable solely by examining the causal aetiology of a specifically *narrative* subset of a person-stage's mental states, then the relevant psychological relation must also simultaneously capture the disposition to offer narrative explanations of those states. While Schroer and Schroer themselves refrain from specifying the

precise nature of the relevant complex dispositional property, they explicitly reject "the general idea that narratives (and their impact upon our mental states) cannot be ontologically reduced to the mental states (and their interactions) of a series of person stages" (2014, p. 454). I therefore take it that the dispositional property they have in mind is a higher-order psychological property that typically emerges around the time that infants develop storytelling abilities (Wang 2021; Nelson & Fivush 2021).

To note, for the sake of consistency, I will for the remainder of this paper replace the notion of narrative explanation as used by Schroer and Schroer with that of *self-narrative*, a term they use analogously and one that is more common in narrativist literature. To show why I believe their attempt to provide a reductionist account of the narrativist thesis ultimately falters, I now turn to the question of what a self-narrative entails, along with the corresponding disposition when queried.

3.1. Larry and Perry

As noted above, narrative continuity differs from standard psychological continuity chiefly by requiring the higher-order psychological disposition to offer self-narratives about certain causally connected mental states, if queried. How should we conceive of these self-narratives? Schroer and Schroer characterise a self-narrative as an explanation that gives *significance* to one or more mental states by relating them to "the subject's sense of himself, of where he has been, and where he is going (or trying to go)." (2014, p. 457) A self-narrative furthermore must exhibit the "basic logic of a story," which "involves more than just thinking ahead and planning to do things in a certain order," yet "does not need to match, in quality and coherence, a story written by a professional author". It also need not be part of "a single, overarching life-story" (2014, p. 458).

To illustrate how the disposition to offer self-narratives works in action, Schroer and Schroer present the example of Perry and Larry. Perry and Larry are making coffee and they respond to the question: "Why are you making coffee?":

> Perry: "I make coffee because I want some" or "First, I grind the beans. Second, I boil the water…" or "I hear the water boiling, I smell the coffee, I feel the warm cup in my hand, etc." (2014, p. 456)
>
> Larry: "My desire for coffee is part of my overall addictive personality […] I also really desire cigarettes and cheap booze. This makes the experience of making coffee somewhat unpleasant for me, for it reminds me of this overall flaw in my character. Making coffee is a daily reminder, in a small way, of both my past struggles with addiction and of the kind of person I am striving to be—the kind of person who doesn't need chemicals to feel good about himself." (2014, p. 457)

According to the Schroers, Perry's explanation fails to meet the criteria of "significance" and the "basic logic of a story" required for a self-narrative, whereas Larry's does. However, in the absence of further clarification, it remains unclear what we must take the precise differences between Perry's, Larry's, or any other possible responses to be. What, for example, are the conditions for an expression to instantiate the "basic logic of a story" rather than mere sequencing? Which features confer "significance" or insignificance, and by whose standards? What counts as being "queried," and what is the role of the querier in the relevant context? Since, in their view, a person's identity over time hinges on the success of these explanations, a more apt conception of self-narratives is naturally required.

3.2. The Nature of Self-Narratives

The abovementioned ambiguity surrounding self-narratives has long plagued narrativist theories (see Velleman 2003; Strawson 2004; Christman 2004; Lamarque 2004; Schechtman 2011). In a recent contribution, Regina Fabry (2023) offers a much-needed overview of the relevant literature, aiming to bring greater clarity to this elusive notion. To begin, she posits that we ought to view any narrative as a particular product of narration. This follows from the widespread view that narratives themselves are specific representational artefacts (Currie 2010; Camp 2024) which serve to represent events in a particular story form. Fabry then identifies from the vast literature on self-narratives various minimal criteria

a particular representation needs to meet to count as a narrative: it must represent the events of the story as temporally ordered, incorporate causal connections, reason-based connections, and an emotional resolution. Furthermore, any narrative must serve to provide some understanding of the story's central character(s) and their context, as well as provide an overall coherence and meaningfulness to the story as a whole. A self-narrative is then specifically a narrative which is self-referential, in terms of that "the narrator refers to themself as the protagonist of the story" (Fabry 2023, p. 9) and will therefore typically involve events remembered by the narrator. To this extent self-narratives stand necessarily "in a dependence relation with episodic memories" (Fabry 2023, p. 10), while also drawing on various semantic memories.

Given that self-narratives constitute such complex representational artefacts, Fabry notes that when we are looking to describe the actual extension of self-narratives, it makes little sense to rely on vague notions such as "implicit narratives" (Schechtman 2007) or "narrative thoughts" (Goldie 2012). Namely, it is unclear how a purely internal phenomena could satisfy all of the conceptual criteria outlined above without making the very notion of self-narrative itself "otiose" (Fabry 2023, p. 16).[15] As such, Fabry posits, we ought to view self-narratives as being instantiated either "textually" (2023, p. 21), or, more ubiquitously, as "*spontaneous conversational self-narratives*" in "the co-present interaction between the narrator and one or more interlocutors in an everyday situational context" (2023, p. 20, original emphasis).

The above is precisely the latter type of everyday, spontaneous, conversational self-narrative which Schroer and Schroer seem to have in mind with their conception of self-narratives as something produced "if queried" (2014, p. 455). As such, we can reconceive the dispositional property to offer self-narratives, when queried, as being able to produce such self-narratives in everyday conversational practices. Note, however, that while we may somewhat unproblematically apply the overinclusive conceptual criteria of temporal orderedness and causal connectedness as unilaterally applying in the same way to a subject's representation

15 This is an important point, as narrativists often try to make their account more plausible by positing the idea that our psychological life is itself structured like a narrative. But what this means is not entirely clear.

of events, the picture becomes much more complicated once we aim to define more substantial notions such as contextuality, coherence, and meaningfulness in similarly objective terms. As Fabry notes, whether such criteria are in fact applicable, will in each case at least minimally depend on pragmatic factors such as the particular "narrative cues, the relationship between story and discourse, the addressee's prior expectations and background knowledge, and the prevalent norms that dominate narrative practices in a given culture." (2023, p. 9) On this conception, isolating self-narratives independent of such a context then becomes a seemingly impossible task.

To underscore the context-sensitivity of self-narratives, Fabry mentions the widespread view that self-narratives are rendered intelligible only within a web of "socio-culturally shaped norms that guide and constrain our engagement with narratives" (Fabry 2023, p. 10; see also Hutto 2016; Fiebich 2016). She emphasises that self-narratives operate mainly through what McLean and Syed (2015) call "master narratives" and "alternative narratives". Master narratives are the dominant, culturally shared stories that provide ready-made templates for constructing a coherent and socially recognisable self-narrative. Alternative narratives, by contrast, emerge in resistance to these dominant scripts, often developed by individuals or groups on the margins, but which nonetheless derive their intelligibility in relation to the very master narratives they reject. At each stage, master and alternative narratives play a significant role in conveying meaning and coherence to an instantiation of a self-narrative, e.g., overcoming addiction and redemption in Larry's case.

The overarching point is then that whether a particular expression would in fact *count* as a self-narrative in any world seems to necessarily involve various facts about the context in which the expression would be uttered, including facts about the respective querier(s), and the relevant socio-cultural norms about what counts as meaningful and coherent self-narratives. This means that determining whether a particular subject would, in fact, be disposed to offer a self-narrative, if queried, requires simultaneous reference to the contextual and socio-cultural factors that make a particular expression count as an actual self-narrative. If reference

to those external facts needs to be made in each instance where the subject is being queried, naturally, then whether an individual possesses the disposition to offer a self-narrative will not individually supervene on the relevant mental states and their causal relations alone. Hence, under Fabry's more plausible conception of what self-narratives are, the narrative thesis fails to supervene on psychological facts alone, and RNT fails.

3.3. Internalist Narrativism and Narrative Competence

To wit, Schroer and Schroer's lack of clarity regarding their conception of the disposition to offer self-narratives leaves open the possibility that perhaps all notions of "basic story logic" and "significance" only need to be applicable for the subject doing the narrating. This means that they could adopt a view where only internal psychological factors count towards what makes an expression a self-narrative. For instance, they might posit that while the complex dispositional property responsible for producing self-narratives is partially scaffolded by a particular socio-cultural environment, once that disposition is off the ground it entirely supervenes on a subject's psychology, regardless of any actual context. Let us call this view, which directly follows from the RNT, internalist narrativism:

> Internalist Narrativism (IN): Whether a subject has (or would, if queried, produce) a self-narrative does not depend on any facts about actual audience uptake, conversational context, or the relevant socio-cultural narrative norms, but only on the subject's internal psychology.

IN implies that so long as Larry's earlier answer to the question "Why are you making coffee?" satisfies his own internal conditions (e.g., his beliefs, including those about what makes an intelligible self-narrative), it will count as a self-narrative no matter in which possible socio-cultural context the question is asked. So we can imagine two worlds, w_1 and w_2, where in w_1 Larry's explanation is in a context where it is perfectly intelligible to a querier as a coherent and meaningful self-narrative, and where in w_2 it will sound in any available context as complete gibberish (e.g., perhaps Larry has various strange beliefs in that world, including a complete

obliviousness to any of that world's master or alternative narratives). If we keep in line with Fabry's definition of self-narratives from the previous section, Larry in world w_2 fails to count as possessing an actual self-narrative, since he does not meet the minimal standards for coherence and meaning in conversational contexts. However, if the relevant conditions for instantiating the correct complex dispositional property are entirely internal to Larry's psychology, Larry succeeds in providing an adequate self-narrative when queried in either w_1, w_2, or any other.

This, I take it, is a counterintuitive conclusion for Schroer and Schroer to draw given their emphasis on the capacity to publicly explain one's self-narrative, if queried. The above also goes against the narrativist thesis (see next section). More importantly, it fundamentally distorts how we do in fact ordinarily assess self-narratives. On internalist narrativism, the question "Does Larry possess a self-narrative?" cannot be settled by examining the public content of what Larry expresses; it turns almost entirely on Larry's internal psychology. Yet in everyday life we *do* assess such questions by attending to what is said: we ask whether an utterance of self-narrative is minimally coherent and meaningful, and we correct one another when it is not. Indeed, such correction is central to how children acquire the capacity to tell what we call self-narratives in the first place (Wang 2021; Nelson & Fivush 2020). On a more natural view, rather than outright stating that Larry possesses a self-narrative in any counterfactual case if the internal conditions are met, it would be more appropriate to ask whether his beliefs about self-narratives are sufficiently responsive in regard to the relevant context and socio-cultural norms. In this way, Larry in w_2 may be given a chance to respond to the available ways of producing self-narratives after being corrected. On the other hand, if Larry continues to fail to either adopt or respond to the contextual demands and socio-cultural norms at all, we might correctly question whether he possesses self-narratives at all.[16]

This suggests a more natural view: the disposition to offer self-narratives is not a fixed capacity that, once developed, simply remains in place; perhaps like the disposition for episodic

16 Whether this is in fact the most satisfying response to this issue, I leave for narrativists to answer.

memory. Instead, it functions more like a skill, one that can be exercised well or poorly and whose success depends on a subject's ongoing responsiveness to their environment. I will refer to this relational version of the disposition for self-narratives as *narrative competence*:

> Narrative Competence: One possesses narrative competence iff, if one would be queried, one would be able to offer a self-narrative of one's mental states that is (at least minimally) meaningful and coherent within the relevant context and under socio-cultural norms.

I take it that narrative competence provides a more coherent account about what is in fact involved in possessing the disposition to offer self-narratives when queried. Note that whether one counts as successful in being able to offer self-narratives about one's mental states, hence whether one is in fact narratively competent, will supervene not solely on the subject's internal psychology, but also on the broader socio-cultural norms and context. As a result, any notion of narrative competence would fail to accommodate strict objectivism and RNT.

3.4. Ownership and Self-Narratives

The previous two sections have tried to show that any conceptually plausible notion of possessing the disposition to offer self-narratives must involve a reference to the relevant context and socio-cultural norms. I furthermore took this to naturally imply that any attempt to reduce the narrativist thesis to a purely psychological relation will necessarily falter. To wit, the view that our social environment plays a constraining role in constituting what counts as possessing a self-narrative is typically endorsed by most existing narrativists. Schechtman (2011) states:

> "In all of these views we see an insistence that one can be a self only by distinguishing oneself from, and interacting with, other selves. One important implication of this embeddedness, as we have seen, is that it puts constraints on our self-narratives. We are not composing the stories of our lives in a vacuum, but in a world where there are others with their own

> stories about themselves and about us." (Schechtman 2011, p. 405)

I now want to briefly explain why this emphasis of narrativists on self-narratives as "an essentially social concept" (Schechtman 2011, p. 404) follows necessarily from their aim to answer the Robust Ownership Condition. Recall, this is the requirement that any account of personal identity over time which aims to satisfy the subjective criterion must entail a continued subject with the capacity to self-attribute their experiences, beliefs, intentions etc. The point is that to meet ROC, narrativists necessarily rely on a version of *narrative competence*, and cannot adopt any notion of *internalist narrativism*. In the same vein, if Schroer and Schroer want to satisfy the narrativism thesis in a non-trivial manner, then they must similarly incorporate the relevant social-cultural and contextual constraints inherent to narrative competence.

One good manner of framing how narrativists view the possession of self-narratives as being, at least in part, socially constituted, is offered by Paul Ricoeur (1992), who builds on John Searle's (1969) account of promising as an example of a constitutive rule. For Searle, certain actions such as promising are only possible within a system of rules that define what counts as such an action in the first place. Promising, for example, is not merely a psychological intention; it exists only within a shared normative framework wherein the expression "I promise that" is recognised as the intention that one aims to keep a promise by some interlocutor (1969, Ch. 3). Ricoeur applies this insight to the domain of self-narration in terms of what he calls "self-constancy": just as one cannot promise without invoking the institution of promising, one cannot provide a narrative about oneself without invoking the community's existing narrative norms and practices which would recognise a subject's self-narratives as theirs.

On this Searlian-inspired view of Ricoeur, possessing a self-narrative is then not simply a matter of having the required psychological structure. It includes the possible recognition of the intention to have a story of oneself for which one can be intelligibly held accountable as the owner of its represented contents. It is for similar reasons that Marya Schechtman (1996; 2007; 2011) includes in her narrativist account the idea that "[t]o enter into the world

of persons an individual needs, roughly speaking, to grasp her culture's concept of a person and apply it to herself." (1996, p. 95). Her main point here is not that persons are circularly constituted by a community, but that to be able to make oneself publicly intelligible as a person (as the respective agent behind these and those practical concerns, intentions, etc.) presupposes a publicly shareable template for characterising what being the owner of such mental states involves.[17] Such characterisations are represented through the practice of self-narratives, which must meet available standards of coherence and fit such that what a subject claims about themselves can in fact be meaningfully attributed to them. Accordingly, whether a particular self-narrative is in fact capable of providing the basis for ownership cannot consist merely in the fact that it refers to some causally-related mental state, but must also be in potential publicly recognisable within that relevant culture as a representation of the fact that one is the owner of this mental state.[18]

Since responsiveness to socio-cultural narrative practices is built into the very notion of narrative competence, it naturally ensures the public recognisability of ownership required by ROC. By contrast, an internalist narrativist view lacks any guarantee that a subject's purported self-narratives would, if queried, be mutually intelligible under shared socio-cultural norms. In other words, to secure ROC, and thereby meet the narrativist's own aims, the Schroers would need to tie the disposition to offer self-narratives to possible socio-cultural uptake. Yet once this dependence is acknowledged, individual supervenience of this disposition on relations among the mental states of person-stages and their causal links is lost. As a result, the RNT fails as a response to the Ownership Requirement and cannot count as genuinely narrativist in any non-trivial sense.

4. Conclusion

In the preceding sections I have argued that the Reductionist Narrativity Thesis (RNT), according to which the capacity for

17 For interesting discussions on this notion of characterisations in relation to narratives, see recent work by Elisabeth Camp (2015, 2024)

18 As Schechtman notes, what would in fact count as the limits of a self-narrative in a particular socio-cultural environment "is largely an empirical one." (1996, p. 105)

producing self-narratives individually supervenes on the mental states of person stages and their causal relations, fails. First, on the most plausible account of what self-narratives are (as representational artefacts realized in ordinary conversational practice), whether a subject in fact possesses the relevant disposition for producing self-narratives depends on contextual factors and socio-cultural norms standards which exceed purely internal psychology. Second, I have demonstrated that a purely psychological view cannot ground the social attributability necessary for the Ownership Requirement and thus fails to capture what narrativists deem essential for the subjective criterion.

Note that the failure of RNT does not entail that any account of narrativism would fail to supervene at all. A supervenience claim of *loose objectivity* suffices: personal identity over time may globally supervene on various lower-level facts about the world, including psychological facts about the mental states of individual person stages together with various other psychological/physical facts which would constitute the relevant conversational context and socio-cultural norms. The natural cost of any such account would be reduced informativeness: our verdicts about personal identity over time will have to partially depend on messy environmental factors that are not strictly determinable "in the head" of any individual. The supposed benefit is retaining the narrativist response to the subjective criterion: grounding prudential concern and moral responsibility in a relation wherein ownership is self-attributable.

The Schroer's then face the dilemma of whether to privilege strict objectivity through a psychological continuity account or to adopt the ownership requirement (to meet the subjectivity criterion) and incorporate a loosely objective narrativist thesis. The latter option would require grappling with the complex task of incorporating a notion of narrative competence into the objectivity criterion. This approach would additionally be facing other glaring difficulties for narrativism.[19] On the other hand, they may also choose the option of dropping LIC's ambitions entirely, and choose to value both solutions (strict objectivity and loose objectivity) as separate

19 The most blatant one being that such accounts will likely be overly demanding (see Olson & Witt 2019)

and equally appropriate answers to the objectivity and subjectivity criteria.[20] These, I take it, are central questions for all narrativists to answer. Whichever path they choose, I contend that subsuming the narrativist thesis wholly under a psychological relation is one path that should remain closed off.

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The Simmelian Subject: Comparing the Post-Subjective in Simmel and Heidegger

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Abstract

This paper examines Georg Simmel's theory of social existence, proposing that an essential feature is his attempt to think society from a non-subjective perspective. I begin with Simmel's criticism of a certain Kantian subject-based thinking, and transpose this to Simmel's own analyses of urban modernity in Rome. Finally, I compare Simmel's post-subjective thinking of social existence with Martin Heidegger's attempt to think existence without the subject.

Keywords: subjectivity | Georg Simmel | Martin Heidegger | dwelling | history of philosophy

Introduction

Orthodox intellectual histories of the so-called "subject" in twentieth-century philosophy typically depict the Kantian transcendental subject as icon of "the free and autonomous individual" (Mansfield 2000, 13). This depiction is followed by Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud and Martin Heidegger, the principal patricidal thinkers who developed theory beyond the confines of the subject. Rachel Fensham's foreword to Nick Mansfield's *Subjectivity* thus identifies a dual tradition beginning with "theories … which foreground the subject as fixed, structures of meaning […] including psychoanalysis, and to some extent, feminist arguments", but transforming into a focus on "those which are anti-subjectivist, from Nietzsche to Foucault" (Mansfield, *vi*). Thus, on one hand, there are Freudian theories of the subject in the psychoanalytic tradition, and on the other hand, there are theories which explain the subject as construction, an iteration of discursive meaning.

More recently, Gavin Rae has argued that the decisive shift occurs not with Nietzsche, Freud and Heidegger, but with the transition from structuralism to post-structuralism. Rae argues that "structuralist thought usurped the privileged role historically given to essence and subjectivity, and replaced it with a privileging of structure. In doing so, however, it simply changed the focus so that rather than insist that the subject constitutes structures, structures were taken to be constitutive of the subject [...] It is at this moment that poststructuralism enters" (Rae 2021, p. 3). Rae thus claims that poststructuralism more radically questioned the foundational structure assumed in subject-based thinking.

This paper proposes a philosophical reconsideration of a thinker who has wrongly been considered a minor figure in the intellectual history of what in philosophical jargon is called "the subject", namely Georg Simmel. Simmel is perhaps best known for his seminal analysis of money, the exchange of which produces the urban, *blasé* individual. Scholarship concerned with Simmel's influence on the twentieth-century philosophy is typically restricted to Heidegger's extremely brief citation of Simmel's inclusion of the "phenomenon of death in his characterization of 'life'" (Heidegger 1985, p. 494, fn *vi*)[1] .

Beyond money, and death, I contend that Simmel's theory of society contains an early reconfiguration of the subjective. I begin with an examination of Simmel's 1908 text 'How is Society Possible?', which I interpret as a rejection of a certain Kantian subject-based way of thinking. Simmel claims that thinking which investigates social formations from the perspective of the subject will inevitably fail to understand the essence of social existence. Society is not an object, thus a subject cannot understand it. I transpose this critique to my reading of Simmel's texts on modern urban life which articulate a rich, non-subject-based analysis of changing modern social life.

1 See, for example Krell 1992, p. 92-95. Krell's focus is Simmel's investigation into the immanence, or otherwise, of death. Simmel shows that the death of the individual both can and cannot be reduced to universal cell death. Krell's claim, therefore, is first, that Heidegger owes a debt to Simmel for introducing death as a primary theme for existential thinking, and second, that Simmel prefigures Heidegger in thinking of death as a phenomenon with multiple modalities.

On the basis of this analysis, I compare Simmel with Heidegger's attempt to think existence beyond the Cartesian subject. I argue that Heidegger can be seen as directly accepting Simmel's analysis of the limits of subject-based thinking. Nevertheless, in his attempt to think entirely without the subject, Heidegger takes a step beyond Simmel and finds himself in the position to criticise the limits of the latter's project.

This paper treads the tracks of a larger research theme focused on twentieth-century theories about the self and the concept of "dwelling", in which I investigate the importance of thinking about dwelling – the practice of being at home – from a subjective perspective. I conclude my analysis with some provisional remarks concerning the possibility of introducing Simmel as a thinker of dwelling, more specifically of urban dwelling.

1. Simmelian Sociology after Kant

Simmel's work can be interpreted as an investigation into social processes. The attempt to structure his reflections on topics as diverse as cities, art, class and money, provides a philosophical orientation which reflects on the interactions between the sundry elements of societies, in their forming and reforming of the individual, their social group and culture. These reflections can thus be understood as constituting a more general approach to the concept of social existence. Within this framework, Simmel performs two moves. First, he attempts to move away from an investigation which itself thinks from the perspective of the singular subject. Second, he replaces a focus on the existence of the singular subject in favour of a focus on social interaction among a plurality of subjects. Both moves can be interpreted as an attempt to think existence in a way which does not take the subject as its privileged mode.

Simmel's 'How is Society Possible?' makes a distinction between two kinds of investigation. The first is modelled after Kant and it is based on the question 'How is x possible?'. For example, in Kant's philosophical terminology, the fundamental question is "How is nature possible?": see, for example, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, §36. The question is answered, Simmel claims, "by the forms of cognition, through which the subject synthesizes

the given elements into nature" (Simmel 1971, p. 6-8). The "given perceptions of color, taste, tone, temperature, resistance and smell [...] are not yet nature. They rather become nature, and they do so through the activity of the mind which combines them into objects and series of objects". For Simmel's Kant, nature lacks an internal synthesis and only gains this synthesis by becoming an object for the synthesising subject. In other words, "nature for him [i.e., Kant] was nothing but the representation of nature". The process of asking and answering the above question yields "the achieving of the synthetic unity" of the given elements which constitute the concept under investigation, namely the concept of nature. Furthermore, according to Simmel, this process, is "a function of the observing mind". This kind of investigation, therefore, is one which thinks from the perspective of the subject. In fact, that which is under investigation (i.e., nature) has no internal synthesis but is transformed into an object by the perceiving subject.

This approach can be distinguished from a second kind of investigation, which asks "How is society possible?". Society does not constitute the synthetic unity of its object from the perspective of the subject. This is because "the unity of society needs no observer [...]. For societal connection immediately occurs in the 'things', that is, the individuals [...]. This does not mean, of course, that each member of a society is conscious of such an abstract notion of unity. It means that he is absorbed in innumerable, specific relations and in the feeling and knowledge of determining others and being determined by them". Simmel's words, thus, express the thought that society is not an entity which gains its synthetic unity just in case it becomes an object for an observing subject. On the contrary, in Simmel's story, society has a unity of its own. However, on the other hand, while the privileging of the subjective perspective is motivated by the fact that the elements given in objectivity lack a proper synthetic unity, this does not necessarily justify a notion of society in which its constituent parts already have their own synthesising capacities; that is, it does not foreground a society which achieves synthetic unity only in the subjective consciousness of its constituents. Hence, Simmel recounts that it is not necessary "that each member of a society is conscious" of the unity of that society. This second investigation, therefore, displaces the synthesising subject and its perceived

object in favour of an entity which is its own being; a being which is not the object of the investigator, nor of the individuals which constitute it, but rather simply "occurs in the things, that is, the individuals".

Simmel's claim that society is an entity which does not appear as an object (in the perception of either the investigator or the constituent individuals) necessitates an investigation which stems neither from the singular individual nor from the group as privileged perspectives of evaluation, but rather springs from the sphere of interaction at the interstices between individuals and keeps it at its focus. In his *Sociology* (1950), Simmel presents a series of grounds for rejecting an investigation into the singular individual. These include each "was led to behave as he did by a development which is somehow different from that of every other individual. In reality, none of them behaved precisely like any other. And, in no one individual, is what he shares with others clearly separable from what distinguishes him from others" (Simmel 1950, p. 5). Each individual comes to be the way they are in relation with the group, but each goes about this process in a different way. As such, all extrapolation from any individual's unrepeatable experience will inevitably misrepresent the social existence of others. One might think that this observation might bolster a philosophical perspective that is not opposed to the perspective of the singular subject but on the contrary in favor of a focus on the individual in its specificity as a truly singular and non-generalisable entity. Simmel rejects such a possibility, however, since, if we focus on "the individual, more closely, we realize that they are by no means elements or 'atoms' of the human world. For the unit denoted by the concept 'individual' [...] is not an object of cognition at all, but only of experience [...]. What we know about man scientifically is only single characteristics" (Simmel 1950, p. 6). However, by seeking to avoid the misrepresentations of generalisation, we on the other hand run the risk of obscuring the original significance of the individual, namely that it is primarily a matter of experience. Drawing together both texts, we end up with a dual claim: since society is not an object in the consciousness of its constituent individuals (nor in the investigator's), if we are to understand the being of society, we cannot extrapolate from the singular individual.

For reasons of symmetry, Simmel rejects investigations which only focus on the group. If individuals cannot be studied because they are inseparable from the group in which they are formed, namely "they are by no means elements or 'atoms'", then, likewise, groups cannot be separated from the individuals which form them. Just as individuals are inextricably formed by their membership in and interaction with the group, so, too, are groups inextricably formed by their interaction with individuals. Additionally, Simmel claims that "in no one individual is what he shares with others clearly separable from what distinguishes him from others" (Simmel 1950, p. 5). To understand what society is, we cannot look into any particular constituent entity in the hopes of grasping society's whole being, since the entities that instantiate society are not easily separable from each other. In addition to being the reverse implication of Simmel's rejection of the individual, these claims also begin to suggest precisely how Simmel conceives of the being of society: not as an object for subjective consciousness, of either the investigator or the individual subject; nor even as an entity which can be found in any particular element of society (of either the individual in its specificity or the group). Rather, society is something that has its own being, and that is irreducible to any one of its instantiations.

Here, there is an intensification of Simmel's criticism against the Kantian approach to philosophical investigation. Not only does society have a being of its own, which renders the subject-based investigation inappropriate. Additionally, there should be no focus on individual subjects, for they may not be subjectively conscious of the being of society. Furthermore, the nature of the being of society is one of interaction between individual subjects. Thus, by focusing on specific individuals, we are likely to miss the true being of society, namely, the interactions which take place among a diversity of individuals.

The interactive being of society is most clearly recognisable in the form of what we might call a dyad. Simmel claims, in fact, that "the simplest sociological formation, methodologically speaking, remains that which operates between two elements. It contains the scheme, the germ, and material of innumerable more complex forms. Its sociological significance, however, by no means rests

on its extensions and multiplications only. It is itself a sociation" (Simmel 1950, p. 122). The dyad, the relation between "two elements", instantiates "the greatest variation of individualities and unifying motives" present in social being. This does not mean that "sociation" is absent from the individual or the group, but rather that taken in isolation from each other, the "germ" process of interaction which takes place between the elements of society would be occluded.

While sociation is present in all social interaction, the structure of the dyad is such that, in the interaction of two, sociation is most active. This is explained by the fact that in the dyadic relationship, there is an experience of confrontation that produces a riveting or deepening of the self, and this process constitutes the experience of sociation. In a dyadic relationship "between two elements[2] [...] each of the two feels himself confronted by the other, not by a collectivity above him. The social structure here rests immediately on the one and the other of the two, and the secession of either would destroy the whole. The dyad, therefore, does not attain that super-per sonal life which the individual feels to be independent of himself. As soon, however, as there is a sociation of three, a group continues to exist even in case one of the members drops out" (Simmel 1950, p. 123). In the dyadic relationship, each member feels, we recall, "confronted by the other". More specifically, each member is confronted with the possibility of the death of the other, which would end the dyad (Simmel 1950, p. 124). Reflexively, each member is also confronted with the possibility of their own death, which would also end the dyad. Therefore, each member is confronted with the constitutive necessity of the dyad for their own continued existence. The confrontation with this possibility, according to Simmel, radically particularizes each individual member of the dyad.

In the group, by contrast, each member may be confronted with a "collectivity" of other members in general, thus absent

2 It is important to note that, although Simmel uses the rather vague term "elements" to describe the components of the dyad, and then gives a description of the relationship itself at the exclusion of "the one and the other" component, the passage begins with the clarification that "these forms exist as much between two groups – families, states, and organisations of various kinds – as between two individuals" (Simmel 1950, p. 123). As such, dyadic relationships can exist between any two entities.

any particularity. This is to say that the death of any member of the group in no way threatens the existence of the group. In the process of becoming a member of the group, the individual thereby departs from the particularizing dyadic relationship. Consequently, the individual becomes neither an individual confronting and confronted with the possibility of the death of another or of one's own death, nor an individual confronting the constitutive necessity of one's own existence. Thus, on becoming a member of the group, the individual is de-individualised, which creates "that super-personal life in which the individual feels to be independent of himself". Unlike group existence, in the dyad, the individual becomes riveted to themselves: unable, either, to escape into being an independent individual, or to become merely a member of a group thereby feeling "independent of himself". Instead, the individual becomes attached to their own being.

In this situation, there is a confrontation with sociation itself. In other words, in the dyad there is a confrontation with the possibility of the death of the other, and the reflexive confrontation with the possibility of one's own death. Additionally, there is therefore a confrontation with the continuing existence of both, for without one or the other the dyad would no longer exist, as well as a confrontation with the possibility of the escape of the self that is entailed by group existence. What this discloses is the essentially interactive nature of Simmelian existence. The existence of the individual in the dyadic relationship is itself a diversity of possible transformative social interactions. Each and any of these interactions entails a transformation. For Simmel therefore, existence, understood first at the level of the dyad, is interaction.

The dyad is Simmel's privileged social form for two reasons. Firstly, as he argues, the dyad contains "the scheme, germ and material of innumerable more complex forms" (Simmel 1950, 122). The dyad is the simplest relationship in which to find the experiences constituting social being. This does not, however, sacrifice complexity, since Simmel claims, "not only are many general forms of sociation realized in it in a very pure and characteristic fashion … [but] the greatest variation of individualities and unifying motives does not alter the identity of these forms" (Simmel 1950, p. 122-

3). Despite its absolute simplicity, it instantiates social being "in a very pure and characteristic fashion". All other social interactions reiterate the structure found in the dyad. The dyad, for Simmel, is exemplary of all the other experiences of the socially interactive being.

In Simmel's description of the dyad we find, in addition to the assertion of exemplarity, what might be called a sociology of sociation itself. In his evocation of the ineluctability of one's being confronted by the other, Simmel's attention is always turned toward the transformations at work in social existence. Whether it is the process of transforming oneself into a group member, or the experience of being riveted to one's own existence in the dyad, Simmel is concerned with the transformative interactions which form the elements of social existence.

In conclusion, we can see that Simmelian sociology understands society as an entity with its own being, rather than an object of subjective consciousness. The being of society is that of transformative interaction. This remains true with respect to both, the level of the dyad and the individual's interaction with the group of which they are a member, as well as the individual's interaction with oneself. Society's being takes place in sociation.

Understanding society as sociation allows Simmel to approach phenomena such as the modern city, the money economy, marriage, art, and much more. Simmel's approach comes from a perspective which focusses on the social situation of the individual, and on the social interaction, namely the sociation, that transforms all elements of that situation. Simmelian sociology can thus be characterized as an investigation into the social processes which take place in certain interactions, as part of the general and ongoing transformation of any given social situation.

2. Simmel in the City

In addition to the continuation of his primary concern with the processes of sociation, Simmel's texts on modern existence present two key features: a notably diverse scope, and a concern with the actuality of existence. Simmel's characterisation of Rome begins with the claim that "the most profound appeal of beauty lies in

the fact that it always takes the form of those elements which are indifferent and alien to it and only acquire their aesthetic quality by their proximity to one another. Each individual word, touch of colour, fragment of stone or tonal element – each are insufficient standing alone. It is only with the gift of community … that the true essence of their beauty can be said to form" (Simmel 2018, p. 33). We can immediately see that, like his sociology, the phenomena that Simmel deems most interesting arise out of interaction. While any given object may have its own value and purpose, they remain "insufficient standing alone". It is only in interaction with one another that they become beautiful. Not only does Simmelian sociology reflect on the social, but also on the architectural and the natural. Simmel claims that the city of Rome vindicates this hypothesis of beauty in interaction, in "the contours of mountains, the colour of walls […] branches and trees" (Simmel 2018, p. 34).

Further on, according to Simmel this enriching effect touches Rome's people, too. Simmel in fact claims that "in Rome, we let go of everything […]. For we are at the same distance in terms of ourselves as we are in relation to the things of Rome […]. What can so often cut us off from the place where we should be, according to the vitality, expansiveness and mood of our individual soul, what keeps us detached and what bars the bridge to our inner homeland – that diffuses in Rome […]. This is precisely how Rome expressly assigns *our* place" (Simmel 2018, p. 41). Here, Simmel attempts to show how the Roman interaction of diverse elements allows for a departure from our customary sense of place into a deeper sense of belonging. Although this claim concerns human interaction, we should remember that Simmel's concern is larger than simply the human experience of Rome. It moreover includes the interactions which play out between humans and architecture, light and shadow, the humidity and aridity of the air and more. Simmel's thinking here, therefore, is not a reflection on solely human experiences of interactions with place, but rather a broader reflection on the rich diversity of transformative interactions which take place in Rome.

From Simmel's perspective, that the modern city is a place of rich and diverse transformative interaction should not, however, be taken as necessarily a good thing. On the contrary, in the works for which he is most well-known, his texts on what he calls "the

money economy", the city figures as the central locus of what Simmel designates as the "*blasé* outlook". As Simmel writes in 'The Metropolis and the Life of the Spirit', "the relationships and affairs of the typical city-dweller have to be so multiform and complex that [...] their respective relationships are entwined like some multi-limbed organism" (Simmel 2018, p. 71)[3] . While a restatement of his claim in 'Rome' that cities are places of endlessly complex interactions, this observation also supports Simmel's further argument that in cities the rapidity of interaction leads to a kind of de-individualisation of encounter. Since "the seller must arouse in the person to whom he wishes to sell ever more novel and specific requirements" (Simmel, 2018, p. 83), the buyer-seller relationship and the buyer-bought relationship (namely the interaction the buyer has with the object they wish to buy) is displaced in favour of an interaction with novelty and specificity. This results in a disinterest for interactions between city-dwellers. Simmel argues that the rapid pace of city life privileges impersonal exchange for the sake of exchange, the chief icon of which is money: "the essence of the *blasé* outlook is a disregard for the differences between things [...]. [T]o the *blasé* individual these [differences] appear in uniformly monotonous grey tones, with none worthy of preference over another. This low mood of the psyche is the true subjective reflex of a being completely permeated by the money economy, because money treats the multiform nature of things equitably, and expresses all qualitative differences only in the sense of how much" (Simmel, 2018, p. 73-4). Money, from Simmel's perspective, accelerates the possibilities of interaction and exchange to the point at which it is simply exchange, accompanied with negligible or with severely diminished interaction.

I propose that Simmel's reflection on modern urban existence can be interpreted as a working out of his theory of sociation into an actual theory of social existence, understood as the interaction between elements of society. In somewhat abstract terms, in this theorisation of sociology, Simmel describes the structure of his approach to sociological investigation, which includes a rejection of the exclusively individual-focused and group-focused investigation in favour of a form of thinking which begins with the dyad, the

3 I am citing from Simmel, G. 2018. This edition includes "The Metropolis and the Life of the Spirit".

locus of sociation itself. Here, therefore, we can see how that work affects Simmel's thinking in specific and actual sociological structures. Living in the modern city entails, for Simmel, living at the locus of accelerated interaction. This acceleration risks eliminating the interaction between individuals which made such meetings possible in the first place. His reflection on the experience of living in Rome focusses on the interaction between different styles of architecture, and on the impact of the shape of the hills on the layout of the streets. Equally, his description of the dangerously de-individualising effect of money should not, however, obscure the fact that here, too, Simmel remains a theorist of social interaction. Simmel's reflections on the transformative processes of social interaction, and on the de-individualising effects of the modern capitalist city, both constitute a broader consideration of the latter's effects on the interactions which make such phenomena as the money-economy and the *blasé* outlook at all possible. This is to say that beneath his reflections on the modern city existence, either in the case of the enriching Rome or in the case of the impoverishing capitalist metropolis, Simmel's thinking remains a reflection on the social transformations, the sociation that is, occurrent in interaction.

3. Simmel before Heidegger

On the basis of what has been said so far, we can identify a number of elements which both suggest a close proximity between Martin Heidegger's and Simmel's philosophical thought, and nonetheless hint towards a considerable distance. On the one hand, I suggest that Heidegger follows Simmel's footsteps in departing from a subject-based way of thinking, in favour of a thinking on the being of certain phenomena. On the other hand, from a Heideggerian perspective, Simmel's attention to the actual remains ontologically limited. In fact, we can see that despite Heidegger's total jettisoning of the subject Simmel retains traces of the subject in his own work.

For a clarification of these distances and proximities, I shall first go over a brief summary of Heidegger's claims *vis-à-vis* subject-based-thinking. Heidegger claims, in *Being and Time*, that Descartes investigates the *cogito*, namely the subjective "I think" without the *sum*, the being of the subject that is (Heidegger 1996, p. 71-2). This failure entails the impossibility of experiencing the world, if not in

terms of objects given to a subject. As such, Heidegger claims, if we are to think of existence and of dwelling in a more fundamental way than that provided by the subject-object relation, we must investigate the possibilities which belong to existence. This series of claims culminates in what I term a "logic of presupposition". Heidegger does not claim that subject-based thinking produces false results; but rather he claims that, as regards Descartes, it presupposes without fully investigating the question of the meaning of being and the possibilities which belong to existence. It is in this context that Heidegger writes that "one of our first tasks will be to prove that if we posit an 'I' or subject as that which is proximally given, we shall completely miss the phenomenal content of Dasein. Ontologically, every idea of a 'subject' – unless refined by a previous ontological determination of its basic character – still posits the *subjectum* along with it" (Heidegger 1996, p. 71). In order then, to understand the "phenomenal content of Dasein", it is necessary for any investigation, chief among them, an investigation into the subject, to first refine itself with a "previous ontological determination of its basic character". It is in the course of Heidegger's attempt to provide the "previous ontological determination" of any further thinking that he constructs the series of oppositions between phenomenology and ontology: between the what and the how, between what shows itself and what demands to be shown, between the actual and the possible (Heidegger 1996, p. 63). Additionally, in the concluding remark of the *Introduction* of *Being and Time*, Heidegger presents these oppositions together, claiming that "what is essential in [phenomenology] does not lie in its actuality as a philosophical movement. Higher than actuality stands possibility. We can understand phenomenology only by seizing upon it as a possibility" (Ibid.). This remark combines each of the oppositions and places them within a further opposition between the actual and the possible, and it is the latter form of opposition which structures Heidegger's critique of subject-based thinking. This reasoning sets the scene for Heidegger's thinking on dwelling.

Based on this summary, we can trace several comparisons and distinctions with Simmel. First, Simmel's reflection on existence in the modern city elicits a strong concern for the actuality of that existence. While his thinking certainly grapples with abstract

notions of time, identity and capitalism, this in no way prevents a parallel reflection on the actual existence of actual individuals in actual cities. His description of Rome contains both an attempt to define the meaning and movement of the beautiful as well as an attempt to respond to the actuality of Rome's geography and history, its buildings and its people. Moreover, although Simmel makes no such connection, we might detect the recurrence of an aspect of his critique of Kantian thought. For Simmel, Kant's reflection on nature remains too limited to the domain of the subject, with its function being to combine the given into a synthetic conscious whole. By contrast, Simmelian sociology attempts to understand the being of society itself, in its processes, transformations and interactions. Therefore, any account of beauty that Simmel might give in his reflections on Rome will not aim at providing a synthesis of the elements of the city which pertain to his concept of the beautiful. On the contrary, the Simmelian approach is concerned with the being of the beautiful in the actuality of Rome.

This approach sharply distances Simmel from Heidegger. In his separation of ontology from phenomenology, Heidegger privileges the possible over the actual. For Heidegger, phenomenology can only be concerned with phenomena which actually show themselves, since its vocation is to "let that which shows itself be seen from itself". Ontology, by contrast, can engage with "something which proximally and for the most part does not show itself" (Heidegger 1996:, p. 59). By directing our attention solely with the what of the phenomenally actual we limit our capacity for setting our attention on the how of the ontologically possible, which has a privileged position. Thus from Heidegger's perspective, Simmel's reflection on the actuality of modern city is a distraction from the more fundamental possibilities which belong to that existence.

Second, in his search for an understanding of the being of the social, Simmel claims that it is not necessary that for the investigator or the investigated to be subjectively conscious of the processes of sociation under examination. On the one hand, "the unity of society needs no observer"; and on the other hand, "this does not mean, of course, that each member of a society is conscious of such an abstract notion of unity" (Simmel 1971, p. 7). In both cases, Simmel's move is not one of outright rejection, but of displacement,

for subject-based thinking is not out of the question and nor is subjectivity an excluded notion. I suggest that this displacement gives Simmel's investigation a substantial flexibility and a broader scope. We have seen that, in his reflection on Rome, he is able to analyse the interaction not only between human beings, but also between humans and architecture, architecture and landscape, past and present, and more. The claim that the reality of certain processes of sociation need not depend on the consciousness of each member allows Simmel to take into consideration a wide range of experiences: those which occur in the consciousness of subjects, *and* those which do not.

Here, too, Simmel and Heidegger stand at a distance. Where Simmel broadens the scope of his investigation in order to include those experiences of which the subject is conscious and unconscious, as well as those which include no subjectivity at all (e.g., between the landscape and the street), Heidegger dispenses entirely with the notion of consciousness in order to investigate the being of certain experiences, rather than the being of the consciousness of those experiences. From Heidegger's perspective, Simmel risks becoming distracted by the consciousness of the subjective experiences he analyses. From Heidegger's perspective, in order to truly understand the experiences with which he is concerned Simmel should dispense entirely of the notion of subjective experience, which would allow an understanding of the being of those experiences. In this way, we might conclude that where Simmel attempts to widen the scope of his investigation, Heidegger attempts to deepen the fundamentality of his reflection.

By bringing to the fore Simmel's concern with the actual and his retention of both, subjectively conscious and non-conscious experiences, what we are really after is Simmel's position with regards to the subject. In fact, a closer analysis of this position shall illuminate the distance and proximity connecting and distancing the works of Simmel and Heidegger. In Simmel's distance from the Kantian style of investigation, we can identify a pre-Heideggerian displacement of subject-based thinking. In his own analysis of Kant's investigation into nature, Simmel identifies a synthesising subjective consciousness which gathers the given elements into a unity. In Simmel's own account instead, this approach is displaced

in favour of a different style which attempts to find the inner unity and being of society itself. Recall that Simmel moreover rejects the possibility of philosophical investigation from the point of view exclusively of the individual and the group. In this rejection, the displacement of the singular subject appears in a form that differs from Heidegger's. In fact, Simmel's reasoning here is that neither form is able to reflect with sufficient clarity the processes of sociation at work. At the level of both, approach and content, Simmel attempts to find a sociology which departs from the domain of the subject.

In light of this, we can draw two conclusions. First, Heidegger shares with Simmel a conviction that, the mode of the subject provides a perspective of investigation that is inadequate for reflecting on existence. In this sense, Heidegger is entirely in agreement with Simmel's claim that the Kantian investigation is inappropriate. Their motivation consists in the fact that the Kantian approach would confront existence merely as a sequence of given elements or objects to be then conceptually synthesized in the mind of the conscious subject.

Second, the conclusions Simmel and Heidegger draw from this are substantially different. Simmel concludes that the scope of philosophical reflection should be expanded to include both subjective and non-subjective experiences, as well as a concern for the actuality of contemporary experiences of dwelling. Heidegger concludes, instead, that an exclusion of the subject is necessary. His motivation here is based on the necessity of providing the notion of the subject with "previous ontological determination". Thus, rather than expanding the scope of his thinking to include experiences of dwelling which belong in the realm of the conscious as well as non-conscious subject, Heidegger excludes the subjective entirely. In the space left behind by the removal of subject-based thinking Heidegger builds his ontologisation of dwelling. Therefore, it is in exactly this space that Heidegger's distance from Simmel with regard to the notion of dwelling becomes even clearer. In other words, differing notions of subjectivity and subject-based thinking determine different reflections on dwelling.

Conclusion

Based on the above, we can draw further conclusions on Simmel's work on dwelling. First, from Heidegger's perspective Simmel's retention of the notion of the actual alongside his discussion of both subjectively conscious and non-conscious experiences, indicate that Simmel's work remains within the domain of the subject. Recall that, in the course of his attempt to provide the "previous ontological determination" for any further thinking, Heidegger constructs a series of oppositions which can be subsumed under the opposition between the actual and the possible. The actual is understood as a sign of the subjective, while the possible is understood as a sign of the ontological. On Heidegger's view, therefore, Simmel's thinking of the actual marks him as a thinker of the subject. Second, because of the failure to exclude the subject, Simmel cannot think the fundamental possibilities which belong to existence. In virtue of this it will remain impossible for Simmel to think of dwelling, at least on Heidegger's terms.

On Heidegger's account, Simmel's reflections on the experience of the modern city dweller remain supposedly restricted to a reflection on the experience of interactions among subjects. Simmel's analysis of the interaction between landscape and architecture, between individuals of different cultures, between capitalism and individual interaction, all this remain supposedly superficial and merely anterior to an ontology of dwelling. Heidegger's interpretation disregards the precision of Simmel's insight, and the possibility of a different kind of reflection on Simmel's visionary foresight into the contemporary experience of dwelling. It does not keep into consideration the great variety of experiences countenanced by Simmel's thought, the deftness with which abstract notions are woven together with the quotidian city resident. However, in so doing Heidegger misses those aspects of Simmel's work that most essentially contribute to philosophical thought on dwelling. In fact, Simmel provides illuminating insights, for example, into the subjective experiences which constitute the interaction between an individual and the society within which they exist. Such reflections, according to Heidegger, simply presuppose a more fundamental question about the being of those experiences and refrain from exploring it. Moreover, according to Heidegger, Simmel's subject-based approach is responsible for secluding him

the possibility of asking the right sort of philosophical questions. In fact, because Heidegger builds his ontology of dwelling in the space left behind by his critique of subject-based thinking, on his account any thinking, including Simmel's, which adopts and remains within the perspective of the subjective is unable to think of dwelling.

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Connecting The Second Person in Mind and Ethics

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Abstract

In recent years there has been a significant turn towards discussion of the second person and its significance to core questions in the philosophy of mind and in ethics. When it comes to the notion of the second person, we find similar features in both fields: appeals to communication, irreducibility claims, and claims about the basis or origin of certain concepts. However, this research has mostly been conducted in parallel. The aim of this paper is therefore to remedy this separation. In doing so, I shall set out the structure of some of the key claims made in each discipline, considering the general relationship between the two domains of study and whether they are compatible. My central claim is that ethics and philosophy of mind make opposing demands on the notion of the second person, which poses a challenge to the possibility of a common notion. This is of theoretical significance because the prospect of a unitarian approach to the second person which branches into both, philosophy of mind and ethics, forms part of the appeal of a second-personal approach to both fields. This obstacle yields predicaments in both domains, but it also brings into view new and promising directions of research. A further aim of this paper is to support the conclusion that the philosophy of mind's approach to the second person offers interesting resources in support of a second personal approach to ethics.[1]

1 It seems to me that the converse claim is also true: a theory of the second person based on ethical considerations can offer useful insights for a conception of the second person in philosophy of mind. However, this paper will largely concentrate on the first claim. For more on the project of bringing mind and ethics into dialogue on the second person, see Doug Lavin (2014), and for discussion of how ethics can suggest useful insights to the philosophy of mind on the second person see Eilan (2025). For an introduction to the second person in the philosophy of mind, see Eilan (2014), and for an overview of recent views on the second person in ethics see Schaab (2023).

Keywords
second person | address | other minds | bipolar obligation | reciprocation

Introduction

Turning to the second person might seem useful for an account of knowledge of other minds. In section 1, I offer some motivation for this. Section 2 introduces what I call the irreducibility and origin claims with the help of Eilan's Second Person Communication Claim. I argue that, for the notion of the second person to ground a fully-fledged account of our knowledge of the existence of other minds, it must not be reducible to a combination of first and third-personal ways of thinking or points of view, and that this irreducibility should be secured by a strong requirement of reciprocity on the use of the second person "you" in mutual address. In section 3 I shall explain Darwall's argument that an irreducible notion of the second person forms the basis of the concept of moral obligation. In section 4, I argue that Eilan and Darwall's accounts are incompatible, and that this is representative of a basic obstacle that challenges the possibility of establishing a connection between mind and ethics through the second person. This raises serious quandaries in both fields. Despite this, I finish by offering a concrete proposal as to how further research may overcome this obstacle.

1. Why Turn to The Second Person?

How do we know that there are other people, other I-thinkers like ourselves? Traditionally, the answer to this question has been third-personal: knowledge of other minds comes either directly from observing others, or through inferences that we make from those observations. One challenge here is solipsism, the belief that we are alone in the world and that no other I-thinkers exist. The challenge is not so much whether the solipsist is correct, but whether the position is at all coherent. A particular obstacle for third-personal accounts in this regard is that they are prone to positing an asymmetry between first-personal self-knowledge and third-personal knowledge of other minds, the latter seeming susceptible to sceptical worries since it heavily relies on observation and inference in a way that self-knowledge does

not. On the face of it, this asymmetry makes it conceivable that all my beliefs about myself (which derive their authority from my first-personal perspective) may be true while my beliefs about the existence of others (which derive their authority from observation and inference) may be false.

So, on this view, it becomes intelligible that I may exist without anyone else existing. This can be avoided: the third person theorist has various options to mitigate this asymmetry and argue against solipsism. I shall focus on a particular kind of response to the solipsist which appeals to the importance of communication and our practical engagement with others. Part of the motivation for this approach is that it is not only hard to believe in solipsism, but it seems difficult for a person to live according to this belief (it is said that Russell received a letter in reply to his writing on solipsism remarking "how odd it was that *not everyone* is a solipsist, given the cogency of his arguments"; Eilan, 2025, p. 295). Knowledge of other minds is a practically significant kind of knowledge: our engagement with others, our care for them, and our interactions with them seem to play a role in our belief in their existence and in our difficulty in denying that belief. These thoughts do not themselves constitute an argument against the solipsist. Rather, they signal the promise of a similar argument which appeals to communication and practical engagement with others. Such an argument would furthermore buttress our intuition that solipsism is something that our practical engagement with others simply forbids. Thus, it may help establish a connection between our knowledge of the existence of other minds, and our ethically significant practical relations with them.

However, not just any appeal to communication is able to make good on this promise. Take for example the central role communication plays in Donald Davidson's rejection of solipsism and external world scepticism. Davidson (2001a) is concerned with three kinds of knowledge: subjective (self-knowledge), intersubjective (of others), and objective (of the external world). He argues that they form a conceptually interdependent tripod and cannot obtain independently: "if any leg were lost, no part would stand" (Davidson 2001a, p. 220). We begin with the concept of belief. For an individual to ascribe beliefs to themselves at all, including the belief 'I exist',

a concept of truth is required which marks a distinction between true and false belief. Without comprehension of the distinction between what is thought to be the case and what is the case, the concept of belief cannot be employed. What is required for possessing the concept of truth? Here Davidson takes inspiration from Wittgenstein: the concept of truth depends on our ability to communicate with others, namely on another's ability to correct our utterances. If I had a word for an incommunicable concept, I could never set a foot wrong in my usage of that word. Only with the help of another who can interpret my speech may I stand corrected, hence succeed or fail to speak truly (Davidson 2001a, p. 209-210; 2001b, p. 117-121).[2] Thus, for Davidson communication renders solipsism incoherent: it is not possible for me to ascribe beliefs about myself to myself without another mind to interpret and correct me. Hence it is not a coherent possibility that I am alone in the universe: coherently believing that I exist requires me to believe that others exist.

So far, we have the subjective and the intersubjective. To complete the triangle, consider that the interpreter must learn how to interpret the meaning of my utterances. Their ability to correct me depends on their succeeding at this, which cannot be achieved *solely* through intersubjectivity. While the interpreter may successfully group together similar sounding utterances of mine, they must also correlate these with an external point of reference, namely objects in the external world, to be able to assign them a meaning. For my thoughts to have determinate content, there must be a way of isolating a specific location amongst the line of sensory stimuli arriving from the external scenario, and this can only be achieved through a cross reference, or in Davidson's (2001a, p. 213) terms, a kind of "triangulation": the interpreter is aware of me being aware of that object or aspect of the external scenario that is the content of my thought.

This is Davidson's central claim. Subjective knowledge requires an intersubjective interpreter to sustain the concept of truth. To

2 Note that the title of Davidson's (2001b) "The Second Person" refers to the necessary role of a second (meaning additional) person in sustaining the concept of truth, *not* to the 'second person' as such (i.e., usage of the word 'you' and the way of thinking that accompanies such usage). The idea of referring to and thinking of another as 'you' is conspicuously unimportant to Davidson's account.

determine the meaning of a speaker's utterance, the interpreter must correlate it with an objective location, and this location can only be pinned down by the intersection of the two perspectives triangulating that point. Without such triangulation, as Davidson sees it, the content of my thought is indeterminate. In this case, there would be no way for me to coherently employ the concept of belief, and I would be unable to express even the most basic beliefs about myself.

While Davidson's argument does a good job of refuting the solipsist, it does not justify what is so attractive about communication compared against other answers we might formulate against the solipsist. Moreover, it does not explain why solipsism is so strongly at odds with our lived experience and real engagement with others. The practical significance of our knowledge of other minds does not enter Davidson's picture, and his notion of intersubjectivity is very weak. On Davidson's view, my ability to ascribe beliefs to myself depends on the existence of another. However, this dependence goes only one way, for on his story subjective knowledge is independent of how the other takes *me* and my recognition of that. The appeal to the other is thus almost selfish: for my thoughts to have determinate content I need to know that another exists, and the other needs to be able to cross reference my utterances with objects in the world, but at no point do we need to mutually attend to one another and take notice of the impressions we make on each other. Furthermore, on Davidson's picture, once we obtain knowledge of another's existence, the question of the ethical and practical significance of this relationship remains entirely open. My knowledge that another person exists could prescind completely from any awareness of the ethical demands which hold between me and that person. A philosophical explanation of our ethical relationships with others requires something more than communication.[3]

How might we overcome this criticism? Notice that Davidson describes communication third-personally: interpretation involves

3 Davidson's account leaves open other quandaries. For example, nothing in his story explains where we get the *concept* of other I-thinkers in the first place. Intersubjective knowledge is a conceptual requirement for subjective knowledge, but where do I get the idea to go seeking intersubjectivity in the first place? (see Eilan, 2025, pp. 297-298).

observing utterances, correlating these with objects in the world, and on that basis inferring content. As such, mutual recognition is not required, nor is any awareness of the fact that the source of these utterances is a self-conscious subject. "Triangulation" may require a second person in the literal sense, but it does not require second-personal language and thinking. We might therefore consider moving away from the third-personal conception of communication and looking for a stronger interdependence relation between the speaker and the interpreter. Such a move would set us on the path of an alternative to third-personal accounts of knowledge of other minds which emphasises the ethical and practical significance of such knowledge; one which sees communication not just as a piece in a wider picture, but as infusing the philosophical explanation of how we acquire the very concept of the existence of other minds.

2. Knowledge of Other Minds

Third-personal accounts of knowledge of other minds face various objections. In particular, accounts like Davidson's leave unanswered an important question about the relationship between speaker and interlocutor in virtue of the minimal level of mutual recognition required. In response to this question and others, recent attention has turned to an account of knowledge of other minds based on the concept of the second person. The promise of this second-personal turn is twofold: firstly, to provide a genuine alternative to third-personal accounts and overcome some classical objections against them (see section 1) and secondly, to provide an account more easily able to accommodate and explain the ethically and practically significant aspects of our knowledge of other minds. I'll now examine Naomi Eilan's account of our knowledge of other minds, and show why it seems that making good on the first promise requires opting for an extremely strong requirement of reciprocity. My focus is on her "Second Person Communication Claim" which directly concerns the origin of our knowledge of other minds:

> Our grip on the idea that other self-conscious subjects exist is rooted in our capacity to enter into particular kinds of communicative relations with them, in which

> we adopt attitudes of mutual address and think of each other as 'you' (Eilan, 2020, p. 3).

In order to represent a genuine alternative to third-personal accounts, second-personal address should correspond to a way of thinking that is robust enough to sustain our knowledge of other minds. One might think that the second person is reducible to a combination of first and third-personal ways of thinking. "You", might just be a linguistic shorthand for the thought "the target to which I am presently speaking". This seems to reflect Davidson's account: in his view, whilst communication is essential for knowledge of other minds, this knowledge is achievable through third-personal observations and the interlocutor's interpretation of the speaker's utterances. Any account of the second person which is reducible in this way seems more of an addendum than a true alternative to a third-personal theory.

To avoid this, and so to get any second-personal account of other minds off the ground, it must be shown that "there is a way of thinking which can *only* be employed when the conditions for address are met" (Eilan 2020, p. 10-11). The demand is to demonstrate that the way of thinking involved in mutual address, and its role in our acquiring knowledge of other minds is *irreducibly* second-personal. In other words, it needs to be shown that there is something about thinking of another as "you" which involves or requires some kind of strong interdependence beyond that which might be established between an object and an observer simply by observation, or which could obtain outside of mutual address. So, it must be shown that observation cannot explain how second-personal communication could serve as the origin of our knowledge of the existence of other minds. What then, will need to be true of the second-personal thinking involved in the phenomenon of address to ensure this? Eilan (2020, p. 12-14; 2025, p. 300-304) suggests three claims, inspired by Martin Buber (1996, p. 54-56, 67) which explain the central differences between I-it and I-you relations:

> (1) *Communicative Relation Claim:* the communication is aimed at establishing a relation of address, namely an I-you relation between persons as

opposed to an I-it relation that one might take towards an object.

(2) *Mutual Interdependence Claim*: the communicative relation can only be successfully established if the object reciprocates and thinks of the speaker as a "you".

(3) *I-You Claim*: Thinking of someone as "you" requires thinking of them as another I-thinker. Both parties must grasp this bi-directionality and so think of each other both as an I and as a you.

The idea is that any form of address which exhibits these properties could ground knowledge of the existence of the other's mind for each of the participants but is not explainable in terms of observation. This therefore gives us both an origin claim and an irreducibility claim. The Communicative Relation Claim is the first step. It requires that communication comes with a distinctive attitude and purpose which actively seeks another person as target. This sets the basis for a special relation different to that which normally obtains in observation, or in more minimal forms of communication which do not explicitly seek another. For instance, "Yeeoowch!" communicates the speaker's pain; but it does not necessarily seek another person as target and is therefore not an address of someone as "you". The Mutual Interdependence Claim does not just concern observable behaviours like somebody turning their head towards you or saying, "Go on, I'm listening". Rather, it refers to the fact that they are regarding you as a "you" in their own mind, independently of what they can be observed to be doing. This means that the success of second-personal address depends on how things are for the other in a way which cannot be determined by observation. The idea that address requires both parties engaging in ways of thinking which they cannot directly perceive in each other makes Mutual Interdependence an extremely strong claim. Indeed, I shall argue that this claim causes a tension for the second person theorist when it comes to establishing a connection with ethics. However, the strength of this claim is also crucial for establishing an irreducibly second-personal account of how we get a grasp of the idea of other minds.

Suppose I enter a relation of address with someone and on that basis come to know that they exist as a self-conscious subject. If we accept Eilan's three claims, what role can observation and inference play? I could, after observing instances of successful address, infer that another is a self-conscious "you". To make this move I would already have to know that the address has been successful; but if Mutual Interdependence holds, then to know this I must *already* know that mutual you-thinking is taking place. This is where the I-You Claim comes in: if I already know that this bi-directional you-thinking is taking place, then this puts me *directly* in touch with the idea of the other as a self-conscious subject. If we have arrived at this point, then we have arrived at knowledge of the existence of another mind already. Thus, if the three claims regarding address are correct, then by the time I know that I stand in a relation of address to somebody, I already know that they exist, which leaves nothing left for observation to do. Moreover, there is no space for observation to come in earlier. In fact, because of the strength of the Mutual Interdependence Claim, observation cannot be the crucial element in the recognition of mutual you-thinking. What does play this role then? Communication itself. Awareness of successful address and awareness of mutual you-thinking must arise simultaneously and interdependently. The story is irreducibly second-personal because the three conditions which are required for mutual address are the very same features which give us our grasp of other minds: there is no separating one process from the other. To put it another way: the reciprocity which Eilan sees as necessary for second-personal communication renders an appeal to observation redundant. The features of second-personal communication are jointly sufficient to ground our knowledge of the existence of other minds without an appeal to third-personal factors.

It is worth clarifying the argument so far. It has not been shown that second-personal address really does require Eilan's three claims. Furthermore, considering the strength of these claims, particularly the reciprocity of the Mutual Interdependence Claim, one might think that this is unlikely. What has been argued is that insofar as our aim is to put forward a position which, like Eilan's Second Person Communication Claim, can offer a genuine and substantive alternative to third-personal views, we need an

irreducibly second-personal story; and that to achieve this, the requirements on the notion of address should be rather strong, like those expressed by the Mutual Interdependence Claim. If the requirement of reciprocity was weaker, that is, if it did not demand reciprocation of you-thinking independently of observation, there would remain a role for observation and inference to play. This would put us back with approaches like Davidson's which were ultimately third-personal despite an appeal to communication.

Secondly, it should be emphasised that the Second Person Communication Claim is a claim about the origin of our knowledge of other minds, and not a claim about a universal basis for such knowledge. This account leaves it open that, further down the line, observation may play an important role in facilitating further knowledge of others (particularly, perhaps, knowledge of what others are thinking). The important point is that it is irreducibly second-personal address which provides us with our first grasp of such knowledge.

Eilan's three claims also point to the further promise of a second-personal theory: because address (supposedly) requires us to think of the other as a "you" and thereby also an "I", the idea that others exist as self-conscious subjects like us is given *directly*. It is questionable whether the same would ever be possible in a third-personal account: could mere observation ever present the idea of another's self-consciousness to us directly? By the same token, Eilan's account is able to explain how we get hold of the idea of other I-thinkers in the first place. Finally, Eilan's theory points us in the direction of the ethical: in address we have two people attending directly to each other and recognising each other's status as self-conscious subjects; and this is a significant step towards an ethically significant relationship. In her words, "thinking of another as 'you' is ethically laden, it is of potential moral significance" (Eilan 2025, pp. 299, 305-307). However, it remains opaque how this connection should be spelled out.

3. The Second Person in Ethics

Insofar as we are seeking a connection between philosophy of mind and ethics as regards to the role of the second person, it is worth attending first to how the concept has been deployed

independently in ethics. Perhaps the most notable treatment of the second person in ethics comes from Stephen Darwall, who argues that moral obligation is fundamentally a second-personal concept. In his view, it essentially involves Strawsonian "reactive attitudes" (Darwall 2006, p. 17), attitudes like resentment and gratitude which arise in interpersonal interactions and involve reference to the thoughts and intentions of others who are regarded as having agency over their behaviour (Strawson 1962, pp. 190-193). Reactive attitudes are particularly noteworthy here because of their role in our practices of holding others accountable for moral requirements, and the way that they may implicitly address demands (resentment implicitly addresses a demand for apology, for example; Darwall 2006, p. 17).

Darwall's argument is based on an analysis of instances where we address another person with a moral demand. On his account, the concepts involved in this particular kind of second-person address form a closed and "irreducibly second-personal" circle (Darwall 2006, p. 11). Suppose someone is standing on my toe and causing me pain. Darwall (2006, pp. 7-9) differentiates between two ways I might go about getting them to move their foot. I could simply make them aware of my pain and its source, and rely on their goodwill to move their foot (agent neutral); or I could make a demand on them, hoping that their recognition of the validity of my demand will lead to the desired outcome (agent relative). In the former situation I only play an epistemic role. I merely alert them to my pain by making them aware of it. Assuming the other person is not opposed to reducing pain, they would therefore have a reason to remove their foot regardless of whether I told them. Even if I did address them with the word "you", the second-person language is not essential for them becoming aware of their reason. They do not need my words at all to become aware of the painful situation, and so my speech plays only a contingent role.

In contrast, Darwall argues, I might *demand* that this person remove their foot. This kind of demand brings with it a whole "interdefinable circle" (Darwall, 2006, p. 12) which is irreducibly second-personal. In making a demand, I assume that I have the relevant authority. If I do in fact have this authority, then my demanding something of someone gives them cause to act along with the demand, a cause

which they may not have had without my demanding. In other words, my demand gives the addressee a reason (perhaps not an overriding reason, but a reason nonetheless) to comply. Darwall (2006, p. 12) gives the further example of a sergeant ordering her platoon to fall in. Unless this demand is addressed to them by someone with the relevant authority, the platoon does not have a reason to act. Thus, Darwall claims, this kind of reason is special in that it depends on the address: "it was demanded of me" is a reason that I can only have *if* a demand has been addressed to me. Hence, it is a "second-personal reason" (Darwall, 2006, p. 13). Importantly, even if the speaker's authority is recognised and the demand valid, there is no coercion. In fact, the addressee acts on this reason *by their own volition*, which implies the responsibility to follow through on their acceptance of the demand. This implies that others have a corresponding authority to hold them accountable, an authority which could ground further demands. Darwall's general claim is that these concepts (demanding, authority, second-personal reasons, and responsibility) imply the others, and so wherever one of these concepts is found, there must be irreducibly second-personal thinking involved.

The above gives us an idea of Darwall's irreducibility claim: the concepts of responsibility and accountability are fundamentally second-personal concepts.[4] Darwall also makes a different claim which we shall call his basis claim, namely that the basic concepts of moral obligation (right and wrong, for example) are essentially connected to interpersonal responsibility and accountability. From the basis claim and the irreducibility claim above, we can infer that the basic concepts of moral obligation are also fundamentally second-personal (Darwall 2012, p. 335). This second claim needs some justification. There do seem to be some moral concepts which essentially involve the kind of interpersonal responsibility which Darwall mentions, promising being a good example. Nevertheless, there also seem to be moral concepts which do not have this structure, and which, most importantly, do not derive their moral force from addressed demands. For example, we might think that the moral principle that I ought not murder does not depend on anyone ever demanding that I do not murder them (see Wallace

4 Darwall calls this claim 'Strawson's point' in virtue of its connection to Strawson's critique of the impersonal nature of consequentialism (see Darwall 2006, pp. 15, 61; Strawson 1962).

2007). Even in Darwall's example the second-personal route is only one out of two options, the first of which is moreover not tied to the circle of second-personal concepts.

The underlying distinction here is between two different kinds of normativity. We should distinguish what Michael Thompson (2004, p. 335-338) calls "monadic normativity", which is expressed through one-place predicates such as "X did wrong by doing A", from "bipolar normativity", which involves a special type of two-place predicate such as "X has a duty to Y to do A". Thompson stresses that neither can be reduced to the other, and that they have fundamentally different structures. In fact, though a bipolar obligation might be translated to a monadic obligation, this would unavoidably alter the content of the thought. For example, the monadic "I did wrong in that I lied to you" expresses a fundamentally different thought than the bipolar "I wronged you by lying". In the latter, reference to "you" is essential to the content of the thought expressed, and it captures your status as the victim of my wrongdoing. In the former, as Thompson (2004, p. 340) puts it, "you are the occasion, not the victim" of my wrongdoing. Hence, the fact that I lied "to you" is only a circumstantial and unessential extra detail, such that "I did wrong in that I lied" expresses mostly the same normative content.

The second-personal nature of bipolar normativity seems relatively straightforward. However, Darwall also holds that moral obligation in general (i.e. both bipolar *and* monadic obligation) essentially involves a second-personal notion of accountability and responsibility akin to that which obtains in the address of demands. What is missing is an explanation of how this applies to monadic normativity. To put it crudely, if second-personal reasons can only result from the address of demands, then what is the source of the demanding which grounds monadic judgements like "murder is wrong"? This question expresses a recurrent objection against bipolar approaches to ethics. More specifically, the fact that the basis of obligation should be a particular kind of two place relationship seems to severely limit the scope of obligations (C.f. Schaab, 2023).

Darwall's answer to this criticism involves a significant weakening of the irreducibility requirement on the notion of the second

person. Firstly, he grants that obligations may be in force even when demands have not *explicitly* been made, for it is the *potential* for a legitimate demand which often grounds obligations (Darwall 2006, pp. 9n.17, 190n.22). Secondly, and most importantly, Darwall moves beyond a notion of demand based exclusively on address from one individual to another, to a notion of demand that is based on the concept of a moral community. The moral community here is a regulative ideal that we conceive ourselves as part of, and that holds an authority over us for which we are to be held accountable. In fact, as Darwall puts it, "to understand moral obligation as related to moral responsibility in the way that we normally do", by which Darwall supposedly means as involving both monadic and bipolar judgements, "we have to see it as involving demands that are 'in force' from the moral point of view, that is, from the (first-person plural) perspective of the moral community" (2006, p. 9). Darwall insists, however, that viewing monadic judgments as deriving their force from the concept of a moral community does "not diminish their second-personal character, since that concerns their 'demand-addressing' quality". Therefore, Darwall claims that our conceiving ourselves as part of a moral community can explain monadic obligations as nonetheless second-personal. In his view, in fact, the moral community is a source of authority and poses demands to us, therefore giving us second-personal reasons which make us responsible for our actions. Even if no one ever actually addresses the demand not to murder to anyone, our situation within a moral community gives us second-personal reasons not to murder, for our participation in that community involves a second-personal notion of accountability towards it.

4. A Dilemma for The Second Person Theorist

An evaluation of Darwall's meta-ethical claims and the question whether his notion of a moral community is successful are important topics which have been pursued extensively.[5] For present purposes we shall investigate whether Darwall's notion of the second person is compatible with the notion required for knowledge of other minds. We have before us a potential route for establishing a connection between our knowledge of the existence of other minds and ethics. If the same special kind of

5 See the articles collected in "Symposium on Stephen Darwall's The Second Person Standpoint" (2007, Ethics, 118:1).

second-personal thinking involved in address is essential both to how we acquire knowledge of the existence of other minds, and to the notion of moral obligation in general, then this forecloses the possibility of having one without the other. It would establish not quite an interdependence between knowledge of other minds and ethics, but a common mutual dependence of both on the concept of the second person; and this would mean that meeting the conceptual requirements of either involves meeting a conceptual requirement of both. Addressing is knowing another's mind, and on the present view addressing would moreover mean being able to either demand something of someone or be held accountable for one's actions. This connection would have implications in both directions. Firstly, it would avoid the unattractive feature of Davidson's account that one might obtain knowledge of the existence of another without any ethical relationship. Secondly, if knowing that another exists essentially involves second-personal address, then whenever that knowledge obtains so too do the conceptual requirements of moral responsibility; and this would explain why moral obligation is so ubiquitous. Perhaps more significantly in the other direction: if the grounds of moral responsibilities are identical with the grounds of our belief in the existence of other minds, then this would explain why those ethical relationships play such a central role in buttressing that belief. Here we have also an explanation of why it is so practically challenging to be a solipsist. Solipsism conflicts with the essentially second-personal character of our ethical responsibilities. To put it another way, we cannot live according to solipsism, because the way in which we already live, namely in relation to others, is itself incompatible with such a belief. However, for this route to be open, the claims made in both fields must be compatible. While both Eilan and Darwall's accounts involve communication, irreducibility claims, and origin or basis claims, on closer examination their notions of the second person are incompatible.

Like Eilan, Darwall distinguishes between "I-it" and "I-you" ways of thinking with reference to Buber (1996, p. 55), making it clear that his notion of the second-person also requires "I-you" thinking (Darwall 2006, p. 39-41). He considers the example of two boxers who attend to one another in anticipating their opponent's move, noting that their thoughts can nonetheless be explained in purely

first and third-personal terms, e.g., "She's going to throw a jab; I should uppercut her" etc. Therefore, their relation remains an "I-it" relation. In contrast, the kind of relation Darwall is interested in obtains if, for instance, one boxer taunts the other, perhaps by asking a mocking question. In so doing, the boxer thinks of herself as having the authority to "demand an answer" (Darwall, 2006, p. 41). This is an example of an I-you relation which satisfies the Communicative Relation Claim.

The Mutual Interdependence Claim is where things become unclear.[6] Darwall's account does require some kind of reciprocation. After all, the success of my demand depends on my interlocutor attending to me and recognising my authority and therefore coming to see me as a source of second-personal reasons. However, nothing in this story requires that the other must reciprocate the same degree of you-thinking, which is an important feature of the Mutual Interdependence Claim. If the only kind of reciprocation needed from the addressee is that they recognise my authority, then this might be reducible to third or first-personal way of thinking: "She is my Sergeant, so I'd better fall in". While the one making the demand must think second-personally of the other as a 'you', it is not clear on Darwall's account that this must be reciprocated by the addressee, and this makes his notion of the second person significantly less demanding that Eilan's.

Even if a Darwallian theorist were to modify this account by adding that the addressee's recognition of authority essentially involves you-thinking, there are still further issues with how Darwall's account weakens the notion of the second-person. Consider again how Darwall attempts to extend his theory from bipolar obligations to obligation in general. Darwall argued that even the responsibility

6 There is some reason to think that a version of the I-You Claim might be met by Darwall's account. Because the address of demands is a reason-giving exchange, addressing a demand to another must involve some kind of awareness of the other as an agent who can act on reasons (demands do not coerce, they depend on the volition of the addressee). If the addressee accepts the demander's authority, they must accept that that their failure to comply with the demand would give their demander a reason to seek accountability. So, it seems that on Darwall's account address involves regarding one another as able to act on reasons. Whether this involves regarding the other as an I-thinker remains an outstanding question. Nonetheless, whether Darwall's account meets the I-You Claim is somewhat unimportant given that it clearly does not meet the Mutual Interdependence Claim.

involved in monadic obligations is fundamentally second-personal because the idea of a moral community, a kind of regulative ideal, can be a legitimate source of second-personal reasons. This claim further weakens the notion of the second person for Darwall now must accept that the required relationship is not restricted to individuals who can attend to one another and reciprocate you-thinking – the moral community cannot think of me as a "you". A consequence of this reasoning which is particularly prominent in Korsgaard's (2007, p.11) interpretation of Darwall's arguments, is that this kind of second-personal relationship might be taken up *with oneself*. The thought here is that the idea of being responsible to oneself is implicated in the human ability for reflection: in Kantian terms, our will operates as both a legislator or lawgiver with authority, and an executor or agent which is responsible of the rules we set for ourselves. By Darwall's argument, where we have responsibility and authority, we have the whole second-personal circle. This would imply, however, that second-personal relationship can obtain without even requiring reference to another (see Haase 2014).

More concerningly, communication seems to have dropped out of the picture. Darwall (2012, p. 336) explicitly accepts that the second person perspective does not require a second party or any actual act of address. However, it was argued earlier that for the second person to be robust enough to support an account of our knowledge of other minds, it must correspond to a way of thinking that can only obtain if the conditions for address are met. Moreover, to make the theory irreducibly second-personal, a strong reciprocity requirement is required. This leaves the project of establishing a connection between the ethical and epistemological roles of second-personal thought with a dilemma: an account of moral obligation seems to require a weaker interpretation of reciprocity like Darwall's; but an account of knowledge of other minds in terms of second-personal thinking seems to require actual address and a strong component of reciprocity.

This dilemma is more than just a contingent incompatibility between Eilan's and Darwall's accounts. There is a basic tension between what the notion of the second person should achieve in ethics versus what it should achieve in philosophy of mind.

As regards to the possibility of knowledge of other minds, for instance, what is required is a strong irreducibility claim to secure the origin claim without observation coming into the story. Eilan spells this out through the Mutual Interdependence Claim's strong requirement of reciprocation, which I've argued is necessary for securing irreducibility. Moreover, even though there may well be other ways of securing the irreducibility of the second person, the fact remains that irreducibility is an essential requirement for a truly second-personal account of our knowledge of other minds. In contrast, in the ethical case, the idea that the second person should be the basis of moral obligation depends on a considerable weakening of the irreducibility claim. This weakening is necessary to allow for a bridge between bipolar and monadic obligations. Darwall finds this bridge in the moral community while Korsgaard finds it in a Kantian second-personal relationship with oneself. Either way, this connection significantly weakens the notion of the second person. While the philosopher of mind strengthens the notion of the second person, the ethicist does the opposite. The two fields yield opposing demands on the concept, which stands in the way of a unitary approach.

This raises serious questions for both sides. For the philosopher of mind: is the strong and irreducible interpretation of reciprocity of the Mutual Interdependence Claim necessary? If it is, as I have argued, then how does this reciprocity connect with the ethical dimension? Is second-personal ethics the only way to spell out this connection? For ethics: to what extent is actual communication a requirement for second-personal thinking? Does a second personal approach to ethics depend on the possibility of establishing a basis claim which covers both bipolar and monadic obligations?

I want to finish now with a concrete proposal for progress. Several moves are available. On one hand, we could develop an account of knowledge of other minds which relies on a weaker notion of the second person. However, I have argued against this proposal. One could, on the other hand, attempt to establish a connection to the ethical dimension without relying on a notion of the second person that is common to both fields (philosophy of mind and ethics). Perhaps, this knowledge could be made to depend on a notion of caring implicated in you-thinking (see Eilan, 2025, pp.

305-310) by developing Iris Murdoch's (1959, p. 51) claim that 'love is the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real.' This path seems promising and is a good direction for further research. However, it gives up on a unitarian approach to the second person along with its advantages. Moreover, it remains opaque at this stage what this different kind of ethical connection would be.

As such, I am inclined to agree with Lavin (2014, p. 9) that "answering these questions, [...] will require taking more seriously than either Darwall or Korsgaard does, the idea that 'you' signifies a specific, ethically significant, mode of presentation of another will, that through which we apprehend other persons as persons". In other words, the path forward is that of strengthening the reciprocity requirement in Darwall's account to bring it in line with Eilan's. The question is how to do this while maintaining the appropriate connection between the monadic and the bipolar. The solution, I suggest, is for the second person ethicist to take a page out of the philosopher of mind's book and replace the *basis* claim with an *origin* claim, in a way that corresponds to the origin claim which in philosophy of mind characterizes an account of knowledge of other minds. Recall that the Second Person Communication Claim only sought to establish that address is the *origin* of our grasp on other minds, hence it does not claim that it is always the basis for such knowledge. In fact, it admits a role for observation coming in further down the line. A similar move is available for Darwall: he set out to argue that all moral obligation can be understood in terms of second-personal reasons. He could instead opt for the claim that second-personal address is the *origin* of our idea of moral obligation through bipolar obligations; this account is perfectly compatible with granting that, further down the line, there might be monadic obligations which are not analysable in purely second-personal terms. If this move can be sustained, then the weakening of the notion of the second person which Darwall employs to bridge the bipolar-monadic gap is no longer necessary. This opens the path for a stronger notion of ethical reciprocity that corresponds with the reciprocity requirement which Eilan argues grounds our knowledge of other minds.

Switching from a basis to an origin claim in the field of ethics might therefore be a promising direction for future research. Even beyond the details of this move, in general much is to be gained, both in philosophy of mind and in ethics, by keeping the respective other field in view. In particular, becoming aware of the conceptual requirements of the concept of the second person in philosophy of mind, and comparing them against the conceptual requirements which ethics poses on the same concept, helps clarify the claims made in the field of ethics and opens up new directions of research which may have otherwise gone unnoticed.

Conclusion

I've argued that the prospect of establishing a connection between mind and ethics through a unified notion of the second person is challenged by the presence of opposing demands placed on the concept in the two fields. In the philosophy of mind, I argued that establishing a second-personal account of our knowledge of the existence of other minds which is a genuine alternative to third-personal accounts requires a notion of the second person which is irreducible. It was suggested that this irreducibility is best secured through Eilan's Mutual Interdependence Claim which posits an extremely strong reciprocity requirement on address: that it must involve two parties regarding one another as a "you" independently of what they can be observed to be doing. Even if irreducibility can be secured by other means, the fact remains that this approach depends on a strongly irreducible notion of the second person. Meanwhile, in ethics, Darwall's project of establishing moral obligation as fundamentally second-personal requires the opposite: a notion of the second person which is extremely weak. It was argued that this is necessary because while some moral obligations such as promises are clearly interpersonal in nature (these were called 'bipolar' obligations), many other ('monadic') obligations seem to exist independently of any interpersonal interaction. Weakening the notion of the second person overcomes this obstacle for Darwall by allowing monadic obligations to be grounded in second-personal relations between individuals and themselves or the regulative ideal of a moral community, but causes a dilemma for a unitarian notion of the second person: the philosophy of mind requires a strong notion of the second person, whilst ethics seems to require a weak notion. I suggested that the

way around this dilemma is for the ethicist to move from claiming that the second person is the universal basis of moral obligation to claiming that it is the origin of our concept of moral obligation with non-second-personal moral obligation coming in further down the line. Beyond this, I've suggested that no matter how we move forward, philosophers in both mind and ethics would do well to keep in view the broader potential for an appeal to the second person to erode the distinction between the two fields.

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The Problem of Transcendental Justification: Reconciling Subjective Validity and Objective Truth in Discourse Ethical Frameworks

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Abstract

This paper delves into the fundamental *aporia* of truth within Jürgen Habermas' discourse ethics and Karl-Otto Apel's transcendental pragmatics: the tension between intersubjective validation and objective validity. I argue that Habermas' procedural model, whilst aspiring to ground truth in communicative rationality, is undermined by a foundational circularity; the very norms of rational discourse presuppose the validity they seek to establish. To address this, I advocate a meta-discursive analysis of the semantic and normative foundations of discourse, exploring Apel's transcendental pragmatics and the potential for truth as a regulative ideal. Ultimately, this study assesses the implications of this paradox for contemporary theories of justification and truth in practical discourse.

Keywords: Transcendental Justification | Discourse Ethics | Aporia of Truth | Meta-Discursive Analysis | Intersubjective Validity

Introduction: The Aporia of Truth in Habermas and Apel

The perennial philosophical challenge of reconciling subjective justification with objective truth finds a crucial locus in the discourse ethics of Jürgen Habermas and the transcendental pragmatics of Karl-Otto Apel. This paper undertakes a systematic analysis of the concept of truth within these frameworks, elucidating its epistemic, normative, and pragmatic dimensions as they emerge from foundational linguistic, communicative, and

discursive structures. At the heart of this inquiry lies a dialectical tension: the interplay between intersubjective validation and the aspiration for objective legitimacy in truth claims. By examining the performative and justificatory dimensions of discourse, we seek to expose the limitations and contradictions inherent in grounding truth within communicative rationality.

A central *aporia* under scrutiny is the ontological and epistemological status of truth: is it inextricably context-bound, and thereby vulnerable to relativistic dissolution, or does it possess a transcendent character capable of sustaining universal validity claims? Habermas, in his effort to bridge the gap between justification and validity, conceives truth as discursively constituted, anchored in the normative presuppositions underlying rational discourse. His formal-procedural model, premised on the "unforced force of the better argument" within an "ideal speech situation", foregrounds intersubjective agreement as the criterion for truth (Habermas 1990, p. 88-89). However, this model generates a profound paradox: how can the universality of truth be coherently sustained if its conditions of validity are themselves contingent upon social-discursive mediation?

This paper argues that Habermas' framework encounters a fundamental circularity: the procedural norms that govern rational discourse presuppose the very validity they seek to establish. The justificatory structure of discourse ethics is predicated on the implicit assumption that its procedural rules are themselves rationally warranted, yet their legitimacy cannot be independently secured without invoking the discourse they structure. This raises a crucial challenge: can the presuppositions of rational justification be sustained without collapsing into either dogmatic foundationalism or an infinite regress of discursive validation? If rational justification and intersubjective redemption are co-original, then truth remains irreducibly contingent on the very norms it aims to justify, necessitating a meta-discursive dimension that interrogates the semantic and normative conditions of discourse itself.

This meta-discursive turn is indispensable for any rigorous epistemic evaluation of truth claims within practical discourse. Yet, Habermas' post-metaphysical approach, by situating self-reflexivity within the contingent structures of modernity, risks exacerbating the circularity inherent in grounding truth within discourse. If truth and rightness are contingent upon meta-discursive reflection, which itself presupposes their validity, then how can we reconcile the contextual dependency of justification with the aspiration for context-transcendent truth? To what extent can truth be meaningfully construed as the product of rational consensus, and what are the epistemological and methodological consequences of this construal? Moreover, what vulnerabilities emerge from a purely consensual account of truth, particularly given the potential for systemic exclusions and distortions within discursive communities?

This paper critically examines whether Habermas' attempt at reconciliation ultimately results in a theoretical impasse, as some critics contend. The tension between theoretical and practical discourse becomes particularly acute when truth is extended beyond constative assertions to the legitimacy of normative systems. This extension introduces a deeper challenge: the justification of the epistemic and methodological foundations of discourse itself.

The structure of this paper is as follows: Section 1 provides an exposition of Habermas' conceptualisation of truth, validity claims, and intersubjectivity. Section 2 rigorously examines the paradox of reconciling fallibilism with idealised discursive conditions. Section 3 explores potential resolutions, including Apel's transcendental pragmatics and the notion of truth as a regulative ideal. Finally, Section 4 considers the broader philosophical implications of this analysis and proposes directions for further research.

1. The Paradox of Truth and Justification: The Dialectical Tension Between Discourse Theory and Philosophical Self-Reflexivity in Habermas' Conception of Truth

1.1. Navigating the Post-Metaphysical Landscape: From Transcendental Arguments to Quasi-Transcendental Presuppositions

Habermas grapples with the fundamental question of how truth is established through argumentation and discursive validation. He confronts the intricate problem of grounding normative presuppositions, questioning whether the validity of truth-claims can be rationally justified within the confines of discourse itself. In his pursuit, he seeks to circumvent metaphysical foundationalism by eschewing transcendental argument (Brune, Stern and Werner 2017; Kim and Hoeltzel 2016; Habermas 1990, 1998; Stern 1999). This strategic move, however, inevitably invokes the spectre of the "Münchhausen trilemma" (Albert, 1968, p. 13), which underscores the inherent risk of circular reasoning or infinite regress. Habermas' response is to posit that truth claims are anchored in pragmatic and "quasi-transcendental" presuppositions, which, while not susceptible to logical demonstration, are unavoidable in discourse (Habermas 2020, p. 647)[1]. These presuppositions, such as the commitment to reason-giving and the principle of non-contradiction, are not external constraints but rather the very conditions of possibility for rational discourse. By moving away from transcendental arguments, Habermas aims to root his theory within the practical, communicative context of modern forms of life (Putnam 1981), integrating philosophical self-reflexivity

1 "If the Kantian question of what we ought to do loses its transcendental background and depends on the occurrence of binding norms whose normative validity claim we can critically examine from the moral point of view, we must confront the unsettling question of whether such categorically obligatory norms in fact still exist today – and whether they should continue to exist at all. Can norms that require their addressees to act in a certain way under given circumstances unconditionally – that is, without regard to the consequences – still claim 'to exist' in the secular societies of Western modernity in the sense that, when they are regularly problematized as objects of criticism and justification, they can still impose themselves in the light of good reasons alone? To be sure, in the role of social scientists, we can observe that, in the largely secularized spheres of action of modern societies – above all in patterns of socialization and systems of formal education, and certainly in informal interaction routines of almost all areas of life, and in the legal systems and constitutional states – conceptions of justice are still embodied that in many cases possess a deontological core of unconditional obligation."

[*Sinnkritik*] (Habermas, 1971, p. 310; 1987, p. 318- 331, 356-373) into lived experiences [*Lebenszusammenhänge*] (Habermas 1974, p. 50; 1979, p. 102; 1987 119-152; 1990, p. 67; 1996, p. 104-107, 310; 2003, p. 175-283).

1.2. The Dialectical Tension: Discourse Theory vs. Philosophical Discourse

Habermas' complex theory of truth is situated within a broader intellectual framework that reveals a profound tension between two dominant interpretative paradigms: the dialectic between Discourse Theory, which foregrounds its procedural model of rational deliberation and its application to practical reason as structured by the formal conditions of argumentation in the pursuit of truth, and Philosophical Discourse, which accentuates its broader epistemological significance and self-reflexive interrogation of the foundational normative premises underpinning communicative rationality and the very concept of truth itself[2]. Coeval scholarship frequently delineates two principal readings of Habermas's work: one that conceptualises his project as Discourse Theory, which foregrounds its procedural model of rational deliberation and its application to practical reason as structured by the formal conditions of argumentation, and another that interprets it as Philosophical Discourse, which accentuates its broader epistemological significance and self-reflexive interrogation of the foundational normative premises underpinning communicative rationality [*kommunikative Rationalität*] (Habermas 1984 vol.1, pp. 8-42, 101-141, 273-339). This tension directly impacts how we understand Habermas' attempt to reconcile the universal validity of truth with its contextual justification, revealing a central paradox within his project.

2 Habermas scholarship reveals a tension between "Discourse Theory" (procedural focus: Alexy 1989, 1994, 2000, 2013; Baxter 2011; Baynes 1992; Bohman 1996; Forst 2002, 2011, 2018) and "Philosophical Discourse" (foundational focus: McCarthy 1994; Rehg 1994). Habermas' work and scholars like Benhabib (1992) and Fraser (1992) engage both dimensions. This research highlights a shared concern with philosophy's nature (Apel 1980; Fultner 2011; Health 2011a, 2011b; Kettner 2006, p. 315).

1.3. Philosophical Self-Reflexivity and the Challenge of Meta-Normative Grounding

The Philosophical Discourse interpretation situates Habermas's work as a mode of philosophical self-reflexivity, whereby justificatory structures, especially those concerning the validation of truth claims and the criteria for truth itself, are subject to critical interrogation within the broader framework of communicative rationality. However, should these justificatory structures — comprising the norms and rules that govern the establishment of truth — be contingent products of linguistic-cognitive processes and intersubjective agreement within historically specific contexts, a critical epistemological challenge ensues. Specifically, can the meta-normative ground, which underwrites the very possibility of distinguishing between truth and falsehood, be exhaustively justified through discursive means, or does it, conversely, remain reliant upon implicit presuppositions that are impervious to discursive critique? This question directly impugns the prospect of attaining an intersubjectively valid conception of truth solely through discourse. It necessitates the postulation of a context-transcendent dimension—a quasi- transcendental condition, a pragmatic form of transcendentalism devoid of metaphysical commitments—that transcends both the formal-logical apparatus and the socio-historical sedimentation of communicative practices within specific institutional contexts. This inherent tension between the universal aspirations of truth and its contextual particularity constitutes a pivotal point of contention among Habermas' critics and remains a central focus of this inquiry. Moreover, the quasi-transcendental character of this meta-normative ground, which shapes our understanding of truth, introduces significant questions regarding its power relationship. Additionally, the potential neglect of non-rational forms of knowledge and the empirical reality of deeply entrenched value conflicts challenges the pursuit of rational consensus. These issues are amplified by epochal challenges and the contemporary "post-metaphysical" condition which demand a critical engagement with the historical and social situatedness of reason itself (Habermas, 1987b, 1992; Benjamin 2008; Löwith 1977, 1995; Lukács 1977; Rorty 2000; Dews 1999). How do power dynamics influence the formation of these implicit presuppositions, and how can we ensure that discursive practices, and thus our epistemic frameworks, are not subtly

shaped by dominant groups? Can we reconcile the contingency of rational justification with the universality of truth?

1.4. Discourse Theory and the Formal-Pragmatic Conditions of Communicative Action

Conversely, the Discourse Theory interpretation concentrates on the relationship between Habermas's Theory of Morality [*Diskursethik*[3]] and its practical application within deliberative democracy, institutionalised through the formal-pragmatic conditions of communicative action, and grounded in its supporting normative and linguistic structures, namely "formal pragmatics", as a means of validating truth claims (Habermas 1979, p. 1-68; 1990, p. 58). From this vantage point, Habermas's project is perceived as a scientific-reconstructive endeavour, designed to elucidate the formal-procedural rules that govern rational argumentation within deliberative practices, particularly in the pursuit and validation of truth. These discourses involve participants engaging in action-oriented, intersubjective exchanges, where speech acts are associated with various validity claims [*Geltungsansprüche*] rooted in communicative interactions (Habermas 1987, p. 18-19; 2001, p. 86). When the intersubjective recognition of these validity claims, necessary for "mutual understanding" [*Verständigung*], cannot be routinely assured, whereas the reasons supporting these claims are not seen as indisputably valid by the participants themselves, a demand arises for more reflective and rigorous forms of argumentation, which Habermas terms "discourses" (Habermas, 1990, p. 67). Yet, if the conditions for such discourses are themselves structured by socio-historical forces, such as power imbalances within institutions or cultural norms that privilege certain voices, that pre-determine the scope of deliberation, then the purported neutrality of rational argumentation, and thus the possibility of attaining objective truth through it, is brought into question. It is within this context of inherent tension that the problem of justificatory circularity becomes particularly acute, as it directly

3 Habermas delineates discourse theory as *cognitive*, *deontological*, *formal-procedural*, and *universal*, (*ibidem*), signifying that moral claims are subject to rational evaluation (*cognitivistic*), governed by impartial formal rules (*formal-procedural*), rooted in duty-based ethics (*deontological*), and aspire to universal validity (*spatio-temporally unlimited*), *cf*. Habermas, 1984, p. 1–68; Rehg, 1994, p. 125–150. Habermas's discourse ethics seeks to establish rational validity claims through argumentation that is both procedural and substantively grounded in communicative rationality; *v*. Bohman, 1996.

impacts the ability to ground truth claims within discourse, and thus, to achieve a reliable and intersubjectively valid understanding of truth.

1.5. Reflexivity and Normativity: Analysing the Tensions Between Discourse Theory and Philosophical Discourse

At the core of Habermas's discourse theory lies a rigorous commitment to dialogical and dialectical processes, encapsulated in the practice of "giving and asking for reasons" (Brandom, 1994, p. 5, 124; Habermas, 1990, p. 67)[4]. The central aim of discourse is the attainment of intersubjective consensus regarding the truth [*Wahrheit*] and normative rightness [*Richtigkeit*] of utterances. Participants endeavour to establish shared understandings and agreements through the application of argumentative rules within specific contexts of justification, guided by a coherent "logic of inquiry" (Habermas, 1984, vol. 1, p. 285). According to Habermas, the legitimacy of this argumentative practice is contingent upon the practical approximation of "quasi-transcendental" and "pragmatic presuppositions" within real communication communities (Habermas, 1990, pp. 63–65). These presuppositions are operationalised through formal-procedural rules of argumentation, which provide the structural framework for the meaningful articulation of "mutual understanding" within utterances.

Crucially, the principles of Discourse Theory mandate that all participants be regarded as equals, devoid of inherent privilege or marginalisation. Furthermore, the practice of discourse must remain unrestricted, resisting the imposition of predefined practical limitations and pragmatically addressing material constraints through counteractions that ensure effective participation. Given that all arguments necessitate rational justification, no utterance can evade intersubjective evaluation. However, these presuppositions should not be misconstrued as metaphysically binding assumptions underpinning discourse. Rather, these rules constitute a linguistically structured framework that enables

4 Brandom's inferentialist semantics, "giving and asking for reasons" illuminates Habermas' discursive validity claims. Habermas, however, adds pragmatic/synthetic relations to objective states, and favours abductive-inferential reasoning over Brandom's deductive focus.

participants to articulate, validate, and substantiate "potential kinds of reasons" through three interrelated and irrefutable validity claims: propositional/constative truth [*Wahrheit*], normative rightness or correctness [*Richtigkeit*], and truthfulness or sincerity [*Wahrhaftigkeit*] (Habermas, 1984, vol. 1, p. 308).

1.6. Reconstructing the Essence of Discourse Theory: A Distinction Between Theoretical and Practical Discourses

Habermas' Discourse Theory rests upon a foundational distinction between theoretical and practical discourses, a dichotomy crucial to understanding his articulation of distinct epistemic and normative registers. Whilst explicitly rejecting an ontological hierarchy between the validity claims structuring these domains, Habermas maintains that their justificatory logics are irreducible to one another. The primary concern of intersubjective evaluation diverges fundamentally depending on whether the discourse in question is primarily theoretical or practical. Theoretical discourses, centrally concerned with the discursive redemption of propositional truth– acknowledging the nuanced acceptations of this term within philosophical hermeneutics – focus on rigorously establishing the validity of assertoric sentences purporting to describe objective states of affairs. This pursuit of constative truth, in contradistinction to a regulative ideal of truth, is characterised by a commitment to correspondence with a purportedly objective world, intentionally bracketed from immediate practical imperatives. Conversely, the attainment of intersubjective "mutual understanding" [*Verständigung*] and "rationally motivated consensus" within practical discourses is primarily oriented towards the redemption and evolution of reasons supporting contested validity claims of normative rightness and their direct practical implications for action and social ordering. This domain, therefore, explicitly concerns the justification of norms and actions themselves, addressing the inherently normative questions of how we ought to act, rather than merely what is objectively the case. This consensus, within Habermas's framework, is predicated upon the "unforced force of the better argument", a principle that underscores the primacy of communicative rationality amidst the plethora of diverse forms of rationality (Habermas 1990, 21-23, 1996, 107).

Unlike propositional truth, which despite requiring intersubjective validation within theoretical discourse, ultimately strives for a demonstrable correspondence with an independent objective reality, the very validity of norms within Habermas' framework, is intrinsically and constitutively tied to deliberative processes. These processes are meticulously conducted in accordance with formalised procedural rules, understood as regulative ideals guiding rational discourses. This fundamental distinction underscores the profoundly intersubjective constitution of normative validity, thereby differentiating it decisively from the object-oriented *telos* of truth claims and highlighting the analytically central role of different types of reasons and discourses in legitimising norms and thereby structuring the social world. Within practical discourses, even acknowledging the interrelation of the three fundamental validity claims, participants typically prioritise the discursive redemption of reasons directly aimed at contested claims of normative rightness, actively seeking to vindicate or criticise them through arguments. Arguments are not construed as mere assertions; rather, they consist of reasons or grounds systematically articulated within, and demonstrably connected to, the relevant normative framework and the specific validity claims inherent in a given problematic.

This necessary connection to a pre-existing normative framework underscores the embeddedness of practical reason within shared intersubjective understandings and socio-cultural contexts, a critical departure from subject-centered reason. While the focus on normative rightness reflects Habermas' emphasis on the practical application of reason in shaping social norms, it also reveals a crucial, often overlooked point: the meaningful articulation of any utterance in practical discourse is contingent upon its conformity to the relevant normative framework and its guiding principles, which function as regulative ideals constraining legitimate normative claims. Specifically, the production of content must respect the intersection of procedural rules and their pragmatic articulation within a given "real communication community" (Habermas 1990, p. 92–94).

However, the evaluation of validity, and potential corrective measures, raises the unresolved issue of adherence to a

higher-order normativity constituted by the rules governing the normative framework and its systems of articulation. This hierarchical structure of normative evaluation reflects Habermas' attempt to reconcile the universality of moral principles with the particularity of concrete situations. Furthermore, the very nature of discourse, as conceived by Habermas, demands the ongoing evaluation and justification of utterances and reasons through intersubjective processes. This constitutive dependence signifies that the performance of practical discourses, the intersubjective exchange of reasons aimed at affirming or denying the normative rightness of norms, presupposes the validity of both the inherent connection between validity and argumentative discourse and the normative framework within which the discourse unfolds.

This presupposition, however, poses a critical challenge to the pursuit of truth within practical discourse. If the very framework within which truth claims are evaluated is itself dependent on presupposed validity, then the possibility of achieving objective truth through intersubjective consensus is called into question. The process of intersubjective evaluation and redemption of validity claims, along with the underlying reasons, must be understood as constitutive of normative rightness. Yet, this constitutive role also implies that the very criteria for truth within practical discourse are inherently tied to the normative framework, potentially undermining the universality and objectivity of truth claims. To what extent can truth be considered the result of a rationally motivated consensus, and how does this impact the assessment of truth-claims in discourse? What implications does this have for the evaluation and substantiation of truth-claims within the realm of discourse? How can the tension between the context-dependent justification of truth-conditions and the context-transcendental explication of the meaning of truth-claims be reconciled in the pursuit of a normative and intersubjective understanding of truth?

2. The Aporetic Core of Habermas' Meta-Normative Project: A Critique of Justificatory Circularity

2.1. The Foundational Aporia: Grounding and Co-Originality

This section critically dissects the inherent *aporia* within Habermas' meta-normative project, specifically the paradoxical

tension between the exigencies of grounding truth and justification and the imperative to reconcile universal validity with contextual particularity within discourse ethics. Habermas' formal pragmatics encounters a fundamental epistemic limitation: its inability to furnish a demonstrably non-circular justification for the procedural rules of argumentation. This *lacuna* engenders a profound *aporia*: the validity of truth and normative claims, contingent upon intersubjective redemption of validity claims, presupposes, rather than establishes, the cogency of grounding reasons. This challenge, the grounding of rational justification, reveals the "co-originality" [*Kooriginalität*] of justification and intersubjective redemption, wherein neither can be independently substantiated without recourse to the other, thus exposing a foundational dialectical impasse (Habermas 1996, p. 82, 120, 122).

The status of a 'grounding reason' is not an antecedent given, but is constituted through intersubjective recognition, which is, in turn, predicated upon adherence to the very norms defining the validity claim. This co-constitution necessitates a meta-discursive dimension concerned with the very constitution of their meaning, particularly regarding the "meaning of truth" (Habermas 2003, p. 66, 91, 112). This circularity, amplified by Habermas' post-metaphysical project is not a mere logical or theoretical conundrum, but a structural feature that reveals the recursive nature of justificatory practices.

2.2. Epistemic Bootstrapping and the Limits of Immanent Critique

This manifests as a profound epistemological and methodological *aporia*, revealing the limits of immanent critique. The adequacy of Habermas' appeal to unavoidable presuppositions remains a subject of intense scholarly debate, potentially deferring, rather than resolving, the fundamental problem of "ultimate justification" [*Letztbegründung*] (Apel 1980, p. 273). The persistent tension between the transcendental and situated dimensions of truth and rightness further complicates this *aporia* questioning the very possibility of reconciling universal validity with contextual particularity—a tension that resonates with broader philosophical discourse on the limits of rational reconstruction (Walzer 1983; Taylor 1989).

2.3. *Wahrheit* as a Regulative Idea and the Challenge of Ultimate Justification

Expanding beyond a restricted focus on propositional truth, Habermas' expansive conception of truth as a regulative ideal necessitates a rigorous engagement with the transcendental conditions of rational justification. This epistemic shift underscores the "meaning of truth" as a transcendental horizon that enables intersubjective evaluation, thereby grounding propositional truth within the architecture of communicative rationality. This strategic epistemic shift is inextricably linked to the demonstrable legitimacy of normative systems. *Wahrheit* functions not merely as a descriptive property but as a normative criterion for assessing both first-order norms and their foundational frameworks. However, this introduces a deeper challenge: the epistemological and methodological foundations of intersubjective evaluation must themselves be subjected to unrelenting critical scrutiny, raising the question of their own ultimate justification, a problem that resonates with the historical concerns regarding the regress of justifications, thus highlighting the inherent fallibility of any grounding exercise.

2.4. The Triadic Notion of Truth and the Persistence of Circularity

Habermas' triadic notion of truth (pragmatic, epistemic, epistemic-transcendent) represents an attempt to navigate these tensions, moving beyond purely correspondence-based theories (Russell 1912; Tarski 1944.). Truth functions as a regulative idea, approached through discourse and grounded in "rationally motivated consensus", aiming to preclude subjectivism. However, critics argue that this account remains insufficiently distinct from consensus-based relativism, raising questions about the normative force of such consensus (Putnam 1981; Rorty 1991). Further engagement with Peircean pragmatism may offer a path to clarifying how an epistemic-transcendent notion of truth can be maintained without succumbing to epistemological indeterminacy. Moreover, the triadic notion of truth fails to fully resolve the fundamental *aporia* of circularity, as the meta-normative ground, however differentiated across pragmatic, epistemic, and epistemic-transcendent dimensions, still requires justification within the

very discourse it is meant to enable, thus revealing the inherent reflexivity and potential instability of the grounding project.

2.5. Meta-Normative Justification and the Reconciliation of Universality and Particularity

This leads us to the exploration of the meta-normative justification of validity, wherein Habermas seeks to reconcile universality and particularity within discourse ethics. As discussed previously, Habermas seeks to ground normative validity in rationally grounded reasons, systematically offered in support of a norm's claim to validity. These reasons are intrinsically linked to the normative framework itself, articulated through the Discourse Principle (D), the Principle of Universalisation (U), and the Principle of Democracy, thus revealing the intricate interplay between procedural and substantive dimensions of justification.

For Habermas, substantive normative validity is achieved through the rigorous discursive redemption of rationally grounded reasons, systematically offered in robust support of a norm's ostensible claim to validity. These reasons are conceptually and systematically connected to the robust validity of the normative framework itself. Normative validity, therefore, necessitates the rigorous integration of both procedural and substantive dimensions, and cannot be reductively equated with the mere achievement of a *de facto* agreement, even when such an agreement ostensibly emerges from dialogical practices, thus underscoring the normative demands of rational consensus (Habermas 1990, p. 64, 89, 93, 104).

2.6. Procedural vs. Constitutive Intersubjectivity and the Challenge of Universal Recognition

A nuanced distinction emerges between formal-procedural, egalitarian intersubjectivity and constitutive intersubjectivity within the theory of communicative rationality. Procedural intersubjectivity, aligned with discourse ethics, conceptualises universality as a procedural ideal, realised through rational consensus within an undistorted communicative framework. Universality, in this paradigm, is an emergent achievement grounded in the normative conditions of rational argumentation. Conversely, constitutive intersubjectivity posits that rationality, normativity, and meaning are not merely derived from discourse [*Diskurs*], but

are ontologically grounded in intersubjective relations, shaping the very structures of communicative rationality. This, however, introduces a paradoxical tension: universality becomes contingent upon local commitments to theoretical or linguistic systems, which may diverge across "lifeworlds" [*Lebenswelten*] (Habermas, 1987, vol. 2, pp. 119–121).

The justification of norms, therefore, necessitates a rigorous critical appraisal of whether a given norm could secure the uncoerced assent of all rational interlocutors within the counterfactual and regulative conditions of unconstrained discourse. Thus, Habermas posits that a norm is valid if, and only if, within the ideal speech situation or an "unlimited communication community", the rational justifications advanced in support of its normative validity are universally recognised as epistemologically and cognitively superior to opposing reasons. In essence, if all possible counterarguments are comprehensively overcome within a specialised discursive domain, the reasons supporting the affirmation of the norm are provisionally valid, thereby engaging in a dialectical process of negating negations to arrive at "grounded reasons" (Habermas 1990, p. 68)[5].

3. Potential Resolutions and Their Implications. The Meta-Normative Ground and the Limits of Proceduralism

3.1. The Meta-Normative Framework: Conditions of Possibility

The intricate architecture of communicative rationality is constituted and operationalised through the presuppositions of argumentation, formal-procedural rules underpinning communicative rationality, which serve as the conditions of

5 The "ideal speech situation" (ISS) provides a normative framework for rational consensus, functioning as a "transcendental-pragmatic" presupposition (Habermas 2001, p. 86). It is "a peculiarly unreal form of communication" (Habermas 1987, vol 2 p. 18–19) characterised by "perfect symmetry", (Habermas 1984, p. 25), requiring participants to presuppose "symmetry conditions". This ideal aims to restore agreement through unconstrained argumentation, (Habermas 1984, vol. 1 p. 42), grounding communicative rationality. Despite later shifts, the ISS remains key to rational justification. Habermas acknowledges its counterfactual nature, noting "we bracket the general thesis of the natural attitude" (Habermas 2001, p. 86) and that "argumentative speech [...] is improbable" (Habermas 1984, p. 25). This tension is a central critique. Apel challenges the ISS's grounding of normative claims (Apel 1980, 1987). Critiques also address exclusion (Benhabib 1986), idealisation (Fraser 1989), and application (Bohman 1996).

possibility [*Bedingungen der Möglichkeit*] for meaningful discourse. This raises a profound philosophical challenge: to rigorously conceptualise the constitution of intersubjective normative validity and to interrogate whether the legitimisation of norms necessarily presupposes the validation of the formal-procedural rules of argumentation. Specifically, this challenge entails an examination of whether the ideal speech situation, understood as a counterfactual construct, relates to the concrete "lifeworld". Moreover, this inquiry extends beyond formal-procedural dimensions to encompass the deeper theoretical, political, and linguistic structures that underwrite and enable such discourses. The question, then, is not merely whether norms can attain intersubjective validity within a given deliberative framework, but whether the very criteria of rational justification themselves remain contingent upon historically embedded epistemic, institutional, and discursive configurations. This tension between universality and particularity is central to Habermas's project, as he seeks to reconcile the context-dependent nature of justification with the universal aspirations of truth.

3.2. Context-Transcendental Normativity and the Rejection of Exclusionary Paradigms

A critical rearticulation of discourse theory necessitates a nuanced distinction between the normative domain of theoretical and linguistic systems, comprising rules and assumptions, and a meta-normative dimension, which provides the conditions for the possibility of the normative domain. This is epitomised by Habermas' inquiry into truth and the context-dependent normative correctness of rules versus the context-transcendental normativity of argumentation's presuppositions. This line of questioning elucidates how discourse theory addresses foundational concerns surrounding the legitimacy and legality of normative frameworks. This criterion, demanding universalisability and rational consensus, necessitates that the validity of a norm transcends the inherently contingent confines of positive law and other normatively codified systems, whose legitimacy is inextricably tied to historically contingent socio-cultural contexts. Consequently, this transcendental imperative mandates the rejection of exclusionary paradigms, be they Eurocentric, logocentric, or otherwise epistemologically exclusionary, that fail to meet the

stringent criteria of universalisation of reasons. For instance, paradigms that privilege certain voices or perspectives based on cultural or historical biases violate the principle of universalisation. The primacy of an inclusive and universally accessible discursive domain emerges as a *sine qua non* for the legitimate establishment of norms through intersubjective and rationally motivated deliberation, approximating the ideal speech situation. This move away from exclusionary paradigms is a rejection of the God's eye view and the pursuit of objective, timeless truth, and towards a situated, intersubjective validation of norms (Habermas 1998, p. 322).

3.3. The Quasi-Transcendental Meta-Normative Ground

While substantive normative validity emerges through shared deliberative practices, these practices depend on a deeper, meta-normative framework that undergirds their possibility, intelligibility, and normative purchase. This meta-normative framework constitutes the preconditions for any valid normative claim. Within Habermas's discourse theory, the concept of a meta-normative ground addresses the fundamental epistemological and normative problematic of establishing intersubjective validity without recourse to metaphysical or foundationalist presuppositions. The quasi-transcendental nature of Habermas's meta-normative ground presents a complex challenge to his discourse ethics. This meta-normative level does not function as an external, transcendental *archē* imposing pre-determined criteria of truth or validity *ab extra* upon propositional content. Neither, in a Kantian transcendental sense, as a set of *a priori* categories that are temporally and logically prior to experience, structuring cognition independently of discourse. Rather, it assumes a constitutive role, operating immanently within discursive practices to indirectly govern evaluations and delineate the very conditions of possibility for valid argumentation and meaningful intersubjective discourse. Operating as a constitutive transcendental condition, it enables intersubjective understanding by establishing the discursive framework for legitimate reasons and critical assessment, thereby mitigating the risks of dogmatism and relativism. The meta-normative ground functions as the implicit "grammar" of communicative action, providing the essential background framework for meaningful communication. This

framework operates through the "unavoidable presuppositions of argumentation" such as the commitment to reason-giving and the principle of non-contradiction, which are integral to shared meaning and rational paradigms[6].

3.4. Unavoidable Presuppositions and Transcendental-Pragmatics

While providing the conditions of possibility for argumentation, this framework remains open to critical revision through deliberative practices. Habermas acknowledges the role of normative presuppositions, understood as validity claims, which underpin our conception of rationality. These claims are grounded in quasi-transcendental and pragmatic unavoidable presuppositions of argumentation integral to shared meaning

6 The concept of "immanent transcendence" while explicitly articulated in later critical theory, can be seen as already latent in the very structure of the presuppositions of argumentation understood as Kantian regulative ideas. These presuppositions, such as truthfulness, sincerity, intelligibility, and normative rightness, are not simply empirical conventions nor metaphysical postulates. Rather, they function as necessary conditions of the possibility and intelligibility of rational discourse. Their role is structurally dual: they are immanent to the practice of communication (enacted whenever participants engage in argumentation) while simultaneously transcending any given instance of communication by orienting it toward an ideal of undistorted understanding. In this way, they embody what may be called an 'immanent-transcendent' structure: their factual indispensability does not derive from external validation but from their performative necessity, while their normative validity lies in the counterfactual ideal they presuppose. This dual status, however, presents a deep philosophical challenge. As the Hegelian critique of Kantian formalism shows, it is not sufficient to point to the necessity of formal conditions; their normative authority must be shown to emerge from their relation to concrete historical and social practices. Hence, while the presuppositions of discourse are ontologically defined by this immanent-transcendent structure, the unresolved issue in Habermas's theory is how to justify this structure without presupposing what is to be justified. In other words, the concept of "immanent transcendence" is not itself problematic. It arises necessarily from the nature of rational discourse, but its grounding remains theoretically fragile. The rules are not arbitrarily posited but are identified by virtue of their inescapability within rational interaction. Yet, their normative force cannot be secured solely through this fact of immanence, nor can it be grounded in a purely transcendental normativity without reintroducing foundationalist assumptions. This is where Habermas's reconstructive approach faces the risk of either circular justification or a latent formalism. The critical task, therefore, is to formulate a non-foundational yet rational account of the presuppositions of discourse, one that preserves their critical function and transformative potential without succumbing to dogmatism or abstraction (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* [1998], A642/B670ff.; Hegel, T*he Encyclopaedia Logic* [1991], §§135–140; McCarthy, 1994). I am grateful to Reviewer I for drawing attention to the centrality of the concept of 'immanent transcendence' in Frankfurt School Critical Theory and for suggesting its significance for the framework of discourse ethics.

and rational paradigms in post-conventional societies. The quasi-transcendental nature of this framework is closely aligned with Apel's concept of "transcendental-pragmatics", which posits that certain presuppositions are inescapable in any communicative act (Apel 1980). These presuppositions are not contingent empirical features, but rather conditions of possibility for meaningful discourse itself. Thus, they may be considered transcendental, though not in the Kantian sense of being grounded in a transcendental subject, but rather in the very structure of communicative action. The formal-procedural rules underpinning these practices are not externally imposed; rather, they are embedded within the very fabric of argumentative practices themselves. As previously argued, these rules are immanent within and constitutive of the performative act of "giving and asking for reasons", which constitutes the core of discourse. Therefore, the presuppositions of argumentation, according to Habermas, are experienced as irrefutable not because they are logically incontestable in an abstract or metaphysical sense, but because they are practically unavoidable within the performative context of actual discourses. Insofar as they cannot be logically deduced from something else, nor can Kantian transcendental arguments be invoked, Habermas contends that logical demonstrations for the validity of these quasi-transcendental presuppositions are unattainable. At most, we can demonstrate the irrefutability of these rules through an *argumentum ad hominem*, akin to Aristotle's refutation of the negation of the principle of non-contradiction. Therefore, the validity of concrete practical discourses must be reflexively redeemed by the participants themselves through their active engagement in argumentation. This intrinsic dynamic of reasoned exchange is conducted by dint of formal-procedural rules of argumentation underpinning these practices, rules that are already immanent within the argumentative practices themselves. Aligning with Apel's endeavours, Habermas affirms that the discursive examination of validity claims is ineluctable, to the extent that no functional alternative is rationally possible without either idealising allegedly universal principles or imposing cultural-historical constraints on participants in real discourses.

3.5. Addressing the "Münchhausen Trilemma" and Performative Self-Contradictions

Whilst Habermas incorporates elements of Apel's transcendental pragmatics, a crucial divergence emerges in Habermas's emphasis on the immanent and reflexive character of the meta-normative ground. Habermas posits that no meta-discourse can furnish a definitive or transcendent justification for the norms governing practical discourses (Honneth and Joas, 1990, p. 231)[7]. The central inquiry pertains to the rational justification of these normative presuppositions, a challenge stemming from the contentious prospect of establishing a meta- discourse or "transcendental language game" capable of harmonising diverse local contexts of meaning. Such an endeavour risks a regression into metaphysical foundationalism, a predicament analogous to the "Münchhausen trilemma" (Habermas 1994, p. 16; Lyotard 1984, p. 65–66; Rorty 1984, 1991, p. 175).

Apel contends that philosophical self-reflexivity, akin to Aristotle's *elenchos*, can indirectly demonstrate that the presuppositions of argumentation underpin the meaning employed in various contexts of signification, domains of knowledge, and social interactions. These normative presuppositions, deeply embedded in linguistic practices and social interactions, function as formal-procedural rules governing the linguistic exchange of reasons, thereby facilitating the determination of argument validity and truth. Furthermore, the relationship between these rules and the articulation of meaning and truth reveals the constitutively intersubjective nature of meaning and rationality. These rules are contingent upon the reciprocal and co-responsible adherence to formal-procedural norms and their nuanced application in diverse contexts. However, a pragmatic dimension exists wherein deviations from these rules are possible. For instance, individuals may make statements of intent without fulfilling them, thereby potentially deceiving interlocutors. Similarly, strategic speech acts may employ semantically meaningful utterances whilst contradicting their underlying validity claims. Apel argues that such actions, affirming a propositional content that contradicts

7 "There are no meta-discourses in the sense that a higher discourse is able to prescribe rules for a subordinate discourse. Argumentation games do not form a hierarchy".

the performative presuppositions of argumentation, including the four validity claims, disrupt the shared sense of meaning within a community. This disruption severs the connection between the sense of meaning and its pragmatic application, resulting in a form of rationality riddled with concealed aporias, antinomies, and anomies.

Consequently, any attempt to deny or repudiate these presuppositions leads to a performative self-contradiction. To propose alternative principles or norms of discourse, one must engage in argumentation, which inherently presupposes the validity of the formal-procedural rules under critique. This performative necessity highlights the practical and reflexive nature of these presuppositions: they cannot be coherently rejected without implicitly affirming their operative force through the act of discourse itself. Attempts to replace or transcend these presuppositions risk introducing an external, historically contingent framework that undermines the universality of discourse. Habermas argues that these presuppositions, which structure the tenets of modern rationality, cannot be meaningfully denied philosophical counterparts. Thus, they can be rationally justified as a form of discursive "practical necessitation". This point epitomises the crux of the Habermas-Apel dispute. In essence, Habermas's approach avoids the pitfalls of transcendental idealism and relativistic contextualism by grounding the justification of discourse norms within the practices they regulate. The presuppositions of argumentation are not external constraints; they are intrinsic to the performative act of communication. They embody the practical necessity of reason-giving and constitute the conditions for rational agreement and mutual understanding. Crucially, they resist hypostatisation through the iterative process of discursive critique, ensuring that the universality of communicative rationality is realised through the dynamic and reflexive engagement of discourse participants (Habermas 2020, 645ff)[8].

8 "The discursive mode of the examination of criticisable validity claims that we raise for propositions is only 'ineluctable' or 'unavoidable' in the weaker sense that there is no functional equivalent for this practice of giving and asking for reasons in any of the sociocultural forms of life that we know of [...] However, this question calls for a teleological answer; it cannot be asked, let alone answered, within the framework of a deontological approach to moral theory. This problem challenged Apel to introduce a super-norm that paradoxically puts us, in addition to the

3.6. Apel's Critique: The Hypostatisation of Post-Conventional Rationality as a Transcendental Fallacy

Karl-Otto Apel's critique of Jürgen Habermas's discourse ethics transcends a mere interlocutory challenge, constituting a profound epistemological and, indeed, transcendental critique of the very architecture of Habermasian intersubjective rationality. In 'Attempts to Think with and Against Habermas', Apel discerns a fundamental *aporia* at the heart of discourse ethics: the aspiration to establish the normative necessity of argumentative discourse while tacitly relying upon a pre-existing framework that, *ex hypothesi*, necessitates its own justification. Unlike critiques that merely address the pragmatic limitations of the "ideal speech situation" Apel's analysis exposes a deeper structural malformation, Habermas's framework unwittingly posits as transcendentally necessary what is, in fact, a historically contingent construct.

Apel's originality resides in his incisive exposure of the hypostatisation of rationality within discourse ethics. He argues that Habermas, in his pursuit of universal intersubjective validity, reifies post-conventional rationality, a historically emergent epistemic modality specific to modernity, as if it were a transcendental condition of discourse. This hypostatisation engenders a conflation of the is with the ought: discursive norms, rather than being grounded in independent transcendental criteria, are surreptitiously derived from and validated by the very socio-historical practices they purport to ground. In so doing, Habermas's model risks embedding a form of epistemic solipsism within its normative architecture, thereby vitiating its claim to universal applicability.

Furthermore, Apel exposes the inherent circularity in Habermas's reliance on post-metaphysical thinking. By positioning discourse ethics as a transcendence of traditional metaphysics, Habermas implicitly presupposes the legitimacy of a rational paradigm that

sum total of moral norms, under the further obligation 'to be moral' in the first place. I cannot address this part of Apel's theory here. But it is worth speculating in conclusion about why Apel stubbornly clung to the transcendental meaning of an 'ultimate' justification of discourse ethics. I suspect that the answer lies in the problematic tension between an 'absolute' or unconditional meaning of ought-sentences and the motivation of socialized subjects who exist in space and time to follow them".

itself remains historically and culturally situated. Apel's critique thus reveals a fundamental incoherence: the very endeavour to eschew substantive metaphysical commitments results in the uncritical adoption of a historically contingent epistemic framework as if it were a transcendental condition, a classic example of a transcendental fallacy.

This challenge is not peripheral but central to the epistemological and transcendental integrity of discourse ethics. If Habermas's theory ultimately derives its normative force from historically situated rationality rather than independent justificatory grounds, then its claim to universality becomes untenable, indeed, self-defeating. Apel's critique, therefore, not only impugns the internal consistency of Habermasian discourse ethics but also necessitates a radical re-evaluation of the conditions under which rational justification itself can claim to be universally binding, thus highlighting the limitations of a purely immanent critique (Apel 1979, p. 22, 1988, p. 374–379, 468, 1992, p. 54).

3.7. Implications for Truth and the Paradox of Justification: Apel's Enduring Transcendental Critique

The Habermas-Apel debate illuminates the unresolved transcendental challenge of reconciling the transcendental conditions of validity with the immanent practices of discourse. While Habermas advances a proceduralist account of truth, Apel's critique underscores a deeper paradox of justification: how can discourse ethics establish the necessity of its normative presuppositions without presupposing what it seeks to justify, thereby falling prey to an infinite regress or a dogmatic postulation?

Unlike other critics, Apel directly engages with the foundational dilemma inherent in Habermas's project, revealing its susceptibility to a transcendental critique. He highlights the risk of collapsing truth into procedural validation, where normativity becomes indistinguishable from historically conditioned agreement, a form of epistemic relativism disguised as universality. This critique exposes the inherent limitations of Habermas's triadic model of truth, which seeks to balance universal validity with contextual justification but ultimately remains vulnerable to the charge of hypostatization, treating historically emergent rationality as if

it were an *a priori* transcendental condition of discourse. The implications of this critique are profound indeed, they constitute a radical challenge to the Habermasian project. If truth is merely the product of rational consensus within discourse, then its claim to objectivity becomes precarious, indeed, illusory. Apel's argument suggests that a purely intersubjective model of truth, even one grounded in procedural rationality, risks a form of epistemic relativism unless it can account for an independent transcendental justificatory standard. The 'ideal speech situation,' conceived as a counterfactual normative horizon, remains vulnerable to the structural distortions of power and ideology, distortions that Apel's analysis reveals to be not merely contingent but systemic. Apel's critique thus extends beyond epistemology into the realm of social ontology, demonstrating that discourse ethics, in its current form, lacks the necessary safeguards against the exclusionary forces that shape real-world communicative practices, thereby revealing its inherent limitations as a model of practical reason.

Moreover, the "Münchhausen trilemma", which exposes the limits of justificatory reasoning, poses a direct challenge to both Habermas and Apel. While their response, grounded in the performative necessity of truth within argumentation, seeks to evade traditional foundationalist pitfalls, it raises new questions about the ontological status of truth and, more importantly, its transcendental grounding. Apel's emphasis on the hypostatisation of discourse conditions suggests that the problem of justification cannot be resolved without confronting the latent metaphysical and, indeed, transcendental commitments embedded within procedural rationality.

The debate also intersects with poststructuralist critiques, particularly Jacques Derrida's deconstructive analysis of performative contradictions. While Habermas and Apel argue that truth is an unavoidable presupposition of discourse, poststructuralist thinkers contend that such performative commitments merely reveal the internal logic of a system rather than its ontological and, indeed, transcendental necessity. If Apel is correct in his diagnosis of Habermas's hypostatisation, then discourse ethics risks becoming a self-referential construct, where justification remains bound within the limits of its own

procedural assumptions, thus revealing its inherent limitations as a philosophical system capable of grounding universal norms.

Ultimately, Apel's critique necessitates a radical reconsideration of the epistemological and transcendental underpinnings of discourse ethics. It compels Habermasian theory to confront its reliance on historically contingent rational paradigms and challenges its ability to sustain claims to universality without resorting to implicit transcendental foundationalism. By exposing the latent transcendental presuppositions within discourse ethics, Apel compels a more rigorous interrogation of how truth and normativity can be justified without reifying the very rational structures they seek to transcend, thus revealing the inherent tension between immanent critique and the aspiration for transcendental grounding, a tension that remains one of the most pressing and unresolved challenges in contemporary philosophical discourse on truth, justification, and the foundations of practical reason (Apel, 1997).

Conclusion

This study has meticulously dissected the epistemological and normative architecture of Habermas's discourse ethics, foregrounding the enduring tension between intersubjective justification and the pursuit of objective truth. Whilst Habermas's procedural paradigm, anchored in the ideal speech situation and communicative rationality, seeks to reconcile consensus with universal validity, it remains ensnared in unresolved paradoxes. The critiques proffered by Putnam, Rorty, and, critically, Apel, underscore a fundamental epistemological impasse: the challenge of grounding truth normatively without succumbing to either an ahistorical rational foundationalism or a relativistic reduction to contingent discursive agreements.

A central epistemological *lacuna* resides in the inherent circularity of Habermas's justificatory framework. The normative presuppositions governing rational discourse, ironically, presuppose the very legitimacy they seek to establish, thereby casting doubt on their independence from historically and culturally situated consensus. Moreover, the de-transcendentalisation of subjectivity in favour of intersubjective validation risks conflating

objectivity with a procedural construct, wherein truth is equated with the contingent outcome of rational deliberation, rather than an independent epistemic criterion. This proceduralism, whilst instrumental in fostering democratic legitimacy, leaves unresolved the question of how truth can retain its normative efficacy beyond specific discursive contexts.

This epistemological and normative dilemma bears profound implications for discourse ethics as a paradigm of practical reason. If truth is entirely mediated through communicative justification, it becomes susceptible to the insidious distortions of social power, ideological hegemony, and the exclusionary dynamics inherent in real-world discursive formations. Consequently, the practical application of discourse ethics necessitates a rigorous critical engagement with these limitations, particularly in the domains of moral, political, and legal reasoning, where normative claims must navigate the precarious terrain between contextual embeddedness and the aspiration for universal validity.

Future research must transcend these foundational tensions by exploring alternative conceptualisations of normativity that eschew exclusive reliance on proceduralism. Peircean pragmatism, with its concept of truth as a regulative ideal, provides a promising avenue for reconciling fallibilism with the pursuit of epistemic progress, thus avoiding the pitfalls of both rigid foundationalism and radical contextualism. Furthermore, integrating insights from critical theory, feminist epistemology, and poststructuralist philosophy is imperative for elucidating the nuanced interplay of power, ideology, and linguistic contingency in shaping discursive justification. By incorporating these critical perspectives and maintaining a focus on the importance of a meta-discursive turn, future scholarship can refine the discourse-theoretical model of truth, ensuring that communicative rationality remains epistemically robust and normatively defensible in addressing the multifarious philosophical and socio-political challenges of our era.

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Collapsing the Wall: Helen Wodehouse in the Context of Contemporary Anti-Representationalism

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Abstract

In this essay, I will show how the ideas developed by Helen Wodehouse in her 1910 work *The Presentation of Reality* can shed light on contemporary idealist anti-representationalism as proposed by McDowell. My aim is part historical, part systematic: I want to present the ideas of a largely unnoticed philosopher of British Idealism, and I want to present them in such a way that illuminates their potential to contribute to contemporary debates. I will begin with a reconstruction of McDowell's arguments against representationalism. McDowell shows how representationalism relies on a two-step model of perception according to which a raw sense-datum is given in experience first, and then processed by the conceptual capacities second, so that it can be expressed in a judgment. Drawing on the works of McDowell and Matthias Wille, I show that this model presupposes an incoherent metaphysical dichotomy of subject and object. I will then go on to linking Wodehouse's ideas to the kind of direct realism about sense-perception McDowell proposes. My claim is that McDowell's direct realism explains only how perception must be conceptualized so that it can be understood as establishing a direct contact with reality. However, an account of how reality is to be conceptualized so that it can be apprehended directly in perception is needed. I show that Wodehouse provides an account that is compatible with McDowell's position. Wodehouse proposes to think of the objects of perception not in substance-ontological terms, but rather as complexes of laws which govern the thought of perceiving subjects. Through this approach Wodehouse's position explains how reality can be such as to be directly apprehended in experience.

Keywords: Direct Realism | British Idealism | Epistemology | Inferentialism

Introduction

Alice is preparing to leave the house for grocery shopping and asks her partner Berenice whether she should bring milk. Berenice replies that there is no need to. Alice asks if Berenice is sure about it. Berenice answers that she just opened the fridge and got a look at the almost-full bottle of milk. Alice crosses 'milk' off her grocery list and leaves.

In this exchange, Berenice makes a knowledge-claim in the form of a judgment and gives a reason to support it. In doing so, she relies on two presuppositions. The first is that the milk's being in the fridge is a fact that obtains prior to Berenice's epistemic access to it. The second presupposition is that seeing the milk is a reason to accept her claim because what she saw was, in fact, the milk, so that she was in immediate contact with the object of her knowledge. I call these the *presupposition of objectivity* and the *presupposition of immediacy*. Taken together, these presuppositions entail that knowledge requires a certain constitutive relation between the object of knowledge and the judgment about it. To accommodate both presuppositions, the object has to be constitutively prior to the reason-giving judgment and the reason of that judgment. In what follows, I will approach the question about the relation between the subjective aspect of judgment and the objective aspect of knowledge as the question of how to accommodate these two presuppositions.

Now, Berenice does something else in the exchange. She has a visual impression of an arrangement of empirical objects, which she places in a discursive context by articulating a judgment and giving a reason for it. Or, to borrow an expression from Wilfrid Sellars (Sellars 1997, §36): she places her experience in the logical space of reasons. In order to make a knowledge claim about an object, call it into question, defend it, etc. the object needs to be capable of being placed in the space of reasons. I call this the *discursivity requirement*.

Here, a tension between the two presuppositions seems to arise, for the presupposition of objectivity seems to require that an object in the logical space of laws must be fundamentally different from an object in the logical space of reasons, while the presupposition of immediacy seems to require that an object in the logical space of laws can be placed in the logical space of reasons.

The idealist tradition is probably the philosophical approach with the most radical solution to this tension. Building on Kant's attempt to go beyond the opposition of Empiricism and Rationalism, post-Kantian idealism has pushed for the sublation of the opposites of mind and world, subjective and objective, as an attempt to show that empirical objects can be taken into the space of reasons.

For almost all of the 20th century, the modern analytic tradition paid little attention to idealist arguments. This changed with John McDowell's seminal work *Mind and World*, which can be read as a reformulation of idealist positions to bring them into dialogue with the analytic discourse. Although it was published in the mid-90s, it remains influential until today.[1]

I will compare McDowell's position with a theorist who discussed similar ideas earlier. In 1910, Helen Wodehouse published *The Presentation of Reality*. In this monograph, she argued for a direct realism of perception and anticipates several points that are crucial to McDowell's position. My aim is to show that the two approaches can support each other. While McDowell focuses on perception and says little to nothing about the nature of reality perceived, Wodehouse does exactly this. Her approach that I label the 'objects-as-laws conception' can be interpreted as a conceptualization of the objects of perception in precisely such a way that it becomes intelligible how reality could satisfy the discursivity requirement without giving up on the two presuppositions. On the other hand, her proposal that the objects of perception should be conceived as laws that govern the thought of perceiving subjects remains unclear. I think that, here, contemporary analytic idealism will help.

1 See for instance (Settegast forthcoming).

1. Why Representationalism?

In *Mind and World* (1994), McDowell starts off with the fundamental insight of Kantian epistemology that in empirical judgment a certain perceptual content receives a certain conceptual form. This enables a first step towards the transition from the space of laws to the space of reasons. Insofar as the conceptual scheme is conceptual, it originates from spontaneity, as opposed to receptivity, which simply takes in what is given. Since concepts belong to the logical space of reason and thus to the realm of spontaneity, their application is radically free. This raises the question of how to make sure that the conceptually grasped content is the correct one, i.e. the one the perceived piece of reality actually has:

> "The more we play up the connection between reason and freedom, the more we risk losing our grip on how exercises of concepts can constitute warranted judgments about the world. What we wanted to conceive as exercises of concepts threaten to degenerate into moves in a self-contained game. And that deprives us of the very idea that they are exercises of concepts. Suiting empirical beliefs to the reasons for them is not a self-contained game." (McDowell 1994, p. 5)

If we subsume the conceptual under the capacities of spontaneity we risk losing thought's hold on to reality. Making empirical claims or judgments would be like spinning in the void without any independent friction to confirm whether concepts are applied correctly or not. There would be no room for the objectivity presupposition.

An appealing solution is to introduce something that lies outside the sphere of the conceptual and enters it through the exercise of receptivity. Here, a raw sense-datum is the obvious candidate: an impression of how things are that is prior to a conceptually articulated judgment; something which is just there, and to which I can point if asked why I believe something to be the case. Under this assumption true empirical judgments are representations of reality, which is the substrate for the raw sense-datum.

> "The putatively reassuring idea is that empirical justifications have an ultimate foundation in impingements on the conceptual realm from outside. [...] The idea is that when we have exhausted all the available moves within the space of concepts, all the available moves from one conceptually organized item to another, there is still one more step we can take: namely, pointing to something that is simply received in experience. It can only be pointing, because *ex hypothesi* this last move in a justification comes after we have exhausted the possibilities of tracing grounds from one conceptually organized, and so articulable, item to another." (McDowell 1994, p. 6)

This view saves us from the worry that judgments as exercises of spontaneity are floating around without an anchor in an independent reality. It does so by conceptualizing empirical knowledge as the result of a two-step process. First, the reality outside of the conceptual sphere interacts with the receptive capacities and brings about a raw sense-datum. Second, this piece of raw sense-datum is processed by the conceptual capacities which inhabit the realm of spontaneity. As a result, the datum receives a conceptual form and is transformed into a judgment. This judgment is supposed to be a representation of the piece of reality which the judgment is about. Hence, this epistemology is commonly labeled representationalism.

The underlying metaphysics is that of an opposition of the mind (the locus of spontaneity) and the world (the substrate for the sense-data which appear to receptivity). The conceptual form of judgment is the result of a process solely within the range of the mind, while the world is "an ineffable lump, devoid of structure and meaning" (McDowell 1995, p. 160). However, while this view accommodates the presupposition of objectivity, it does so at the expense of the discursivity requirement and the presupposition of immediacy. In fact, the object of judgment is *ex hypothesi* outside the grasp of the conceptual, so the transition to the space of reasons cannot occur.[2] The sense-datum, on the other hand, meets the objectivity

2 McDowell rephrases this point in a slightly different way when he says that, under this view, there can only be excuses for judgments but not reasons. (McDowell 1994, p. 8)

requirement, but it is less than the object; so, the presupposition of immediacy is no longer satisfied. Therefore, we need a conception of reality which is constitutively prior to apprehension and can immediately be articulated in judgment. A suitable way to think of reality in such a way is the Tractarian concept of the world (Wittgenstein 1921, Prop. 1 & 1.1). Because facts are something which can be the object of thought and grasped in judgment, they have a rational structure that lends itself to judgment (McDowell 1995, p. 160). So, they satisfy the two presuppositions and the discursivity requirement.

Not only is this an argument as to why we should not adopt the mind-world dichotomy which enables and motivates representationalist epistemology; it also points towards McDowell's proposal on how to ensure that empirical judgments are about a piece of reality. Before discussing this, however, I address another problem arising from representationalism and from the adoption of a dichotomy between mind and world.

Matthias Wille provides a thorough assessment of the above dichotomy (Wille 2012, Chapter 2). He builds on McDowell's work and agrees with him that a metaphysics of "here the conceptual system, there the world" (McDowell 1994, p. 35) is incoherent. Wille argues that representationalism cannot accommodate the presupposition of objectivity. His position rests on the insight that the mind-world distinction can only be made from a standpoint which is independent of both, reality as it appears to the subject, and reality as it is independently of any subjective experience. The distinction between reality as perceived and reality as it is that underlies the representationalist conception of empirical judgments, can only be made from a perspective that appreciates and distinguishes both as well as explains their relationship. However, it is far from obvious how such a standpoint can be established and whether it can be intelligibly described. It might seem to give an easy explanation of some representations like photographs. When I take someone's picture, an external observer can compare the picture to the person because they are looking at both from an independent standpoint. Nevertheless, in a representationalist epistemology and its underlying metaphysics, this mundane example becomes a metaphor of a second-order

question about genuine knowledge. Representationalism asks whether the epistemic position that appears to be such that it enables a subject to perceive reality the way it is, actually is such a position. The ordinary first-order application of this question to the photograph example is innocuous. In fact, you may legitimately wonder whether the photograph I took is genuinely a photograph of someone in particular or, if it is, whether it's been taken well enough. One can always take a step back and reflect on one's epistemic situation. In a way, epistemology does the same thing. In fact, it studies the knowing subjects themselves and asks questions like: 'How do you know that what you perceive from the standpoint you occupy is how things really are?'. However, whereas the first question is a question about the basis of specific knowledge claims, the latter is a second order question about knowledge in general. The second-order application of the question to the possibility of genuine knowledge is not on a par with the first-order application.

Moreover, we can only make the second question from our own standpoint as the objects which epistemology studies and as the subjects doing the very studying. Hence, there is no further (third-order) stepping back, no further external standpoint that subsumes us as knowing subjects and as epistemology theorists. Nevertheless, this further step is exactly what the representationalist metaphysics in question presupposes. In fact, it assumes that there is a categorical difference between the perspective of the epistemic subject on one hand and the epistemological perspective from which the epistemic subject and their perspective is described on the other hand.

> "This observational standpoint is intended to allow a dispassionate and–due to its detachment–completely value-neutral analysis of the epistemic possibilities of the subject of knowledge, because the view from sideways-on is also intended to allow an unclouded view of the world as it actually is, independent of the limitations of our cognitive possibilities." (Wille 2012, p. 110, my translation)

In order to establish a difference between reality independent of how it appears to us and reality as it appears to us, we need an epistemic access to reality that is not an appearance. We would

need non-representational knowledge of the represented, of the representation, and of the relation between both. As Brandom argues, this leads to an infinite regress of representations:

> "The epistemological enterprise is not intelligible unless we can make sense of the relation between representations of representational relations (what they are for representers) and those representational relations themselves, and then representations of those relations, and so on. Until we have grasped all of that infinite chain of representings of representings of representings…, we are not in a position to understand the representational relation, and hence not the "instrument or medium" of representation." (Brandom 2019, p. 48)

If knowledge is conceived as the representation of a piece of reality constituted by an isomorphism of the piece's form and the judgment's conceptual form, there would have to be non-representational knowledge about this entire model. It must be non-representational, otherwise the problem of the distinction between reality as perceived and reality as it is, arises again. However, as the discussion of Matthias Wille's position shows, non-representational knowledge of this epistemological model is an incoherent notion, even by the model's own premises. So, while representationalist epistemology purports to accommodate the presupposition of objectivity, a closer examination reveals that it cannot consistently affirm the existence of something objective and the existence of its relation to the subject; and therefore, fails to accommodate said presupposition.

2. How not to stop short anywhere of the Facts: McDowell and Wodehouse

Representationalist epistemology presupposes a metaphysical dichotomy of subject and object which is impossible to render intelligible. Therefore, it cannot accommodate for either of the two presuppositions, that of objectivity and that of immediacy; nor can it fulfill the discursivity requirement. In the following sections, I discuss McDowell's and Wodehouse's direct realist epistemology as an alternative to representationalism.

2.1. McDowell

To overcome the knowledge-transcendent metaphysics of representationalism and explain how knowledge claims can be subject to normative assessment, McDowell proposes to think of the conceptual capacities as passively operative in perception (McDowell 1994, p. 10). That is to say, while they belong to the domain of spontaneity, their application over time becomes second nature meaning that they do not require active application anymore. Thus, the facts grasped in perception can be understood as encounters with a reality that is independent of the subject but nonetheless conceptually shaped, so that knowledge claims are open to reflection and critique. The concepts that are passively operative in perception provide the subject with a perspective from which it becomes possible to connect with the objects as something that can be known via a method of knowledge-acquisition. A subject who cannot make the inferential move from 'this is red' to 'this is colored' has a very limited knowledge, if any, of redness, color, and colored objects. So, this view requires that the subject understands what it means to claim that something is the case (Brandom 2001, 89; Brandom 2002, p. 96; McDowell 1994, p. 12). To understand the concept of color is to know that it is a property of surfaces, that it can be apprehended in visual perception and so forth. This also means that to understand the concept of color is to understand how to make knowledge claims about colors, how to defend them, how to call them into question and so forth. This is only possible if we understand the perceptual capacities as pervaded by concepts from the very beginning. Knowledge, consequently, is not the result of a two-step process of acquiring a raw sense-datum and then processing it with conceptual capacities. The conceptual capacities are operative in perception from the very beginning. Therefore, the mind is not separate from the world. Reality is, in principle, capable of being known. A position which states the opposite would have to subscribe to the metaphysical dichotomy of mind and world which I already exposed as incoherent at the end of section 1.[3]

3 Simon Wimmer has brought it to my attention that this amounts to a straightforward rejection of objections based on the knowability paradox according to which, if all truths are capable of being known, all truths are known. Since discussions about this paradox are first and foremost couched in terms of formal logics, while 'transcendental' strikes me as the best label for the argument I am giving here, addressing the ramifications of my argument for the paradox or vice versa is beyond the scope of this paper.

McDowell's commitment to this view is manifest throughout his writings:

> "[T]here is no ontological gap between the sort of thing one can mean, or generally the sort of thing one can think, and the sort of thing that can be the case. [...] Of course, thought can be distanced from the world by being false, but there is no distance from the world implicit in the very idea of thought." (McDowell 1994, p. 27)

> "[S]ince there is no rationally satisfactory route from experiences, conceived as, in general, less than encounters with objects–glimpses of objective reality–to the epistemic position we are manifestly in, experiences must be intrinsically encounters with objects." (McDowell 1998b, p. 344)

As I said, McDowell holds that the conceptual capacities are passively operative in perception throughout the entire process of acquiring knowledge. How is this claim to be understood? I take his point to be that all perception of something is perception of something as something. This enables a subject to reflect on whether or not they are in a position to "take the experience at face value" (McDowell 1994, p. 26). When I judge that the leaves on the tree are red, I already relate to the leaves and their color in a specific way which, among other things, includes a general notion of reality, that leaves can be red, that I found out by looking out the window etc.

A slightly different example will illuminate a different aspect of this idea which will be important later. Take the case of seeing a series of letters, say 'CLOSED' on a sign on a shop's door and judging that this series conveys a meaning. In purely empirical terms, the meaning is nowhere to be found in the arrangement of lines. But, given that you are a competent reader, your conceptual capacities, passively operative in your looking, are presenting the arrangement to you as meaningful. This is not to say that the meaning is just in your head as opposed to out in the world, because this very opposition is shown to be meaningless (see section 1). Rather, your way of relating to the arrangement of lines, the point of view from

which it appears as letters is a part of reality. (McDowell 2013, p. 43; McDowell 1998a, p. 116)[4].

We have seen what is necessary so that we can say that in perception a perceiving subject is in immediate contact with the piece of reality perceived. McDowell claims that "There is no ontological gap between the sort of thing one can mean, or generally the sort of thing one can think, and the sort of thing that can be the case." (McDowell 1994, p. 27) Yet his attempt to collapse the wall between mind and world only proceeds from the side of the mind, showing how the sort of things that can be thought can also be the sort of things that can be the case. Notably absent is a conception of reality which explains how it can be immediately apprehended in perception.

This raises doubts on whether he fully succeeds in giving an account of knowledge which accommodates for the presupposition of immediacy. A likely explanation for this absence is that he does not want to presuppose a knowledge-transcendent position which might force him to re-introduce the incoherent distinction between reality in itself and reality as it appears. This is indeed a valid concern, and if an account of reality which could explain how it is possible for reality to be directly apprehended were only possible by relying on such dichotomy, we would have to do without it. However, there is a way for direct realist epistemology to account for reality without relying on the knowledge-transcendent meta-epistemological perspective. We can collapse the wall from the side of the world too, and show that the sort of thing that can be the case can also be the sort of thing that can be thought.

2.2. Wodehouse

This is where Helen Wodehouse enters the scene. Just like McDowell she rejects the idea that reality is outside of the direct grasp of thought and only enters it mediated by the perceptual apparatus. Similar to him, she thinks that there is no ontological gap between thought and reality and criticizes representationalism for failing to fulfill the presupposition of immediacy:

4 McDowell's discussion there revolves around the objectivity of aesthetics but: "This is a general question about the status of properties that are not conceivable independently of sentient responses to them." (McDowell 1998a, p. 116) See also (McDowell 1998c, p. 123).

> "What I oppose is the constantly-recurring tendency to believe that only in sensuous experience are we in contact with the real world. The sense datum, it is continually supposed, is all that is 'given' to us, and round it we have to make a 'construction' of our own. Then, by mere force of assertion apparently, we are held to 'identify' this construction with the real world which, except through the hole of sense, we cannot reach." (Wodehouse 1910, 68; See also Wodehouse 1910, p. 18)

Wodehouse develops her direct realism by starting with an intentional and relational definition of knowledge. To know something means to stand in a specific relation to a specific object. This object must be part of reality, because the notion of knowing only makes sense if what is known is real. Furthermore, the relationship is that of presentation, which ensures the object's independence from the subject and, consequently, its reality.

> "What I find is the only thing that is capable of being found, namely the real world. My finding of it and my coming upon it, and against it, is the event of the presentation of reality, and this is all that the phrase need mean. What meets us is the real, and this meeting, this having it before us in our conscious life, this finding it under our eyes, is presentation, or cognition, or knowledge." (Wodehouse 1910, p. 4)

Wodehouse later points out that reality is not exhausted by what appears to the senses: in knowing, one does not only apprehend the known objects but also the relations that constitute the apprehended fact or its connection to other facts (Wodehouse 1910, p. 46). In light of McDowell's claim that reality needs to have a rational structure to figure in rationally structured judgments, it is clear why direct realism about perception should allow for perception to have a non-empirical aspect, because otherwise it would succumb to a variant of naïve realism. If reality is the entirety of facts, perception of reality must include non-empirical aspects, too, insofar as facts are not just aggregations of objects, but rationally structured complexes of objects. Wodehouse affirms this view of perception and simultaneously rejects the two-step

model of judgment: "Sense must if possible supplement thought, and thought must help sense, and all kinds of thought must assist one another. If this to be done, each of the fields in question must be capable of having reality presented within it" (Wodehouse 1910, p. 55).

If empirical facts have, in virtue of being facts, non-empirical elements, how can all their elements, empirical and non-empirical, come together to form one object that figures in a judgment? The two-step model has a simple and obvious answer to this question, but once the notion of pre-conceptual content is off the table, it is no longer an option. Wodehouse suggests thinking of any object of knowledge as a complex of laws that govern the thought and action of the subject to whom the object is presented:

> "A real thing, whatever else it may be, is the method, or necessity, or law, in a group of events. The laws of its nature govern the behaviour of other objects in relation to it and our own experience in respect of it. The number five is a knot of such laws; the constitution of a country is another more complex and far-reaching group; a beech-tree is a third; a man is a fourth." (Wodehouse 1910, p. 70)[5]

Wodehouse contrasts this view with the conception of an object as a substance. She points out that, under the objects-as-substances view, the presentation of an object to a subject requires a spatiotemporal relation between the two. Thus, even if the object is spatiotemporally present to the subject, it is also in some sense remote. Subject and object are always separate. This leads to the conclusion that grasp of the respective object is never of the object itself but rather of something that is brought about by it and is less

5 One might object to the transition from "laws that govern experience" in the cited passage to "laws that govern thought and action". It is important to note, though, that Wodehouse's entire work is permeated by the idea that those are two sides of the same coin. See e.g.: "My existence takes shape in action; in part of this I express myself against the world, in the other part the activity is receptive and the world expresses itself against me. In this forth-going and incoming, this expression and apprehension, my life consists." (Wodehouse 1910, p. 57) and: "Without conation we should not *know* anything; without cognition we should not seek–*anything*." (Wodehouse 1908b, p. 62) Experience and action are equiprimordial and inconceivable without each other. So, the transition is not an interpretative stretch but rather perfectly consistent with a theoretical commitment that appears throughout her writings.

than the object – an 'image in the head' or a 'mental representation'. (Wodehouse 1910, 70f.) She thereby anticipates McDowell's critique that the metaphysics underlying the mind-world dichotomy and the related representationalist epistemology cannot make room for the presupposition of immediacy. (McDowell 1998b, p. 344)

The objects-as-laws conception serves as an alternative to the objects-as-substances conception. According to the objects-as-substances view the objects of knowledge are ontologically distinct and separate from the knowing subject. This point is even more prominent in a passage of her monograph on moral philosophy, *The Logic of Will:*

> "We get the right idea when we think of the 'nature of the numerical system.' It is not a 'substance' to be imitated or worked upon. It can be partly expressed by multiplication tables and examples and formulae; long lists of rules that hold wherever number appears in certain forms, others that would hold if number appeared in certain other forms, and so on. It would be partly expressed also in another aspect by rules that are too complicated to formulate; the rule, for instance, that for a particular kind of boy in a particular kind of hurry 5 and 6 will add up to 13." (Wodehouse 1908b, p. 86-87)

Note how, in the last sentence, it becomes apparent, that the very concept of an object has built into it its specific way of relating to a subject, and how this relation is in part dependent on the subject. Thus, objects are discursive from the very beginning, and there is no need for a transition from the space of laws into the space of reason, because subject and object are defined in relation to another.

If objects of knowledge are complexes of laws, what kind of laws are they? I think, the best way to make sense of this idea is that they must be rational laws. In this way, we can acknowledge that the objects of empirical knowledge are not limited to causal laws that explain the interaction between the objects and the perceptual apparatus. In fact, we should not understand the laws that define empirical objects solely as causal laws. If we did, we

would find ourselves appealing to an extra-conceptual given once again, thereby committing a genetic fallacy, that is, to conflate an explanation of how a subject comes to make a knowledge-claim with a justification for this claim. On the other hand, if the laws in question are understood as rational laws, empirical facts can have an internal rational structure that makes them into facts rather than aggregations of objects. But what does it mean to say that, when I look outside the window and perceive that the tree is blossoming, there is a complex of rational laws governing my thought? And what does it mean to say that a first-grader who adds five and six and concludes that the sum is thirteen is governed by rational laws? My suggestion is to understand the laws in question as the ways in which a conceptually grasped object appears in the discursive practice of epistemic subjects. When I claim that the tree outside my window has red leaves, I am not only committing myself to the correctness of the claim, I am also committing myself to a number of other claims, such as that it is not a bush that has trees, that the tree has leaves in the first place, that it is one of a number of different species of trees, and so forth. (Brandom 2001, p. 89).

Similarly, the first-grader is in epistemic contact with (mathematical) objects and makes a knowledge-claim about them. Admittedly, they are wrong in making this specific claim, but nonetheless, they are making a move in the game of giving and asking for reasons. Thus, they are acting with some conception of rightness and wrongness operative in the background.

Not only does the objects-as-laws conception allow for empirical objects to exert a rational influence required for them to figure in judgments. Additionally, this conception illuminates McDowell's suggestion that concepts are passively operative in perception. We can understand concepts as Wodehousian complexes of laws that exert a rational-normative influence on sufficiently competent rational subjects. Now, this means that in my apprehending that the tree is blossoming, the complex of laws that makes up the nature of the tree governs my thought. This is to say that the tree is the totality of the rules according to which it can figure in action and thought of rational creatures. On this conception, subject and object form a complex of relations to one another such that reality

is presented to the subject as thought governed by the nature of the object of experience. Thus, the distinction between the tree as it really is and the tree as it is presented to me becomes meaningless.

By shifting from substances to laws, Wodehouse approaches and collapses the wall between the mind and the world from the world's side. Her conception therefore fills the theoretical gap that McDowell leaves open and gives an account of what reality is according to which it can figure as the object of knowledge. She also collapses the wall from the mind's side when she dismisses the objects-as-substances view as "a mere remnant of the belief that the mind lives inside the body, joined with the undeniable truth that an external object's influence can penetrate the body only by stimulating the sensory nerves." (Wodehouse 1910, p. 71). Of course, relations of this kind play a role in perceptual experience, and Wodehouse does not deny this. It is just not a role that suffices to bring subjects in contact with reality. Ultimately, both ways of collapsing the wall come down to the same. If "there is no distance from the world implicit in the very idea of thought" (McDowell 1994, p. 27), it seems to be a matter of taste whether one says that experiences are "glimpses of objective reality" (McDowell 1998b) or that "our mind is capable of putting itself forth to embrace the whole universe" (Wodehouse 1910, p. 72). The result is in any case a sophisticated as opposed to naïve direct realism.

Some objects require a causal relation to the subject in order to present themselves to a subject. For some other objects, in contrast, it is part of their very nature that their presentation is not contingent on causal relations. However, the actualization of non-empirical laws are still presentations of objects in the sense that there is always something that governs the thought and action of rational subjects.

Conclusion

I have presented a critique of representationalist epistemology which shows that it presupposes an incoherent metaphysical dichotomy of subject and object. This metaphysical dichotomy does not allow us to conceive of knowledge as contact with a piece of reality, a fact. In fact, it cannot make room for the idea that reality is apprehended immediately and can be subject to a

discursive practice. McDowell's conceptualist epistemology takes an important step towards overcoming the dichotomy of subject and object by saying that concepts are passively operative in perception, so that perception is capable of apprehending facts.

However, this does not give us the full story. What is needed in addition is a conception of reality which explains how it can be the sort of thing that is capable of presenting itself in perception in such a way that a subject's experience of it can transition from the space of laws to the space of reasons. In order to provide this conception, I have discussed Helen Wodehouse's objects-as-laws conception which conceives of objects as complexes of rational laws that govern the experiences of epistemic subjects.

I want to conclude by pointing out the ramifications of this view. At first glance, it might appear like abandoning the notion of an objective reality altogether (understood as independent from the act of apprehension). If a perception of an object is understood as just a concept governing the perceiving subject's thought, are we not falling back into subjective idealism?

However, it is vital to resist the urge to say 'just' here, which suggests some kind of deficit, a second-best solution we would have to accept because the best is not available. Considering the arguments against representationalism and the mind-world-dichotomy in section 1, there is no best solution compared to which the objects-as-laws conception would be second.

The notion of objective reality is connected to the idea that reality is not within the grasp of spontaneity and is therefore constitutively independent of the act of apprehension. The objects-as-substances view (see Section 2.2) is an upshot of this idea. However, there is a way to preserve the idea that reality is constitutively independent of the acts of apprehension without subscribing to this view. This way becomes apparent if we consider epistemic access to non-empirical objects.

If we reject the objects-as-substances view in favor of a conception of objects as laws, we are no longer bound to think of the relation of the subject to the object of judgment as a causal or quasi-causal

affection. The objects-as-substances view underlies debates on (anti-)realism in e.g. ethics and mathematics.[6] These debates concern whether there can be non-physical, non-tangible, abstract objects which cannot exert a causal influence on epistemic subjects but are nonetheless real and affect subjects in a way which is not causal but works in much the same way. McDowell rejects the former view which he labels "rampant Platonism" (McDowell 1981) on very much the same grounds as his rejection of representationalism.

This rampant Platonism is a manifestation of the substance-ontological conception of objects which underlies debates around the alleged queerness[7] of the objects of mathematical or moral judgment. The objects-as-laws conception allows to phrase the question in entirely different terms, so that discussions of queerness do not even arise. In a way, it decouples epistemology from ontology and allows to speak of truth and of knowledge without a need to introduce objects that transcend the possibility of epistemic access.[8] Where there is judgment, there are rules; and where there are rules, there is the possibility of truth.

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6 (Putnam 2004, Chapter 3) presents these debates and exposes the objects-as-substances view as the underlying ontological assumption.

7 Mackie's argument from queerness relies precisely on the assumption that moral properties would have to be like everything else in the world, that is, capable of influencing the perceptual apparatus while at the same time be substantially different, namely action-guiding. It is the first part of the assumption that reveals Mackie's commitment to what I call the substance-ontological conception of objects. (Mackie 1981, Chapter 1).

8 For a book-long discussion of this idea see Schwarz 2024.

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Honorary Essay

Maria Baghramian is Emeritus Professor of American Philosophy at the School of Philosophy in University College Dublin (UCD) and founder of the UCD Post Graduate Programme in Cognitive Science. She has been principal investigator of important EU-funded international research projects and has held visiting posts in Europe, Asia, North America and Africa. Her most recent project is ETICA, funded by Horizon Europe's European Research Area Chair program, and dedicated to the 5-year research theme "Hope and Trust in a Time of Multi-Crises", which will be developed mostly at the Center for Ethics in Public Affairs of the American University of Armenia (AUA). Baghramian's contributions have provided novel ways of approaching classical themes of philosophy like objectivity and relativism, whilst at the same time introducing new directions of research, spanning disciplines as diverse as philosophy of language, philosophical logic and social epistemology. In particular, Maria Baghramian's highly theoretical work has not remained closed-off from the social dimension of science, nor to the political characteristics of our time. Her wider-ranging interests are manifest not only in the latest development of her philosophy in the direction of social epistemology but also in a more persistent awareness of the features of academic life. Founded by Professor Maria Baghramian in 2008, *Perspectives* owes much to this sensibility. Pablo Vera Vega's Paper picks up from a Workshop on Professor Maria Baghramian's philosophy featuring Professor Baghramian as keynote speaker, entitled "Reading Putnam" and held in the University of La Laguna, Spain, on November 12-14, 2024 (Project PID2022-142120NB-I00 funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation). By featuring Vera Vega's paper as honorary essay, *Perspectives* wishes to serve as platform for an interesting research paper in a novel discipline of philosophy and by so doing celebrate Professor Maria Baghramian's philosophical contributions and her untiring work in sustaining *Perspectives* throughout the years, from its inception to its current stage, without which its current achievements would not have been possible.

Distrust, Suspicion and Criticism

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Abstract

In this paper, I propose a profile of distrust that highlights its integral and gradualist aspects. The integral aspects refer to the fact that we distrust a subject in their entirety, not selectively for specific actions. The gradual aspect indicates that distrust encompasses different varieties. Peculiarly, and contrary to the thesis of the incompatibility of trust and distrust, I argue that these are dispositions that can coexist, leading to dispositions such as suspicion. I then propose a profile of suspicion, comparing it with *epoché*, and differentiate the two in terms of the proximity or distance imposed on their subject matter. I thus proceed to analyse the relationship between suspicion and criticism. I shall illustrate my analysis through a case study, namely the Bárcenas case, and explore its treatment in the newspaper *El Mundo*.

Keywords: distrust | trust | suspicion | criticism

Introduction

It is commonly asserted that trust is the glue that holds society together (Castelfranchi & Falcone 2010, p. 265-280). However, this popular notion can lead to an excessively positive assessment of the phenomenon of trust, a sort of "joy of trusting", the flip side of which is the oblivion of its opposite: the phenomenon of distrust. This can be clearly seen in the fact that there are normative proposals that, instead of weighing the role of distrust, attempt to advocate how one might "trust well" or in an "intelligent manner" (O'Neill 2013, and 2002, p. 58).

In this article, I explicitly defend the role of distrust, as I consider it essential to our society based on the assumption that a society entirely based on trust would be totally uninhabitable. Against those who believe that distrust only "breeds disharmony and alienation, and extreme distrust —paranoia— is a pathology" (Flore & Solomon

1998, p. 213), I advocate that distrust is a crucial ingredient for the good development of humanity. In fact, there are approaches that defend the role of distrust, sometimes as a means of subsistence and resistance for certain minorities (Krishnamurthy 2015, p. 392) and sometimes as a healthy skepticism that allows us to begin to trust well (Baghramian & Panizza 2022). My proposal aligns with this second perspective and seeks to root the phenomenon of suspicion, so fundamental for achieving critical attitudes, in that of distrust.

I structure this article in three parts. In the first, I outline the phenomenon of distrust by comparing it with the phenomenon of trust and the phenomenon of mere non-trust. In this first part I focus especially on the more gradual aspect of these phenomena. In the second part I describe both the phenomenon of suspicion and the way in which it can be deduced from distrust. According to my interpretation, suspicion is a nuanced form of distrust. In the third part, I apply this notion of suspicion to the case of journalistic information, finally linking it to the notions of concern for truth and criticism.

1. A profile of distrust

Several analyses of trust are often characterized by what, following McLeod, we can call the interpersonal paradigm (McLeod 2020), which we can describe as the claim that trust consists in trusting other people. In general, the notion of trust appears almost entirely flattened on the interpersonal paradigm which, however, is only a variety of trust. The hegemony of the interpersonal model imposes a series of characteristics that are not necessarily universal in the phenomenon of trust. I am referring to the emotional character of trust, some aspects of vulnerability, or the possibility of demanding accountability. However, it is possible to observe trusts beyond the interpersonal framework: we can think of trust in whole groups or communities, trust in institutions and between institutions; or trust in science, in oneself, in robots, and in governments.

Some philosophical accounts of distrust suffer from the same vice. *Prima facie*, to distrust means to distrust a person. In general, it seems that distrust is conceived through the interpersonal paradigm, but it is not unimaginable to distrust non-personal

entities (Ullmann-Margalit 2004, p. 78). The interpersonal model affects distrust differently. In the case of trust, perhaps the interpersonal model might find a justification in our assumption that trust demands a response; that is, it imposes a certain second-person perspective. Unlike trust, distrust operates as a confinement of the subject in herself, it is a turning away, a flight from the object she distrusts. Therefore, distrust can be exhausted in the perspective of the one who distrusts. In other words: the object or subject matter we address restricts and determines us more when we trust than when we distrust.

Let us now tackle the notions of flight and confinement to examine the hostility that is usually assumed inherent to distrust. Not-trusting is a neutral disposition: it means merely not harbouring the disposition to trust. Distrust, however, means much more than this (Hawley 2014, p. 1): not-trusting does not offend, while distrusting does (Domenicucci & Holton 2017, p. 150). Both dispositions deny trust, but only one affirms in its negation something more than a mere absence. To distrust implies a very negative evaluation, or prejudice. It implies either a judgment of bad faith or a judgment of incompetence. For example, we can imagine a case where a speaker asserts she distrusts her neighbour, but bases this general opinion solely on her judgment of the neighbour's qualities as a confectioner and then projects to the whole of the neighbors persona. We can also imagine a similar case where our speaker asserts the same statement but only because she is talking elliptically and assumes her interlocutor understands that what she really means is that her neighbour is an incompetent confectioner. In the first case, our speaker's judgment is unrestricted: she is generalising from a specific quality to the whole of the neighbor's qualities. This judgment assumes not only that the neighbour is generally incompetent (i.e., with respect to all her characteristics), but also that she is distrustful as an individual. Now, judgments of distrust may be formed with or without a reason; but in both cases they are totalising, i.e., distrust qualifies its object in an unrestricted manner. Instead, in the second example, we only have a judgment of incompetence.

The main difference between incompetence and distrust is that the former is based on a restricted assumption relatively to a

specific quality. The judgment of incompetence assumes that the object of the judgment cannot be trusted with respect to a specific reason, not that it is distrustful as a whole. In fact, in our example the speaker makes no assumptions about the neighbour as an individual but only about her ability as a confectioner. Examples such as these rest on an equivocation of the term "distrust" and would force us to use two different languages depending on whether we understand the concept in the generalised (distrustful) or restricted (distrustless) sense. I believe that the first kind of judgment is formulated in bad faith, irrespective of whether it is justified or not. By "bad faith" I mean that, in formulating a judgment of distrust, the agent assumes the existence of a latent or express will to harm residing in the object of her judgment. In my analysis I shall concentrate on judgments of distrust as instances of bad faith in the above sense (leaving to the side judgments of incompetence). It seems reasonable to think, for example, that one can say that she distrusts her neighbour even though in reality, she only distrusts her qualities as a confectioner. However, once again, I believe that this use of "distrust", which is strictly linked to the notion of incompetence, forces us to assume the equivocality of the term "distrust" and, consequently, to use two languages at the same time. I prefer, by terminological imposition, to privilege the aspect of bad faith, understanding that this implies a latent or express will to harm.

The immediate consequence of this is the assumption that all distrust has an ethical focus directed at a (lack of) moral quality, namely the lack of moral quality we assume exists in the object of our distrust. Therefore, distrust has a moral or ethical causation. Nevertheless, distrust can arise with respect to entities of very different types. We could observe a distrust expressed with respect to an interpersonal morality, with respect to an animal morality, with respect to an institutional morality, etc. Moreover, the trigger of the hostility that gives shape to distrust, namely the context of distrust, could also be of different kinds. Distrust could, for example, arise with respect to an aesthetic question, or with respect to an epistemological consideration. Therefore, we can begin to classify different types of distrust depending on the object of distrust and on the context or cause of distrust, that is respectively the thing at which it is directed and the trigger that

generates distrust. Nevertheless, once that hostility takes the form of a certain type of distrust in a certain context, the judgment (or prejudice) which expresses the distrust in question, the judgment that explains the distrust, is always ethical. More specifically, by addressing the (lack of) moral quality of the entity we distrust, we integrate it. By this integralistic aspect I mean that even if a judgment of distrust is initially formed in a restricted manner (eg., "I distrust you with respect to this, but not with respect to that") it begins to invade other aspects of the object of distrust that, originally, might not have been on its horizon. Therefore, the negativity which characterises distrust is such that it affirms more than what it originally denies.

This characteristic, which can be referred to as its toxicity, consists in the integration of the different facets of the object that is distrusted. This offers us an aspect, perhaps the most relevant one, which differentiates mere non-trust from distrust. In withdrawing our trust in something or someone, we are not merely placing distrust on something or simply denying it our trust. We are noting something specific about the object of distrust which we express through a judgment about the totality of its characteristics. We are determining that object in a certain way and concretising it. Distrust is a panoramic attitude and it is based on judgments of totality. This is what makes the expression "I distrust you with respect to this, but not with respect to that" implausible: if distrust is not already all-encompassing, it will tend to be so. This integration is highly compatible, I would even say deducible from, the priority that Faulkner (2015, p. 426) gives to distrust (and trust) in terms of a relationship in which there is no need for the three-place predicate. That is to say, on Faulkner's view, observing only the distrusting subject is enough to account for the phenomenon of distrust.

We can observe this totalising integralistic pressure also in other negative phenomena. Particularly in those in which, for their constitution, emotions play a relevant role. However, not all distrust is equally toxic. Because distrust is rooted in hostility and because there are different types and degrees of hostility, we can imagine a spectrum of distrusts. A greater hostility will produce

a greater, faster, more radical and irreversible integration of the object that is distrusted.

The above brings us closer to a certain pluralism of distrust, pluralism which, I believe, generates a very concrete and realistic image of the dispositional ecosystem in which distrust is, in fact, located. Distrust does not acquire its gradualism only with respect to the hostility to which it is due. Just like trust and reliance, where there is a certain tendency to rely on the object of trust, similarly with distrust there is a certain effort not to rely on the object (D'Cruz 2019, p. 936), what I pointed out before when speaking of flight. In distrust there is already an enriched non-reliance, what I've earlier described as a self-enclosure. This feature represents another foci or source of pluralism. The above suggests that, in addition to different types of distrust (as a function of the objects and contexts or causes of distrust), distrust itself is a matter of degree due to its central characteristics coming in degrees, namely the hostility and the flight or non-reliance of the subject of judgments of distrust with respect to the object of her judgment. In fact, turning to the latter feature, not only can we think about the way in which these dispositions are constituted with respect to non-reliance, but we can also observe the efficacy of these flights or escapes away from the object of distrust.

There are other factors that make for the gradualism of distrust. Just as there are different varieties of trust depending on the level of reasonableness or trustworthiness of the object of trust, we can observe different degrees of reasonableness of distrust by attending to the dis-trustworthiness of the object in which the distrust is placed. One judgment of distrust might be more or less reasonable than another. This generates varieties of distrust ordered not only in terms of their reasonableness, but also in terms of the property or properties that generate distrust; which have been previously called "triggers". For example, while honesty seems a universal cause of trustworthiness, dishonesty seems a very reasonable cause of dis-trustworthiness. Nonetheless, dishonesty can manifest itself in different ways and one can therefore distrust someone or something by attributing the property of dishonesty without certainty; that is, one can distrust the object of her judgment not because it is dishonest but because it seems so. We

can therefore see that the causes of distrust can generate a variety of distrusts. Some distrusts perhaps might not be very reasonable. Because of its weakness, this feature of distrust (i.e., its varying levels of reasonableness or dis-trustworthiness) is particularly close to the notion of suspicion.

Even so, I believe that the most relevant and interesting pluralist aspect has little to do with the above conceptual framework. It is usually argued that distrust not only negates trust but also excludes it; in other words, that they are antithetical and incompatible dispositions (Ullman-Margalit 2004, p. 60). It is reasonable to hold this view since the purest profiles of trust and distrust, full trust and full distrust, cannot be held at the same time: if one fully trusts someone, how could they distrust them? I speak of purity and fullness to express dispositions that are neither forced or blind but are given freely and without nuances.

Still, not all varieties of trust or distrust are so full and pure. The thesis of incompatibility truthfully describes the impossibility of combining two totalising dispositions: total trust and total distrust. This description of distrust, devoid of any other attributes, refers to its aforementioned toxicity. However, this thesis ceases to work in application to less rigid varieties. A form of total trust on the other hand is that which, for example, we can place in our parents or in our partner. Since this disposition expresses something close to (or identical with) "feeling loved", it reasonably excludes any assumption of bad faith, an assumption that would generate distrust. Nevertheless, not all trust proceeds in this way. Several instances of trust are cases of what we could call "aspectual trust". The notion of aspectual trust expresses the degree of confidence to bring about a certain state of affairs placed in the object of our judgment of trust.

Aspectual trust is for many the paradigm of trust (Hardin 2002; Hawley 2014; Jones 1996); but, quite paradoxically, as I believe, the incompatibility thesis does not apply to it. To evaluate the reasonableness or correctness of aspectual trust, one usually evaluates the ethical or moral quality of the object in which one trusts or will trust. This evaluation can easily produce a process of integration, which would count as a positive version of the

toxicity of distrust. Below a certain threshold, nevertheless, this integration does not necessarily take place. Consequently, the two dispositions, aspectual trust and (toxic) distrust, would have horizons of different scale: trust is directed only at one aspect, while distrust is directed to the totality.

It may seem that, distrust with respect to the totality is incompatible with aspectual trust. This is because distrust usually motivates actions aimed at not relying on (and even not relating to) the person one distrusts. At most, it might be said, the fulfilment of an expectation might be due to a happy surprise, but not to the (aspectual) trustworthiness of the object of distrust. It seems that distrust pushes us away while trust brings us closer. They are opposite movements, and it can be said that, therefore, they should not occur at the same time.

Nevertheless, the fact that we think that they should not occur at the same time does not imply that, in fact, they do not so occur. We can approach their compatibility by considering that distrust can occur with a low or moderate intensity. In other words, even considering the toxicity and unrestricted generality of judgments of distrust, those we distrust need not be our greatest enemies. It seems reasonable to hold that such forms of distrust, even if they imply the consistent attribution of a certain bad faith, can be compatible with some deposits of trust. Moreover, I believe that, even if the possibility of compatibility is more obvious with moderate modes of distrust, compatibility does not necessarily require recourse to such low-intensity forms of distrust.

If we consider that one can love and hate someone at the same time, or that one can want something that repulses her, we begin to understand how one can trust and distrust the same thing. These dispositions seem to contradict one another. Nevertheless, in our descriptions of these phenomena, we must leave that contradiction aside to satisfy the requirements of understanding. Moreover, perhaps it is not a real contradiction after all. In fact, trust and distrust turn on different aspects of the same thing: trust addresses the capacity to facilitate something good, while distrust addresses the capacity to cause something bad. Although both dispositions have an ethical undertone, their point of departure

(and arrival) is different. In fact, even the most perverse is capable of doing something good. This may be another way of saying, with McGeer, that "trusting and distrusting inhabit incommensurable worlds" (McGeer 2002, p. 22). What we are here calling the incommensurability of trust and distrust refers to the fact that they are directed at different aspects of the same thing. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, this incommensurability explains why some forms of trust and distrust can coexist, that is be expressed with respect to the same thing or person.

2. The place of suspicion

As I anticipated, one of the most remarkable varieties of distrust is that of suspicion. Following our previous characterization, suspicion arises when the subject is either not completely certain or wrong about the reasonableness of the dis-trustworthiness of the object of her distrust. Naturally, the inclusion of this disposition in the domain of distrust may generate misgivings. Even more so if one considers suspicion as a variety of distrust that could require a certain degree of trust in order to arise. I preliminarily justify this inclusion by appealing to the aforementioned possibility of observing distrust according to its different degrees. Some may argue that the appropriate space for suspicion is that of mere non-trust or that it occurs within the framework of a certain agnosticism (Ullman-Margalit 2004, p. 61; Sinaceur 2010, p. 543). However, I believe that both options are based on an unrealistic image of the dispositional ecosystem of both trust and distrust.

It is common to think that trust and distrust can be adequately represented in terms of a horizontal scheme. This figure would have trust and its varieties on one extreme (ordered in terms of their proximity or remoteness with respect to mere non-trust) and distrust and its varieties on the other extreme (ordered in terms of the previous parameters). The space in the center represents the state at which non-trust reaches neutrality. This neutral space is that of agnosticism (Ullman-Margalit 2004, p. 61), which may be defined as a space in which neither p nor ¬ p is believed; analogously, with respect to trust, it is a space characterised by the absence of both non trust and distrust. But, as I emphasised in the previous section, there may be dispositions that mix distrust and trust. This originates varieties that, due to their nuances, can

be interpreted as distrustful trusts or trustful distrusts, but not as instances of agnosticism. This forces us to assign agnosticism a different space and, consequently, to discard the horizontal model.

Against this image, I propose the following allegory inspired by a school painting exercise. We are facing the green colour continuum. Blue and yellow predominate, blue at one end and yellow at the other. These are orderly mixed and pure green emerges in the centre. Now, on top of this spectrum, we lay another colour: white. As a result, several pastel shades of blue and green emerge: some shades are pure yellow, others pure blue, others are mixtures. This gradation represents the continuum of trust, distrust and non-trust dispositions. It is, of course, indifferent which colour we assign to which disposition, provided that we assign them to the pure colours, not the mixtures. Whichever assignment we choose, this exercise will show us (1) that the path towards non-trust is a progressive dispositional deficit interpretable, I believe, as a loss of intensity and (2) that there are dispositions which combine trust and distrust. Cases such as these would be, I believe, forms of critical or monitored trust.

With this schema in mind, I argue that suspicion is not agnosticism, that it cannot be deduced from non-trust and that it is a variety of distrust, more specifically, that it arises from the mixture of trust and distrust. Surely our linguistic uses allow us to speak of suspicion as weak distrust; however, it does not seem that weakening distrust generates, *eo ipso*, suspicion. We can interpret suspicion either as a type of belief or as something prior to belief, as a suggestion or intuition and, if we are inclined to this second option, we must take into account that the tendency of suspicion is, indeed, the forging of a belief. Suspicion is a disposition by which one maintains that what appears to us, what is manifest, is not what it really is (Fein & Hilton 1993, p. 169). This contradiction between being and appearing constitutes the negative aspect of suspicion. Moreover, suspicion is often, though not always, accompanied by a certain uncertainty: it is not the express negation of the manifest but only the beginning of that negation.

It is this very marked denial of the manifest, that differentiates suspicion from mere epoché, namely the suspension of judgment. I mention judgment and not existence because I discard the phenomenological *epoché* from this description. Regarding the suspension of judgment, we can distinguish two dimensions or spaces: one occurs daily, when someone, perhaps out of prudence, refrains from affirming or denying something; and the *epoché* of skepticism, which is a refraining from judging out of a bad consideration with respect to our capacity to judge. This bad judgment is motivated on different reasons. We can distinguish two important types of reasons: theoretical and practical. Typically, the main theoretical reason for such bad judgment is the assumption that truth is unattainable. The practical reasons are more diverse. However, a very powerful one, which even appears in the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, is that of the permanent unhappiness produced by the search for Truth (Sextus Empiricus 1994, p. 5-6).

Whatever the motivation for *epoché* is, it can be represented with different amplitudes. We can think of a total or a partial *epoché*. Total *epoché* expresses Descartes position in his *Meditationes De Prima Philosophia* (1641), according to which the very totality of reality must be questioned. Partial *epoché* instead takes place when judgment is suspended with respect to only a few questions, or even a single one. Total *epoché* seems somewhat implausible: discarding all possible truths seems too close to hovering in the abyss. It is not only very impractical but seems rationally impossible to sustain. What I have in mind here with respect to suspension of judgment is then a local *epoché*, with a more or less extensive horizon. Although this horizon may be very extensive, it cannot coincide with the totality of judgable objects. This *epoché* operates a distancing: it neither denies nor affirms the content of a judgment, as it simply departs from it. This makes *epoché* a disposition that often results in self-absorption: the negation of judgment, which comes with suspension or *epoché*, is an affirmation of the subject of the suspension; it is a withdrawal of subjectivity. It is a withdrawal of the subject from the object of her judgement. Naturally, analyzing it as withdrawal can be problematic, though I believe it best captures the ethical core of skepticism. From a more epistemological perspective, such as that of contemporary zeteticism, *epoché* is not a movement of withdrawal from inquiry

but a norm established within it, giving rise to an especially noteworthy pluralism of suspensions or *epochaí* (Wagner 2024, p. 23), although its compatibility with other rules such as those of doubt is also very debatable (Machuca 2021, p. 27; Guilielmo 2024, p. 315). These clarifications may be pertinent. However, I consider it essential to distinguish at least two types of agnosticism: the one that distances itself from the object by neither believing nor disbelieving, and the one that "believes without believing." I associate the first with the term *epoché* and properly attribute it to agnosticism. The second movement is that of suspicion.

I believe that it is this movement of withdrawal that most clearly differentiates the phenomenon of epoché from that of suspicion. The subject who exercises *epoché* withdraws from its object and suspends its objectivity. Suspicion, however, is indissolubly linked with the object of judgment and cannot shun it. On my account, suspicion is a nuanced variety of distrust for three reasons: (1) like distrust, suspicion could be analytically exhausted as an attitude; (2) it implies the supposition of something bad, namely as the subject of a judgment of suspicion I understand that the concealment or subversion of the manifest is an evil; and (3) suspicion shows a tendency to integration, to the toxicity earlier mentioned in connection with distrust. Nevertheless, it is much more natural to think of local suspicion than to think of local distrust. However, since suspicion is a concealment of the manifest as something it in fact is not, the fact that something is being concealed tends to integrate the totality of the different facets of the object of suspicion.

Contrary to what happens in the purest forms of distrust, this integration can be incomplete or sensitive to different contexts. Its relation with trust is due to the fact that suspicion is located, so to speak, on the tracks that would lead to an expression of (or demand or need for) trust. I am referring to the experience of giving in to suspicion, or of listening attentively to an unconvincing speech, of carrying out an action the moral quality of which we doubt. This is the phenomenon I want to capture here, which is, moreover, a disposition that does not seem temporally stable. In fact, suspicion must be resolved either by disappearing, or by discovering the truth or falsity of what is suspected. Of course,

one can remain suspect even after this resolution, but either way there seems to be a certain tendency to decide for one of two extremes of a polarity (i.e., believe or not believe, trust or distrust). This tendency moreover does not exist in the varieties mentioned above making up this dispositional ecosystem (trust, distrust, non-trust). Therefore, it seems that suspicion tends towards distrust, trust or mere non-trust.

2. Our most critical attitudes

In the previous section I differentiated suspicion from *epoché*. With this account in mind, I can now address the question how to strengthen our most critical attitudes. I am not going to offer here a decalogue or any advice, but an analysis of the phenomenon of criticism. The term "criticism", is an ambiguous term, or rather, a term whose meaning can be widely discussed. However, there is a meaning of "being critical" that I will discard right away. I am referring to criticism as mere negativity. In this sense, "to be critical" means something close to "being insulting" or "being offensive". I leave this meaning aside for I am interested in criticism with respect to a set of phenomena to which, prudently, it is not possible to "be offensive". This set of phenomena is that of those that force us to a certain testimonial knowledge. In particular, I am thinking of the critical attitude that we should ideally have when we consume journalistic or quasi-journalistic information (on microblogging sites, for example).

This critical attitude is often linked with *epoché*, with "healthy skepticism". In my opinion although this link may sometimes be necessary, it may end up being inefficacious. Suspension of judgment implies turning away from the issue rather than remaining in it. One can, after *epoché*, evaluate the propositions in favor of their truth or falsity, or of the relevance or irrelevance of what is presented; but this kind of evaluation requires a very particular kind of subject. To be able to turn away from the question, the subject must be able to turn away. This might seem obvious, but it turns out to be somewhat more complex if we analyze it carefully. The subject who intends to suspend judgment must experience the question from which she is turning away as not very urgent, which does not mean that it is necessarily unimportant. In fact, it seems that urgency forces us to not suspend judgment and to

take a part, perhaps a reversible one. Experiencing judgment as not very urgent also means that the *epoché* requires the subject to be highly uninterested, and by "uninterested" I mean a subject whose existence does not depend on what he or she is about to judge. I hold that to make our critical attitudes dependent on such a demanding disposition like suspension of judgment or *epoché* may imply the nullification of almost all criticism.

Therefore, rather than to *epoché*, I entrust criticism to suspicion. Indeed, I entrust our most critical attitudes to suspicion. I am referring to the "most critical" because I believe that suspicion is easily more radical than *epoché*. Earlier I pointed out that suspicion binds us to what we judge, while *epoché* separates us from it. Naturally, observing things from a certain distance can be virtuous, but this distance can easily be found in suspicion too. To exemplify this, I will consider a case that shook Spanish politics in 2013.

I am referring to what has come to be known as the Bárcenas Case. On January 18, 2013, the newspaper *El Mundo* published some quite detailed information about the irregular and parallel financing of the Partido Popular, then the governing party in Spain. *El Mundo* was and is widely known for its historical right-wing bias. Moreover, it was widely known for the dissemination of a conspiracy theory regarding the authorship of the Madrid train bombings in 2004 (also known as 11-M). This theory doubted the veracity of the official version, which attributed the attacks to a jihadist cell. The conspirators believed or wanted to believe that it had been ETA, a terrorist group that aspired to the independence of the Basque Country. They supposed that this last option could have benefitted the conservative government of José María Aznar. In their view, their narrative would have mobilised the right-wing vote as a response to a local tragedy caused by a peripheral form of nationalism. Naturally, the 11-M conspiracy theory is not the only hoax promoted by *El Mundo*, but it is probably the most shocking (and worst orchestrated). When publishing the information on the irregular financing of the Partido Popular, *El Mundo* published an exclusive of undeniable relevance. Although a short time later the more progressive newspaper *El País* joined in with the explosive publication of more evidence, which became known as "The Bárcenas Papers" (*El País* 31 January, 2013). Nevertheless, for a

short time only *El Mundo* had been publishing information on what later came to be labeled as the Bárcenas case. Those days, anyone who wanted to know about this matter had to consult *El Mundo*.

It was a pressing issue. The stability of the government was at stake and there was no time to suspend judgement, but according to many *El Mundo* was not a reliable media outlet. It had already lied about 11-M, could it not be lying again? So, the disposition that many of us harbored when reading *El Mundo* was not skepticism but distrustful confidence. We read it, but with reservations. We believed what it said, but not entirely. We assumed that there were some truths there, but we were unable to determine either their location or their identity. We looked for its bias, its interests: we expected it to betray our trust.

This type of trust awaits betrayal, but it combines with a degree of distrust, which manifests in the tendency of allowing oneself to be guided despite contrary circumstances. This is what I call suspicion. Its contradictory characterisation is what allows one to assume the distance required to be able to judge appropriately, what I like to call "a distant proximity". This distance is a separation that does not disintegrate.

Trust is what keeps society together, that is "its glue". But is a totally glued society habitable? It seems that the omnipresence of lies, bullshit and so many other varieties of falsehood, makes the commitment to trust problematic. Or, to put it another way: it seems that if we do not take a certain distance, we can end up destroying society by trusting too much. A totally distrustful society is a non-society, and a totally trusting society seems equally doomed to failure. Given this situation, it seems reasonable to promote intermediate dispositions. It is in these that criticism, so necessary and urgent in our days, can be placed. The work of criticism is inextricably linked to judgment, but not to any judgment. It must be a judgment concerned with truth, with relevance, with goodness, etc.

To put it in Hegelian terms, the disposition in which we could place criticism must be one that allows us to carry out the effort of the "concept" (Hegel 2004, p. 35). This means that it must be a

disposition that not only admits but proposes; or what is the same: it must not be a passive disposition, but an active one. So, we must discard agnostic and skeptical dispositions and therefore leave the *epoché* aside.

I believe that suspicion is the disposition in which criticism can most easily take root. This disposition is born with an idea, i.e., a contradiction, a negativity that drives it. Suspicion forces us to be more active and reflective (Hilton et al. 1993, p. 501). Its active character is what allows us to come in contact with a negativity that we would otherwise never gain awareness of. Perceiving this negativity, trying to understand it, even trying to make it positive, constitutes the core of criticism, it is the deep meaning of suspicion, and it is a new value for that kind of distrust. However, we must also avoid over-relying on this disposition. A dispositional ecosystem dominated by suspicion can ultimately become uninhabitable, for suspicion seems too demanding to sustain as a permanent state of being. Thus, the most desirable scenario appears to be a balance of trust, distrust, and suspicion. Yet there is no formula (or guide) for achieving this "middle ground": only the suspicion that weighing this third disposition might foster the development of better critical attitudes.

Conclusion

In this article I wanted to show how suspicion can be framed in terms of the dispositional framework of trust and distrust. To this end, I have built a profile of the phenomenon of distrust by comparing it with that of trust and I have showcased some of its possible relevant varieties. This profile has come up with two characteristics that are, in my opinion, very relevant. I refer here to what I have called the toxicity of distrust, namely the peculiar way in which distrust integrates the different aspects of the object that is distrusted and, in addition, to the way in which distrust can be made compatible with trust, against the incompatibility thesis.

It is precisely from the compatibility of these two dispositions that I have deduced the phenomenon of suspicion, which I define as a distrustful trusting, or as a distrust that is guided by trust. I have compared the disposition of suspicion with *epoché*, differentiating them by their intensity and by the way in which one, suspicion,

brings us closer to the object which we distrust while *epoché* separates us completely from what we would otherwise judge.

Finally, I have shown how the disposition of suspicion serves to foster some of our most critical attitudes. In so doing, I have explored the experience of suspicion following the publication by the newspaper *El Mundo* of the first journalistic investigation on the Bárcenas Case. This has allowed me to conclude with the statement that suspicion is a close distance, it is the disposition that allows us to get close enough to the facts to judge them from afar.

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Tasting Coffee: An Inquiry into Objectivity.

By Kenneth Liberman

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As the title suggests, this book explores the intersection of coffee and objectivity. More precisely, it is about objectivity in the world of coffee tasting, using coffee as the perfect example to thoroughly examine and question whether objectivity, which is commonly understood by professional tasters as the tool to eliminate subjectivity from any judgment along with the biases and interests that accompany it, is truly achievable. It's no coincidence that Liberman begins by questioning the nature of objectivity itself, highlighting that although nearly everyone assumes there is such a thing as objectivity, very few can actually define it precisely. According to the author, objectivity "has become an epistemic virtue" (p. 1), a universally sought-after quality that enables both practices and their practitioners to be regarded as 'scientific' and therefore true. And yet it remains difficult to fully grasp.

Kenneth Liberman is an ethnomethodologist and direct student of its founder, Harold Garfinkel. Liberman is Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the University of Oregon, specializing in social phenomenology, with a particular focus on Husserlian philosophy.[1] At the core of his work is participant observation: he spent two years living with Australian Aborigines, [2] and four years in Tibetan monasteries studying the dialectical practices of Buddhist monks, to which he still devotes a significant portion of his research.[3] For the same reason, his study of coffee led him to visit around 14 countries over a decade, taking professional courses and becoming

1 Liberman 2007.
2 Liberman 2017.
3 Liberman 2004 and 2016.

an expert taster himself. Starting in Trieste, Italy, known for its coffee production, Liberman moved on to Brazil, where Santos is the world's leading coffee distribution city. He then went to Panama and Colombia, participated in international competitions in El Salvador and Nicaragua, and visited plantations in Costa Rica and India. Additionally, he tasted coffee in cafés and roasteries in the USA, Argentina, Canada, China, France, and Sweden. I believe it is precisely the combination of a practical sociological approach with a deeply theoretical one that makes this book an intriguing example of field research in a discipline like philosophy, which often separates theory from practice, as well as mundane life from contemplation thereof.

The book written by Liberman offers a profound and extensive analysis of the socio-cultural practices involved in the formation of taste, aiming to identify, describe, but also challenge what objectivity means within the ordinary work practices of professional coffee tasters. The choice of coffee tasting is particularly compelling for a combined reason: firstly, coffee has become such a fundamental commodity that the coffee industry inherently demands and meticulously pursues objectivity; secondly, the sense of taste is defined as one of the most subjective experiences, yet one that has also traversed a history marked by continuous efforts to establish shared standards of objectivity. Liberman aims to use the case of coffee to explore the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity in the realm of taste. He questions how much of the objectivity demanded by the market depends on inherently subjective practices, and how issues intertwined with taste (such as gustatory pleasure, everyday life, aesthetic sensitivity, and social status) affect the pursuit of objectivity in sensory evaluation. His research falls within the domain of the sociology of science (p. 1), addressing objectivity not as an abstract philosophical problem but as an empirical and sociological issue.

Accordingly, a clear distinction runs throughout the book between Liberman's descriptive observations, which analyze how objectivity is constructed within the social practices related to the world of coffee, and the normative implications that arise when he discusses the limits and potentialities of these same practices. This distinction is essential to understand the book's value both

as a sociological study and as a critical reflection on sensory practices. It must be acknowledged, however, that the descriptive and normative dimensions inevitably tend sometimes to overlap, as it often happens in analyses of something as elusive as taste. Nonetheless, I believe it is precisely the constant interplay between the description of tasting practices and the phenomenological definitions of key philosophical concepts that makes Liberman's work particularly unique. The book is extensive and substantial, divided into four distinct parts, each comprising several chapters, 14 in total, akin to the countries he visited. These chapters alternate between stories drawn from direct experiences in the coffee world and distinctly philosophical reflections. The book concludes with an appendix featuring examples of tasting sheets, which visually illustrate the concepts analyzed throughout the work.

The first section, consisting of two chapters, explores the history of coffee's purveying and its production chain, crucial for understanding the role this commodity has played and continues to play in the global market. One of the most intriguing aspects concerns the definition of 'normal coffee,' which varies significantly from one country to another based on how coffee is consumed and on its socio-cultural significance. For instance, in Ethiopia, where the coffee plant is believed to have originated, beans were initially crushed and eaten with other ingredients. In Italy, espresso is considered the only acceptable way to drink coffee, while in India, a land rich in coffee plants, soluble coffee is the predominant choice. In the United States, mass marketing has led to increasingly cheaper coffee, which, according to the author, is often of lower quality despite being seen as an essential right for all. However, ensuring affordable coffee for consumers is built on deep inequalities within the chain of production, involving numerous intermediaries that make it nearly impossible for consumers to know how much reaches the hands of coffee growers. While this is not the central focus of the book, Liberman believes it is crucial to make readers aware of the many issues surrounding this commodity. He also discusses potential, albeit complex, solutions being pursued by the smaller worlds of 'specialty coffee' aided by the work of professional tasters, i.e., higher-quality beans cultivated in smaller quantities, often at high altitudes and with stricter standards.

The complex nature and various facets of objectivity are examined in the second part of the book, composed of three chapters. Liberman begins by outlining how objectivity and subjectivity are "sociohistorical achievements" (p. 65), meaning that they emerge at a specific moment, more fully in the 19th century, and are a blend of multiple components, in which, besides shared practices, morality and metaphysics must also be considered. In this first part of the book, Liberman argues that objectivity is an always occasioned, situated, and multifaceted device that primarily serves communicative, organizational, and consistency-seeking purposes, making it a product of intersubjective agreements. To provide a theoretical foundation for his thesis, he explores coffee tasting as a distinctly phenomenological subject, drawing especially on phenomenologists like Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Alfred Schütz, William A. Earle, Dan Zahavi. But he also references socio-ethnomethodological studies pioneered by Georg Simmel and concretely developed by Garfinkel, which move beyond the idealistic residues of Husserlian methodology favoring instead methods that emerge directly from a participatory observation of the research situation. This interdisciplinary approach allows Liberman to examine tasting practices considered to be objective, revealing the inherent subjectivity of tasters while recognizing that a continuous engagement with the coffee in the cup can foster new modes of occasioned objectivity. Objectivity is thus considered as a dynamic process in which professional tasters should consistently interact with coffee, allowing it to 'guide' their evaluation. This process requires a balance between the standardization demanded by the coffee industry and an openness to the uniqueness of coffee as a living and ever-changing entity. In this regard, Liberman diverges from Husserl to argue that "objects are not without agency, and they continually impinge on our being. Objects provide us with the clues we use to maintain the coherence of their identity, and the key to objectivity is to let objects show themselves from themselves" (p. 126). This observation seems to suggest not only a shared tasting practice but also an ideal of how we should relate to objects in general. Nonetheless, the other key point in his discussion of objectivity is the fact that coffee is certainly a peculiar object, because it stems from a constantly dynamic and evolving identity as a plant. Coffee undergoes various processes where numerous variables can significantly alter its final

taste. The author emphasizes the importance of understanding how the taste of coffee depends on a myriad of factors, from harvesting and blending, to communication between exporters and importers, and the work of company marketers. Throughout each stage, the taste of coffee never remains the same: how can one achieve universal objectivity in its evaluation?

To comprehend how to tame an inherently living object and bring it into consistent and commercially viable standards, one must delve into the essence of coffee tasting: the third section, notably the most extensive with 7 chapters devoted to the topic, explores several aspects related to taste. Liberman succinctly captures its essence at the beginning of this section: "'I like' does not mean 'good.' Surely, 'good' is a consensually negotiated value [...]. 'Like' is the sentiment of an individual, while 'good' is a feature achieved by a social system; however, this falls short of the 'objective' that fills the dreams of sensory analysts" (pp. 143-144). This passage effectively condenses all the definitions of taste provided by Western philosophy over the centuries: the sensory evaluation of coffee based, for example, on numerical scores, precise descriptors of acidity and sweetness, as well as texture or roast level, does not align with the pleasure experienced during tasting, nor with the 'calibration' process that tasters undergo before each evaluation, significantly influencing their assessments. In addition to this initial calibration, tasters participate in a final debriefing where only judgments on flavors that are widely shared survive the dialectic of comparison and discussion, which can only then be defined as objective. Liberman extensively examines tasting protocols composed of predetermined descriptors, tools favored by sensory science, yet themselves occasioned, despite their neutral and universal appearance, and always presupposing a detachment from the object under examination rather than an actual intensification of the relationship with it. This third part of the book focuses primarily on a descriptive analysis of tasting practices and the social dynamics that govern them. However, when Liberman critiques the standardization that reduces the complexity of taste, he suggests an alternative approach to enhancing the deep interdependence and dialogue between subjectivity and objectivity.

The research concludes by directly addressing the scientific approach of sensory analysis. Just as objectivity, 'science' is also a wide concept difficult to define singularly, as it comprises a range of diverse practices. In the last two chapters, Liberman illustrates how scientific sensory analysis applied to coffee involves monitoring, simplifying, and measuring aspects of taste that in reality work synergistically and continuously influence each other. His aim is certainly not to dismiss scientific procedures, rather to understand how to use them in a way that does not overshadow the phenomena they investigate, thereby remaining close to the mundane experiences that lay drinkers have with their daily coffees. According to Liberman, standardization for economic reasons should be prevented from obscuring individual phenomenological experiences. Drawing on Heidegger's *Principle of Reason* and Simmel's reflections, Liberman lastly reaffirms that maintaining a separation between subjective and objective aspects of taste risks misunderstanding their mutual dependence, since every "objectivity of objects relies on subjectivity" (p. 431). By conflating standardization with objectivity, sensory analysis diminishes the subjective and intersubjective activities of imagination and communication that guide the work of professional tasters in the quest for objectivity, which is always necessarily situated, and where the situation itself must be decided anew each time.

Liberman's ability to address the issue from a practical standpoint, all while drawing and comparing the ethnomethodological approach with phenomenology, makes this volume not only relevant to everyday experiences but also instrumental in expanding the very concept of science. How? By addressing objectivity as emerging from everyday practices rather than as a fixed, universal standard. His integration of sociological and philosophical studies provides a framework for understanding science as a situated, occasioned activity shaped by intersubjective agreements and practical interactions. Unlike traditional views of science that emphasize universality and neutrality, Liberman highlights the dynamic interplay between subjective experiences and collective practices, demonstrating how this interplay generates collaborative forms of objectivity. One of the key examples the author references is the already mentioned 'calibration session' in international coffee competitions, where objectivity is established through mutual

discussion among the tasters. During the subsequent tasting, they aim to identify that agreed-upon value in the coffee cup.

From this perspective, however, a limitation in the sociologist's study becomes evident. Liberman relies on specific perspectives within the philosophy of science without considering others that have deeply explored the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity. While Liberman does not directly engage with, for instance, some feminist philosophers of science, his focus on intersubjectivity and the contextual nature of objectivity echoes some key themes in this tradition, such as the rejection of universal, disembodied objectivity and the emphasis on situated knowledges.[4] This is, I believe, the primary shortcoming of Liberman's approach: while it is certainly impossible to encompass every theory about scientific objectivity, some specific perspectives could have enriched his theoretical framework, especially when applied to the peculiar realm of taste.

Liberman crafts a compelling and intricate treatise on coffee, which at times can prove theoretically challenging for coffee experts and overly technical for philosophers (and lay drinkers). Yet, his extensive reflections are pretty unique in illustrating how, in matters of taste, the debate between the subjectivity of taste and the objective standards sought since the advent of modern aesthetics remains prevalent, impacting both everyday life and world market economies. Liberman's volume sheds light on the many facets often taken for granted when analyzing taste, leaving us longing to uncover the ever-emerging flavor of the coffee we are sipping.

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4 See, for example, Haraway 1991 and Longino 2001.

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Perception and Idealism: An Essay on How the World Manifests Itself to Us, and How It (Probably) Is in Itself.

By Howard Robinson

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The book is divided into two parts. Although the conclusions of the first part are reached independently from the second one, the author claims the first part to constitute a necessary preamble to the second one (p. 226). In the first part, a version of a sense-datum theory of perceptual experience is defended against competing approaches. According to such a theory, qualitative features, *i.e.*, sense-data or *qualia*, are actually present rather than merely represented in perceptual experience. Naïve realism/relationalism, namely, a view whereby perception puts us in direct contact with the external environment, is refuted on the basis of its commitment to deny any positive content to so called 'philosophers' hallucinations', namely, states which are subjectively indiscriminable from genuine perceptions and are produced via the activation of the very same brain processes that are involved in specific type of perceptual experiences (p. 14-15). A further argument is raised against naïve realism, *i.e.*, the argument from illusion, which is based on the observation that at least in certain instances of perception, we become aware of objects or contents that have (however slightly) different sensory qualities compared to the physical object we are supposed to be perceiving (p. 32). Several objections both to the argument from philosophers' hallucinations and to the argument from illusion are reviewed and rebutted. Intentionalist/representationalist theories of perception are refuted in virtue of an internal tension of them, namely the one

between their commitment to a "common factor" approach, which is supposed to distance intentionalism from naïve realism, and their rejection of any sense datum view.

Any attempt to resolve the tension based on a distinction between the *content* and the *object* of experience, it is argued, makes intentionalism *de facto* collapse on either one of the two approaches intentionalism is supposed to counter, namely naïve realism and the sense-datum view themselves. Towards the second half of the first part of the book, a positive account of the directedness of perception is offered. Such an account is based on three main tenets (Ch. 6-8): (i) objectivity is grounded on what Hume called the constancy and coherence of experience; (ii) embedded in any (or at least most) of our experiences there's an inherently judgmental/informational component; (iii) the coherently organized qualia instantiated in perception are the manifestation of the world in a way that is appropriate for creatures like us. The second part of the book deals with the question of what the ultimate nature of the world should be in order for it to sustain its accurate appearance to creatures like us. Two arguments that occur in Berkeley and one argument from John Foster are revised and defended to the case that no conception of physical space can be severed from its empirical/phenomenal manifestation. Different forms of scientific realism such as the power conception of matter, Lewis' quiddities, Esfeld's matter points and various interpretation of quantum theory, are analyzed and it is argued that their conception of matter and space either leads to forms of phenomenalism/idealism or is at least as counterintuitive as idealism itself or both. Moreover, following Berkeley it is suggested that the very notion of quality, without which the modern conception of space would end up being devoid of any content, is intrinsically experiential. Towards the end of the book, several versions of non-theistic phenomenalism and panpsychism are analyzed and found to be overall less satisfactory than Berkeleyan theistic idealism.

Perception and Idealism is a complex exercise of philosophy, replete with arguments and theses. Every single sentence is both thought-provoking and meticulously positioned against the background of the overall argumentation being pursued. This books presents advocates the theories that are opposed by Robinson, like naïve

realism and intentionalism about perception, mainstream physicalism, panpsychism and neutral monism, just to mention a few, with tight-knight arguments to be considered when addressing objections or opposing views. The theories above are dissected thesis by thesis, argument by argument, premise by premise with intellectual honesty and surgical precision. No claim or argument escapes the relentlessly rigorous effort of analysis of Robison. Yet, the overall big picture is constantly kept in view. The book is also impressively rich: it combines an accurate historical understanding of more than one deep philosophical puzzle with a precise discussion of some of the most recent developments of the philosophy of perception and the metaphysics of mind and consciousness. Yet the book does not pay the price that texts that prefer extensive to intensive treatment of philosophical issues sometimes pay, for different views and authors are not simply mentioned or quoted, but rather thoroughly analyzed, commented and weighed against the background of two leading arguments, one per section of the book. The book is an intellectual marathon, but one definitely worth the effort: if one makes it to the end, one will end up with, among other things, a fairly good and comprehensive understanding of the state of the art of several distinct but deeply intertwined debates or areas of inquiry, most notably, the contemporary epistemology of perception.

Although the phenomenological/trascendentalist tradition is rarely mentioned or cited if at all, as far as I can see the book is also an exercise of phenomenology, or at least may be deployed as a prolegomenon to a phenomenological endeavor or a preliminary defense of the kind of theoretical framework that would justify engaging in a phenomenological description of the structure of given kinds of perceptual experiences. In fact, in Chapter 6 it is argued that objectivity is grounded on the constancy and coherence of experience, as per a Humean approach. This would call for a description of the invariant structural features of the contents that are given in perception and ground objective statements. As Husserl (e.g., 1982b) famously stressed, a truly empirical approach to reality, as the one Robinson pursues in the book, commits one to take reality at face value precisely and solely as it presents itself to us as experiencers, namely as (or at least *in*, or *through*) conscious experience. Looking through the lens of phenomenology, the assumption whereby conscious experience is existentially,

ontologically, epistemologically or methodologically secondary with respect to the entities that are posited by the best scientific theories we have available is a daring one originating from the natural attitude and extending well beyond it.

As phenomenology suggests, physical entities initially present themselves as correlates of conscious experiences: they emerge as stable reference points within a dynamic consciousness and derive their significance from given conscious acts. Phenomenology acknowledges that physical objects seem to go beyond consciousness but shows that this transcendence is inherently tied to certain aspects of given experiences themselves (Husserl referred to this phenomenon as 'the immanent transcendence' of our experiential objects, e.g., in 1982a, §48). The apparent transcendence of given objects of experience then gets to shape our naive conception of what an object is in the first place: an object is supposed to retain its identity across time, space, and contexts, thus being detached, at least in part, from present time, present location and present context. Thus, so called objective statements are *de facto* formed by extrapolating bundles of invariant structural features from individual conscious acts or collections of them. Based on these patterns of regularities, experienced phenomena are then interpreted as independently existent material objects. The effectiveness of this process, however, leads to a form of amnesia whereby the role of consciousness as an inescapable epistemic ground tends to be overshadowed (Bitbol 2008, p. 4; Hut and Shepard 1998, sections 2-5).

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The Subjective and The Objective: Philosophical Traditions in Dialogue

INTERVIEW

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