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SPECIAL ISSUE OF “BALKAN JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY”

the topic of the 2024 special issue of our journal: “Changing Personal Identities: Some New Philosophical Challenges”

CHANGING PERSONAL IDENTITIES: SOME NEW PHILOSOPHICAL CHALLENGES

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The major objective of this special issue is to outline the genealogy of two mutually related perspectives regarding some philosophical challenges in shaping identities. While the first philosophical perspective questions both the definition and the application of *the concept of Identity with a capital I in time*, the second one tackles the expanding role of building *identities* (*plural*) *in times of crisis*.

The first perspective is exemplified by providing some interdisciplinary insights into the concept of identity as a heterogeneous concept–specifically, by encouraging the recognition of multiple identities. Such exemplifications include: 1) an analysis of the genealogy of the Sámi people’s identities in Finland through the process of rewilding as a matter of re-cultivating belonging engagement against the socio-culturally suppressed possibility for self-identification (see Tero Mustonen’s article *Lake Mekrijärvi and the Karelian Heartland: Re-emergent and Re-imagined through Landscape Rewilding*), 2) an investigation of the diversity of more-than-human identities within a post-humanist framework (see Ester Toribio-Roura’s article *Beyond the Human: Crossovers for an Onto-epistemological Bifurcation*), 3) a re-evaluation of the role of a philosopher’s identity that questions the linear process of identification from past to present in terms of intellectual influence (see Magdalena Hoły-Łuczaj’s article *Identity of a Thinker, or Rereading Böhme and Heidegger on Dwelling (Wohnen) for Environmental Ethics*), and 4) an exploration of the role of the so-called episodic Self in overcoming some of the experiential constraints triggered by the narrative Self (see Hari Narayanan and Jayprakash Show’s article *Narrative versus Episodic Self: The Matter with Identity*).

In turn, the second perspective is displayed by pointing out different philosophical concerns about the particular environment that necessitates the recognition of multiple identities as variables. This perspective shows why and how such identities not only result from given historical and socio-political regimes of power but also encourage the reconsideration of associated relations and socialities. The exemplifications include an analysis of the challenges to 1) the diverse identity interpellations revealing associated identity-proposals that inflict complex vulnerabilities as a result of the ways of anticipating mainstream hermeneutical resources (see Ioana Grancea’s article *Whose Hand Writes the Story of ‘Us’? Vulnerability to Identity Interpellations in a Non-repressive Social Context*), 2) the recognition of a diasporic identity by taking into account that distance and proximity to the homeland are not only geographically determined but also anticipated with respect to multiple proposed and contested narrative identities (see Davit Mosinyan's article *On How There Is Diasporic Identity*), and 3) the growing role of anti-natalism, which underrates the constructive potential of necessary tragic for personal identity (see Silviya Serafimova's article *'Conspiracy against Humanity': Is Peter Wessel Zapffe an Anti-natalist?*)

Cutting across the boundaries of different fields of philosophy in an interdisciplinary context, the structure of the special issue is underlain by the attempt to show the intrinsic relations between the aforementioned two perspectives–specifically, by discussing philosophical dilemmas about some similar (by definition) types of identities, which, however, are both deconstructed and reconstructed under different historical and socio-political circumstances.

An illuminative exemplification of the methodological intersection of the two philosophical perspectives is the volume's first article (see Mustonen's article *Lake Mekrijärvi and the Karelian Heartland*). It demonstrates that "the deep mapping" of identities, which reveals their hidden layers, necessitates the recognition of their associated embodiments, triggered by particular socio-cultural transformations. Specifically, the 're-emergence' of the sense of belonging through the process of re-imagining is not a fantasy of a time that has never existed. It is a practice-related revival of meaningful interactions that is a natural (in the sense of logical) response to such transformations when they are anticipated as a crisis for what one recognizes as one's own world.

The panel of invited papers demonstrates why understanding the plurality of identities is impossible unless one not only questions the recognition of Identity with a capital I, but also examines different types of identities as mutually related. As a point of intersection between the three papers in the panel, one can point out the authors' focus on the role of environmental identities, which are closely tied to that of indigenous and narrative identities (see Mustonen's article *Lake Mekrijärvi and the Karelian Heartland*), technological, narrative, and relational identities (see Toribio-Roura's article *Beyond the Human*), and intellectual identities (see Hoły-Łuczaj's article *Identity of a Thinker*).

The intra-methodological links between the mutually complementary types of identities go through the volume, as follows. The line of thought regarding the elaboration of the role of narrative identities is enriched with an analysis of personal identities (see Narayanan and Show's article *Narrative versus Episodic Self*) and cultural and social identities (see Mosinyan's article *On How There Is Diasporic Identity*). Consequently, the line of thought regarding the reconstruction of complex relational identities (see Grancea's article *Whose Hand Writes the Story of 'Us'?*) points toward the necessity of exploring the intersections of personal and moral identities (see Serafimova's article '*Conspiracy against Humanity'*).

In addition to the articles, the volume includes three book reviews. The first one (written by Serafimova) is devoted to a volume of collected papers that tackle the performative potential of post-truth as shifting and intensifying major public imaginations of science and politics (see Kjetil Rommetveit (ed.), *Post-truth Imaginations. New Starting Points for Critique of Politics and Technoscience*).

In the second review, Lilia Gurova discusses a volume of articles about the transformed relations between personal and moral identities due to the increasing impact of AI technologies in certain fields of philosophy (ethics in particular) as well as economics, defense studies, and computer science (see Boris D. Grozdanoff, Zdravko Popov, and Silviya Serafimova (eds.), *Rationality and Ethics in Artificial Intelligence*).

Last but not least, Frédéric Tremblay's review of D. Tsatsov's book *Dimitar Mihalchev – "Filosofski studii. Prinos kum kritikata na moderniia psikhologizum–1909 g." Vuvedenie* (*Dimitar Mihalchev – "Philosophical Studies. A Contribution to the Critique of Modern Psychologism. – 1909." Introduction*), which displays the diverse heritage of the prominent Bulgarian philosopher Dimitar Mihalchev (1880–1967), brings one back to the complicated receptions of a thinker's identity, viz., to the intellectual climate in which the nihilistic attitudes towards one's own philosophical heritage gain strength.

In conclusion, the diverse–in both methodological and thematic terms–contributions show that challenging the concept of Identity with a capital I necessitates questioning the associated misconception that identity is a static concept guaranteeing individual and collective harmony once and for all. Furthermore, the contributions clarify why and how identity fusion underlain by a sense of 'oneness' as a striving for harmony becomes anachronic. This means that the recognition that Identity with a capital I is incongruent, where incongruency is not only temporal but also moral, aesthetic, and socio-political, reveals the complex tensions of our existential diagnosis of a world in crisis.

Articles

Invited paper

LAKE MEKRIJÄRVI AND THE KARELIAN HEARTLAND: RE-EMERGENT AND RE-IMAGINED THROUGH LANDSCAPE REWILDING

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Abstract:

This article discusses the Mekrijärvi boreal lake system in North Karelia, Finland, and the Koitajoki river. It traces historico-cultural interactions with the lake, from its role as an epicenter of Karelian rune singing and traditional practices, to the natural and cultural disruptions caused by large-scale natural resource extraction that shattered forests, peatlands, and waterbodies, and on into a new era of restoration. In the 2000s a community-driven NGO began to document oral histories and scientific evidence of the lake's condition. In the 2020s, this effort evolved into a landscape-scale eco-cultural revitalization effort. Habitat for endangered whitefish and degraded peatlands are being restored and traditional knowledge has become a central force in rebuilding and re-imagining traditional northern societies. Snippets of personal memories and oral poetry offer a window into a unique boreal world which, though once thought to be lost, is in a state of re-discovery and healing.

Key words: Mekrijärvi, seining, epic poetry, Finland, rewilding, whitefish.

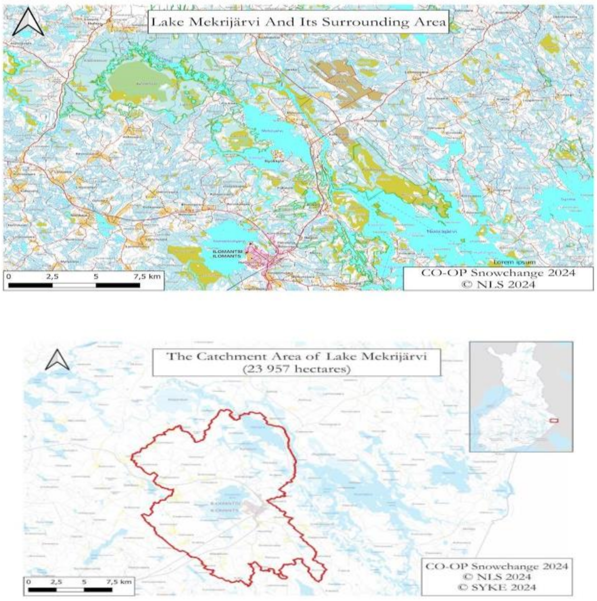


Figure 1. Location of Mekrijärvi in Finland and its catchment area. Snowchange, 2024

1. Introduction

This article presents the story of the Mekrijärvi (Kupiainen, 1985) boreal lake system. Located in eastern Finland, the lake is known for its world famous epic poetry tradition, and was the home of some of Finland's most famed Kalevala-style singers (Piela, 1985). In the past 80 years, the lake has been affected by man-made ecological changes, mainly in the form of peatland ditching and industrial forestry (Mustonen & Mustonen, 2017).

The article, building on the author's own memories and experiences in the area, showcases interconnected attempts to revitalize the ecosystems and cultural practices connected to the lake system, particularly through biocultural engagements with the landscape in the form of river seining. Italics are utilized to highlight the author's own direct reflections. Such an autoethnographic approach is subject to a number of caveats. These include potential valorization of the past or romanticization of cultural practices. Peer-reviewed source literature is used to offer a balanced view but the purpose of the text is, in some ways as Dillon et al. (2012) point out, to offer a provocative and time-bound view of a large cultural and ecological restoration process under way.

Mekrijärvi, also spelled Megrijärvi, is a part of the Koitajoki river basin (Kupiainen, 1985). From the south, lakes Ilomantsi and Kätkäjärvi flow into Mekrijärvi. The main Koitajoki river enters into the lake in its northwestern corner, and then continues onwards (Fig. 1).

The lake surface is approximately 144.4 meters above sea level. It is 6 kilometers long and 2 kilometers wide, with a rather shallow mean depth of 1.7 meters (deepest: 3 meters). The total area of the lake is 894 hectares and it holds 15.1 million cubic meters of water. The mean flow rate is 2.5 m3/s.

Figure 2. An aerial view of Lake Mekrijärvi, August 2023. Snowchange, 2024

Ecologically, the lake's water temperatures fluctuate based on what happens in the surrounding areas, and winds mix the waters effectively in the open season (Fig. 2). The shorelines mostly consist of peatlands, occasional eskers (Putkelanharju), and boreal forest. Due to the presence of natural post-Ice Age peatlands, the lake waters are dark with depth of visibility at 70-100 cm. The lake waters are very slightly acidic, with a pH of 6.5. Mekrijärvi can still be considered oligotrophic, though some indicators point towards eutrophication.

In terms of aquatic biodiversity, the lake is home to duck mussels (*Anodonta anatina*), with the main fish species being roach, perch, and ruffe. Salmonids like vendace also live in the lake. Whitefish (*Coregonus lavaretus, Fig. 3*), which migrate through the Koitajoki system, are a central indicator species (Huuskonen et al., 2012). Other species include northern pike, common dace, ide, burbot, bleak, and bream.

Culturally, the lake is known for its Karelian rune singing tradition. The very first human populations on lake Mekrijärvi to have left any trace are the Indigenous Sámi people. Many toponymic place names in the river Koitajoki catchment (for example, Lake Suomujärvi) can be traced back to the Sámi era that probably ended around 1000-1200 CE (Aikio, 2012).

Figure 3. Whitefish (Coregonus lavaretus), September 2023. Snowchange, 2024

Karelians, an ethnic minority that today exists in both Russia and Finland, can be considered the traditional inhabitants of the area since 1200 CE. The Karelian population then, and to some extent to the present day, focused on slash-and-burn (kaski) agriculture, hunting (especially of moose and wild forest reindeer), and fishing.

They were early adopters of the Greek Catholic faith, which arrived from Russia. After the 1640s and the Rupture Wars between Sweden and Russia, a Finnish-speaking Lutheran population arrived in the Koitajoki area, their presence fostered by the Swedish Crown. They propagated field agriculture and cattle-based farming. After the Second World War, Finland was forced to cede part of the Ilomantsi Municipality to the Soviet Union. Today, these two groups both live together in the Koitajoki area with some families of mixed religious traditions, too (Björn, 1995; Hakamies, 1995).

This paper approaches Lake Mekrijärvi as a nexus of Karelian traditional knowledge. Historically, the lake was divided into two main villages: Mekrijärvi on the eastern shore, and Ryökkylä on the Western part of the lake (Björn, 1995; Jetsu, 1995; Vesajoki, 1995).

The village of Mekrijärvi was associated with the Sissonen and Huohvanainen families (Jetsu, 1995; Kupiainen, 1985; Piela, 1985). Ryökkylä was associated with the Mustonen family. These communities were Greek Catholic for the most part. The village of Ala-Koita, located close to where the Koitajoki River enters Lake Mekrijärvi, is also an important site in terms of the biocultural context of the whole lake system.

Simana Sissonen, a rune singer and spiritual figure, is the most famous of the knowledgeable people we know of from lake Mekrijärvi (Fig. 4 and 5). He was born, according to different sources, either in 1778, 1781, or 1786. He died in 1848. He had six children. In the mid-1800s rune collectors and folklorists visited Sissonen and documented in the order of 30 epic Karelian songs (with repetitions the number is up to 80), including some that are over 300 verses long (Siikala, 1995).

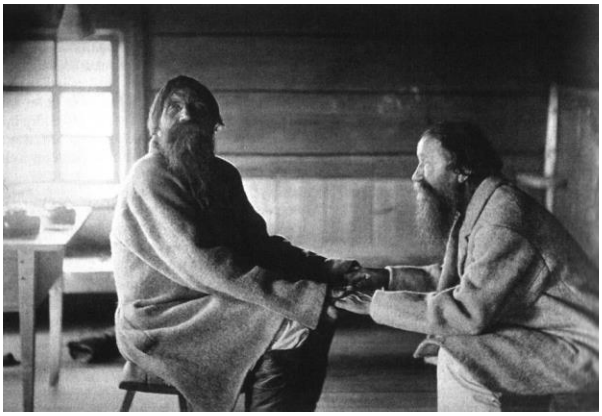
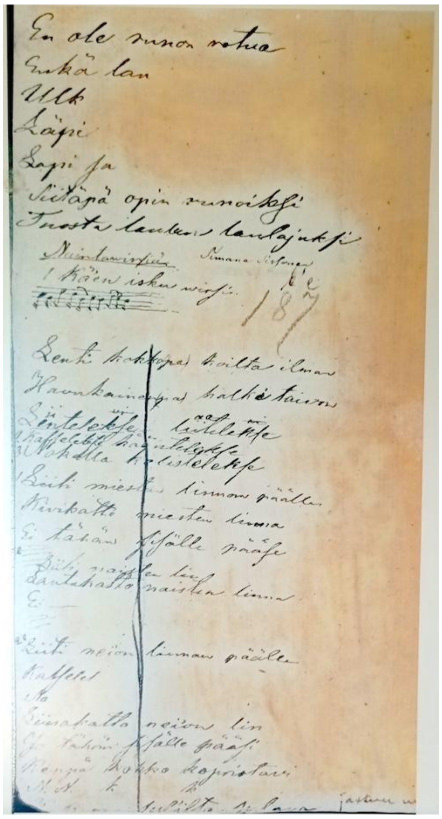


Figure 4. Two rune singers from White Sea Karelia. I.K. Inha, Wikicommons

The era between Sissonen's death to the present day has seen a wholesale ecological and cultural transformation of Lake Mekrijärvi and the Koitajoki basin. The rune singing tradition and the period which can be described as one of autonomous governance (Huntington et al., 2017) effectively ended with the extensive loss of boreal forests, which came to be seen primarily through the lens of economic value. With the arrival of sawmills in regional centers such as Joensuu, downstream from Mekrijärvi, timber came to be seen as a quantifiable resource whose primary value lay in extraction (Kupiainen, 1995).

Additionally, in the mid-1800s, the region underwent 'The Great Partition.' In 1809 Finland, along with Karelia, was annexed to the Russian Empire by the Swedish Crown and given the status of Grand Duchy–in essence, a state that had considerable autonomy within the Russian Empire.

Following this schism, the Grand Duchy of Finland pursued an agricultural land reform first implemented by the Swedish Crown with the purpose of shifting the system of village land ownership and use. Prior to the reform, every Swedish farmer owned several pieces of land that were spread throughout the village area. Broadly, the reformed system sought to ensure that every farmer's landholding was geographically connected, rather than disparate (Kupiainen, 1995).



En ole runon rotua
Enkä lan
Ulk
Läpi
Lapi ja
Siitäpä opin runoiksi
Tuosta laulan laulajaksi

Figure 5. A photo of the original tune description from Simana Sissonen, by collector Daniel Europeus. Snowchange, 2024

Prior to partition, the Karelian communities of Mekrijärvi practiced traditional land use and governance models (Kupiainen, 1985; Mustonen, 2014; Mustonen & Mustonen, 2017; Piela, 1985) that can be defined as northern Eurasian seasonal land use and occupancy. The main focus of the Sissonen family and the people of Ryökkylä was on fisheries, hunting, gathering, and seasonally shifting slash-and-burn agriculture (Kupiainen, 1985). Their way of life was far removed from the fully sedentary farming societies of southern Sweden.

The Great Partition eliminated the Karelian communities of Lake Mekrijärvi's capacity to practice their endemic lifeways (Mustonen, 2014) and to maintain traditions of self-organization and their relatively autonomous position (Huntington et al., 2017). Living boreal taiga ecosystems were converted into natural resource assets, at first for sawmills, and then, as the 1900s began, as a source of pulp for paper and other timber products. The vast communal lands the communities of Mekrijärvi utilized for hunting, their fishing lakes and rivers, as well as hay collecting associated with peatlands, were converted into quantifiable assets. This led to the internal demoralization and destruction of community-based governance of Lake Mekrijärvi (Kupiainen, 1995). By the turn of the 20th Century, the lands and waters the Sissonen clan had governed for centuries had been dramatically fragmented. Even the home of the famed rune singer's family, a seat of immense cultural power and heritage, changed owners.

The old songs and Karelians' sense of deep belonging and engagement with the natural world were equally transformed. The research and public image of the documented songs became a world of its own from nation building to critical folklore research (Aho & Jetsu, 1995; Siikala, 1995). In this paper, the songs and associated culture are approached as they appeared as a part of a boreal lifeworld (Mustonen, 2014).

We cannot say that all traditional land uses or practices such as hunting, mushroom harvesting, and fisheries ended. They were deeply ingrained and vital, for example, for communal food security. But the capacity of the communities to effectively practice self-regulation and decision making was badly compromised, with new forms of incoming governance strongly welded to the new state-controlled system.

The old songs had little power in convincing regional officers of community norms. The proliferation of schools, religious missions, and other institutions of modernity (e.g., the cash economy) from the 1850s onwards also played a part in eliminating the central role that the songs and myths of the boreal taiga had played in the autonomous era of self-regulation and the endemic ordering of the temporal and spatial elements of life in Lake Mekrijärvi.

In the period between 1850-2024, we see the impacts of social and economic shifts on boreal ecosystems in the Lake Mekrijärvi area and beyond. So far, we have investigated only the first stretch of this time period, but the decisions made between 1950-1990 in an era of rapid modernization in Finland are also of vital consequence.

Finland is an area of global importance for boreal and Arctic peatlands. Over 10 million hectares of peatland are contained within the nation's borders (~30% of the land area). Globally, peatlands store more than 30% of the remaining soil-based carbon in the world today (IPCC, 2022). Since the 1940s, the proliferation of industrial forestry and peat mining has degraded more than 5 million hectares of Finnish peatlands through ditching—a process of draining peatlands through removing vegetation and digging water canals so that the peat dries prior to industrial processing. In addition to site-specific loss of habitat and species that require stable wetland environments, these changes also have downstream water quality impacts.

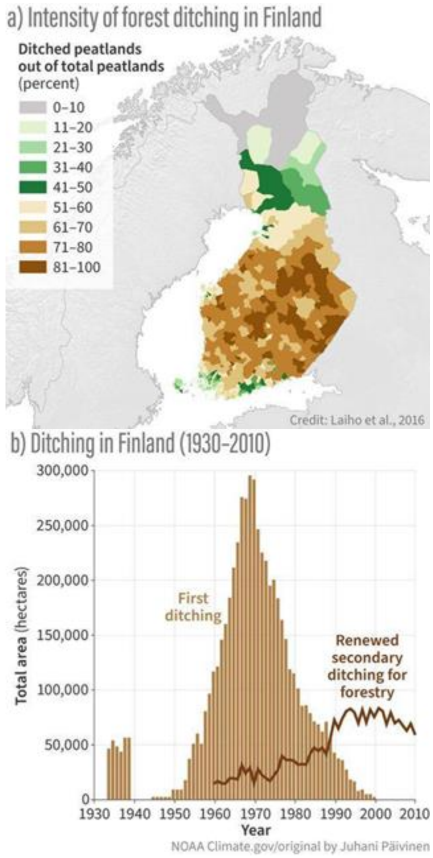


Figure 6. (a) Intensity of ditching across Finland showing ditched peatlands as a percentage of total peatlands for each province (Korhonen et al., 2021, creative commons; Laiho et al., 2016) and (b) the temporal scale of peatland ditching 1930-2010 (NOAA Climate.gov modified from Juhani Päivinen/University of Helsinki, used with permission)

The first wave of commercial exploitation in what are now Finland's forests began with the international tar trade of the 1600s, when tar, which is produced from wood, became the territory's primary export. A second wave of commercial forestry exploitation emerged in the 1800s after the invention of steam-powered sawmill equipment, which increased sawmill productivity.

The third and most environmentally-destructive wave was the large-scale clear-felling of timber forests for the pulp and paper industries, starting in 1945. This wave resulted in the loss of 95% of Finland's natural boreal forest ecosystems south of the Arctic Circle in just over 80 years.

A major driver of this industrial push was Finland's need to fund major war reparations that the nation was obliged to pay to the Soviet Union in the years following World War II. This massive national debt resulted in a rapid, single-generation technological, economic, and cultural transition in Finnish society. The period from 1945 to the 1990s (and in some ways, to the present day) was a time of massive, interconnected, top-down policy shifts that drastically altered large wilderness ecosystems. Forest degradation was intrinsically linked to the transformation of traditional wilderness economies and communities, like those of Karelia. The result was the loss of communal rights and subsequent direct assimilation of traditional communities into the cultural, linguistic, and economic norms and practices of dominant western European societies.

In the Mekrijärvi area specifically, by the 1970s, three large hydro dams had been built along the course of the Koitajoki River, effectively cutting land-locked Atlantic Salmon and other migratory salmonids off from their normal migrations and spawning grounds (Mustonen & Mustonen, 2017). The majority of the natural boreal forests around the lake were clearcut. The peatlands of Parilamminsuo west of the lake and the peatlands of Pitkälahdensuo to the south were ditched for timber production.

This led to a release of organic and nutrient flows (Aho, 1985) into the lake and affected the mercury embedded in these habitats, releasing it along with methylated heavy metals into the downstream waters (Fig. 6.). By the 2020s, food bans on larger predatory fish, including pikeperch, perch, pike, and burbot were in effect in the catchment. Fish over 1 kilogram were considered unsafe for human consumption. Based on modern scientific understandings, we know that the ditching of these peatlands also destroyed large carbon sinks (IPCC, 2022).

Today, the wealth of relatively sustainable engagements with boreal ecosystems, unique oral poetry, and sophisticated systems of self-governance in Karelian cultural life have been replaced with clearcut timber forests, disarray in traditional practices, and ditched peatlands. It is against this stark background that this article is positioned.

The article will shed light on a process that began in 2016, which seeks to rewild Lake Mekrijärvi and the wider Koitajoki Basin at landscape-scale, enabling these ecosystems to 're-emerge' in a 're-imagined' form. To illuminate this process, the article follows an approach adopted from Dillon et al. (2012) which proposes that, in order to thoroughly investigate socio-ecological systems, we need to engage with 'deep mapping'–an approach that builds up, overlays, and renders visible different layers of meaning connected with a place, drawn from distinct genres, styles, and contexts.

No one science article has the space to capture all elements of the Lake Mekrijärvi socio-ecological (Huntington et al., 2017) approach; however, this piece will illuminate core elements of a rewilding-restoration process under way on the lake through Dillon et al.'s (2012) method. Following this method, which emphasizes the validity of different forms of experience and knowledge, the article is run through with the author's own personal experiences of visiting, fishing, and living in the Koitajoki Basin since late 1970s. It addresses and describes three critically important aspects of recovery: physical restoration of peatlands, the role of river seine fishing methods, and the unique Mekrijärvi boat. The article ends with a reflection on traditional land governance in the 21st Century and a discussion of what a futureproof, resilient, and re-emergent Lake Mekrijärvi might look like.

2. Aspects of Re-emergence: Peatlands, Traditional Watercraft and Seining

2.1. Arriving in the Koitajoki Basin

My first memories of arriving in the Koitajoki area in the summer of 1978 are of the cabin, sauna, and small farm owned by Heikki and Paula, my great uncle and aunt (technically Paula was the sister of my grandfather). We traveled in a boat with an outboard motor, as back then there were no roads then to their place on Lake Nuorajärvi, the next lake upstream from Lake Mekrijärvi along the Koitajoki River. My summer memories are of gillnetting perch and other fish, swimming in the clear waters of the lake, and sitting in the sauna with my cousins, Eero and Hanna…

I have been visiting and fishing in the Koitajoki Basin since 1978, around 46 years now. In my early days spent there, the road system connecting wilderness cabins was rather limited. Several families I knew still retained seasonal practices and traveled by boat for the purposes of hunting, fishing, gathering, and recreation on the river. In the 1970s, I remember that the waters of both lake Mekrijärvi and adjacent Lake Nuorajärvi were clear as memory serves.

This was evident to me from time spent swimming and especially in gillnetting. It was only in the 1980s when the large-scale peat mining and impact of ditching of peatlands nearby started to impact the water quality and ecological condition of these ecosystems.

Since 2001, I have lived close to and frequented the Lake Mekrijärvi area and broader Koitajoki Basin regularly. Several other changes have become clear to me. The clear cuts of large, natural forests have sped up, and today there are very few forest areas that are over 100 years old. The impacts of peatland destruction have become more and more pronounced–algaes bloom in the lakes, organic loading clogs fish spawning areas, gill nets emerge from the water slimed. Extensive forestry road networks have rapidly proliferated now reaching the Lake Nuorajärvi cabin of my childhood. These changes have all taken hold simultaneously, expanding especially rapidly in the 1990s.

At some point in the 2010s, those of us working in the Snowchange Cooperative, an organization based in North Karelia and devoted to boreal and Arctic ecosystems and traditional knowledge, started to ponder what could be done to undo these damages in the Koitajoki area and enable a recovery that would also be socially meaningful in the villages and communities of the area.

Dozens of meetings, workshops, reports, and oral history interviews later (including with my great aunt, Paula), we started to see an outline of what this restoration and recovery could look like. It would involve three elements: a turnaround in the quality and status of natural systems, a new understanding of Lake Mekrijärvi's history and culture, and the revitalization of surviving traditional practices through which river and lake communities meaningfully interact with the waters of the region.

In the next section I will summarize the findings and results of our work in pursuit of these three goals between 2016 and early 2024.

2.2. Restoration of Peatlands

During my lifetime most of the peatlands around Koitajoki, and in particular areas right next to Lake Nuorajärvi, have been ditched. Some of these were supposed to be protected areas. The waters turned brown and muddy, gill nets were filled with slimy algae, and swimming became very unpleasant. We asked ourselves: what must we do?

Rewilding (Perino et al., 2019) peatlands serves several vital natural functions in the European boreal and subarctic: it keeps carbon in the ground, provides important habitat and natural flood control, and may initiate carbon sinks, enabling the drawdown of carbon dioxide in large quantities. Restoration of peatlands is also a mechanism to address almost a century of top-down natural resource governance by slowly moving towards village-led co-management and local benefit sharing.

Lake Mekrijärvi is fed by waters from the south, west, and north. Many of these sub-catchments and interlinked areas are peatlands. In almost every direction, the Koitajoki Basin suffers from large-scale peatland ditching and in some cases peat mining, a form of energy production that is now a 'sunset industry' in Finland, due to its heavy carbon footprint.

Figure 7. Restoration on Rahesuo peatland, August 2022. Snowchange, 2024

Ditching of peatlands is by no means limited to the Koitajoki or the Lake Mekrijärvi area. It has influenced millions of hectares of critically important peatlands across Finland (see Fig. 6). In 2016 and 2017, Snowchange held a range of conversations with Rewilding Europe, an NGO based in the Netherlands, and the European Investment Bank about the possibilities of enabling landscape-level solutions to tackle the huge problems caused by peatland destruction.

This conversation led to the establishment of Snowchange's Landscape Rewilding Programme. After approximately five years of implementing this program across Finland (see www.landscaperewilding.org), we were able to secure substantial resources to directly address problems in the Koitajoki Basin and its vast, yet damaged peatlands. Depending on the levels of degradation, restoration often involves blocking ditches, raising the waters back to the pre-damage levels, and monitoring species comebacks and water quality (Haapalehto et al., 2011).

Finally, the outline of an answer to the ditching problem began to emerge, and over the past three years we have been able to secure and begin to re-wild sites that are affecting Lake Mekrijärvi's water quality and habitats as well as those in the wider Koitajoki Basin (Fig. 7).

Taraassinsuo is an approximately 66-hectare peatland area on Lake Ilomantsinjärvi, which empties into Lake Mekrijärvi from the south. By protecting it and enabling its recovery, we have been able to improve the quality of water headed for Mekrijärvi.

Similarly, on the north side of the lake there is another peatland, Jokisuo (Fig. 8). This 50-hectare site, also included in the Landscape Rewilding Programme, is on the road to recovery. What happens in this peatland area directly influences the health of areas of the Koitajoki River where whitefish spawn. By restoring this peatland, we have been able to address issues including organic loading, thereby protecting the spawning site of this endangered species (Aho, 1985). We will discuss the role of these whitefish spawning sites below in more detail.

Figure 8. Jokisuo peatland on the right, August 2023. Snowchange, 2024

The village of Ryökkylä on the shores of Mekrijärvi was historically the traditional dwelling place of the Mustonen family, who intermarried with the Sissonens. Famous rune singers, including the daughter of Simana Sissonen, have lived in Ryökkylä down the years. Through strategic land purchases, we were able to secure the Soikkala Ecological Corridor, which connects an intact, protected peatland called Korvunsuo and the lake. This combined effort enabled the protection of biodiversity over a total land area of close to 700 hectares, conservation of cultural heritage in the form of a traditional house in Soikkala, and the prevention of additional loading from degraded peatlands into the lake body.

Our largest efforts to address peatland issues emerged in 2022 and 2023. Over the past two years we have been hard at work at the interconnected Rahesuo–Kaitoinsuo–Ilajansuo–Valkeasuo peatland complex, which includes the 700-hectare Haravasuo peatland area to the west. Restoration is now underway across all of these areas through a combination of innovative shared management of land concessions with a timber company that owns hundreds of thousands of hectares in Finland, and strategic land purchases. The so-called Rahesuo corridor or landscape totals 5000 hectares of interconnected ecosystems.

In summary, the waters of Lake Mekrijärvi are on the path to recovery. In general terms, peatland restoration keeps carbon in the ground, provides for important habitat and natural flood controls, and may restart carbon sinks. We have been tracking the CO_2 drawdown and methane outflows and link this with an understanding that peatland restoration is an effective restoration measure.

In the Koitajoki basin, restoration is achieving the goal of stopping harmful water pollution that has been affecting the lake and the river for over 80 years. While not all peatlands are yet restored, we have found the answer to the question we first asked in the 1980s: how can we stop pollution and harm from industrial land use? Even though full ecological recovery of many restored sites will take up to twenty years, the process is underway. In many areas the re-wetting of these damaged peatlands stops harmful CO_2 emissions on day one. Recovery has begun.

2.3. The Mekrijärvi Boat, Songs and Rediscovery of Knowledge

Ever since I was young and sat listening to the stories and oral histories of my aunt, father and uncle, I have wondered, what happened to us? As I grew up and learnt how epic poetry from Mekrijärvi influenced J.R.R. Tolkien and his Lord of the Rings, *my curiosity only intensified. International surveys routinely find Finns to be the happiest people on the planet–yet our traditional culture of the boreal forest is mostly gone, there are no old growth forests left, churned up peatlands leach mercury into our waters, hydroelectric power stations stop trout and extremely endangered land-locked salmon from migrating up the Koitajoki, our old singers have fallen into silence. How did a rune singing forest culture become, by 2024, the resource periphery of Europe? What happened?*

Figure 9. A model replica of the Mekrijärvi boat. National Board of Antiquities, used with permission

In 1846 Simana Sissonen sang the following epic poem (here as an extract):

Polvenhaava

Itse v[anha] V[äinämöinen]
teki tieolla venettä,
laati purtta laulamalla,
pani laian, lauloi virren,
pani toisen, lauloi toisen.
Uupui kolmea sanoa,
peripäätä pantaessa,
kokkoa kohottaessa.
Itse v[anha] V[äinämöinen]
vesti vuorella venettä,
kalkutteli kalliolla;
ei kirves kivehen koske,
eikä kalka kalliohon,
kirves liuskahti lihaan,
päähän polven V[äinämöi]sen.
Veri tuiskuna tulevi,
hurme hurstina putosi,
läikähti lähe punanen;
veri peitti marjan varvut,
hurme kattavi kanervat;
tuli tuska V[äinämöi]sen
pakko raavahan urohon:
huuti kerran suunsa täyen
päänsä päälle taivosehen;
ei tuolta apua tullut.
Tuo oil tuska V[äinämöi]sen,
pakko raavahan urohon:
huuti toisen suunsa täyen
maahan alle jalkojensa;
ei tuolta apua tullut
Vaan on tuska etc.
huuti vielä suunsa täyen
tuohon laajahan merehen,
Lapin maahan laukiahan,
Pohjan pitkähän povehen.
- - -

This passage of oral poetry is named *Wound to the Knee*. It is part of the larger Sampo epic cycle. Sissonen sings and describes the Karelian hero, Väinämöinen, building a boat. According to the song, the boat needs knowledge, songs, and 'words,' i.e., mythical incantations. As the boat is getting made, the hero hits himself with an ax. Blood spurts out of the wound. The hero yells out in pain and all sorts of adventures then ensue, taking the listener further into the epic cycle.

Of importance here are the themes of boats and healing. While swimming in Lake Mekrijärvi in the summer of 1980, a group of young boys found remnants of a boat. They went to the local research station at the time and alerted the lead scientist there that something strange had been found. From here emerged an episode that I refer to as a process of rediscovery of our traditions and connections to lake Mekrijärvi.

The Finnish Board of Antiquities and the Maritime Museum were alerted to the boat's discovery and dispatched an underwater archaeological team to the site where the remnants of the so-called "Mekrijärvi Boat" were spotted by the boys (Björn, 1995; Forssell, 1985).

Forssell (1985) reports that the boat was discovered by the boys in an 80 cm thick mud layer on the southern shore of the lake. When the archaeological team arrived at the site, they determined that 20–30 % of the original boat had been found.

From Forssell's account (1985) we can extract some of the characteristics of the Mekrijärvi boat. The bottom of the boat had been hollowed from an aspen and stretched. The stempost had been hollowed from a spruce. In total, a 280 cm long piece of the boat was discovered, but it would have been longer. The vessel's strakes were fastened with spruce root fibers and also contained tar that had been applied to the boat. In total 400 pieces of the boat were salvaged. The Mekrijärvi vessel is a five-piece boat including a hollowed out keel and hollowed stempost, sternpost, and two strakes. The whole boat's design bore a resemblance to the clinker boat-building technique. It was initially dated to 1500 CE.

If we consider the boat in the wider context of boreal boat innovation and design, similar boats have been discovered in Siberia (Luukkanen & Fitzhugh, 2020) and in Keuruu, Finland, in 1930.

The greatest innovation found in the design has to do with the strake technique. Including a second strake in order to raise the boat side height causes stempost and sternpost problems to emerge (Fig. 9 and 10). Dugout boats are hard to raise, as they are made from a single tree. The builder(s) of the Mekrijärvi Boat solved this problem by stretching an aspen log into a shape that enabled keel plank-style raising.

Forssell (1985) argues that Mekrijärvi may seem insignificant in comparison with other, larger lakes and watercourses in eastern Finland. However, if one looks at Lake Mekrijarvi and bears in mind that in bygone days light, shallow-draught rowing boats were used for long journeys, one can begin to see that the lake may have had a certain significance as a confluence of several waterways in the North Karelian lake district.

Figure 10. A model replica of the Mekrijärvi boat on its side. National Board of Antiquities, used with permission

The Mekrijärvi Boat is an innovative Siberian-related boat design– a fast and sleek boat, which would have enabled quick journeys across the Lake Mekrijärvi area and into the wider Koitajoki space. An old Finnish word, *uisko*, refers to this type of boat.

The discovery of this rather unique boat in Mekrijärvi, combined with the central role of boats in the oral poetry, links the region to the wider cultural continuum of northern Eurasia (Luukkonen & Fitzhugh, 2020). Just like the epic singing style of Mekrijärvi, which reached its known apex with the Sissonen Family, the boat indicates that the lake was a source and center for a culture that maintained good relations with its surrounding ecosystems and natural resources. The songs, as well as the hunting-fishing society, were able to develop endemic mechanisms of regulation and orderly governance of a boreal landscape consisting of peatlands, waters, and forests.

Things are emerging from the mists of collapsing time. We are now aware of the Mekrijärvi Boat and its symbolic value as a mechanism for place-based healing and recovery. The old poems from the lake point to the skills, knowledge, and central role of boats. In addition to the ecological restoration of the area, we have started conversations both with the Maritime Museum of Finland as well as with contemporary master boat builders in Karelia to learn more, and ultimately re-construct and renew the Mekrijärvi Boat (see earlier attempts and replicas in Björn, 1995).

While such artifacts and watercraft will not serve an identical purpose today as they did in 1500 CE, they are central to biocultural recovery. The boat, as well as the songs, are powerful mnemonic guides as we try to solve the puzzle of *how* the old people lived, *how* they chose their ways of being and transport, and *how* they utilized methods that solved the almost impossible problem of the stempost and sternpost.

Climate and ecological problems are a little bit like the problem of the stempost. The old people were clever enough to shape and bend the aspen dugout to deliver a higher, raised boat, thus significantly increasing its capacity to travel in waves, transport more cargo, and be a shift vessel. Just as they innovated to meet the needs of life on Lake Mekrijärvi, we are hopeful of providing solutions to the 'impossibilities' of our time.

2.4. Role of Unique River Seining

Growing up in western Finland on the shores of Lake Näsijärvi, I heard about seining: a communal fishing method that targeted schooling fish like vendace and whitefish. It had disappeared from where we lived by the 1940s. Visiting Koitajoki from the late 1970s onwards, Uncle Heikki would refer to seining, which was still on-going in some parts of the river system. As I got older, I wondered if it still was going on.

In the final example of Lake Mekrijärvi's revitalization, we turn to the role of river seining in the adjacent village of Ala-Koita, just 500 meters downstream of Mekrijärvi's shores. Central to this story is Reino Piitulainen, a river seiner from that community. It was his knowledge that finally enabled all of the components of the re-emergence of Lake Mekrijärvi to fall into place.

Figure 11. Reino Piitulainen (middle) and Karoliina Lehtimäki pull the new river seine, November 2023. Tero Mustonen in a boat in the back. Snowchange, 2024

Reino was born in the 1950s to a Karelian family that lived next to Mekrijärvi on the Koitajoki River. He garnered traditional knowledge of fisheries from his late father, including river seining, winter fish traps for burbot, and many other aspects of co-existence with the river.

In Reino's lifetime, the river has been subject to hydropower development and other dams, the mining and ditching of peatlands, and loss of water quality. These changes have had a particularly profound effect on populations of Koitajoki whitefish (Coregonus lavaretus).

Most of Lake Mekrijärvi's whitefish spawning areas are in front of or in close proximity to the village of Ala-Koita. As a salmonid fish, after spawning in late October and early November, whitefish require water of good quality and a highly oxygenated flow for survival. As the eggs hatch over the long boreal winter it is vital that enough oxygen flows to the eggs before they hatch in spring. If these conditions aren't present, the post-Ice Age lifecycle of these fish is threatened.

When mined or ditched, peatlands release organic matter, loading downstream areas and accumulating in spawning grounds. This deprives the whitefish eggs of the oxygen they need. This destructive cycle accelerated significantly in the 1970s to the 1990s.

During the 1990s, Reino contacted officials to report loss of water quality and organized meetings of the local fisheries bodies, who issued statements over many years to raise the alarm: the whitefish was dying. In response, fishery authorities banned river seining on Koitajoki. Reino and his community were devastated. A practice they and their forebears had carried out since time immemorial, and which certainly was not the source of the problem, was banned with little understanding by the state or regulatory bodies.

Reino decided to act. He invited the chair of the fisheries officials of North Karelia to see the river seining and to demonstrate that the problem was not the seining, but the peat mining. Officials came, they pulled a seine with Reino, but could not complete the pull, as the end of the seine was so filled with mud and peat that they could not bring the seine to shore.

The authorities saw room for improvement. An exception license was granted to Reino and a handful of remaining river seiners. They started to pull the nets again and were able to document, using their traditional knowledge and catch records, the status and trends of the whitefish. More importantly, seining helped to clean the whitefish spawning spots, enabling a recovery of reproduction habitats for the whitefish. This is achieved when the seine travels over the spawning site filled with organic matter and mixes and enables the organic loading to start moving again in the river. Repeated seining actions cleanse the site and oxygen-rich waters are able to flow into the area again.

By the 2010s, river seining was able to support a recovery and stocking program of the Koitajoki whitefish (Coregonus lavaretus) in the wider national interest. Spawning was successful on those spots where seining was conducted in an orderly fashion. The observations and population count of Reino and the seiners provided accurate and important knowledge and assistance to scientists documenting the whitefish migration in the remaining undammed parts of Koitajoki and Lake Mekrijärvi (Huuskonen et al., 2012).

In the 2020s, Reino found himself with a new problem: most of his colleagues had either died, left, or were too old to maintain the river seining traditions that had started to enable the recovery of the whitefish. Snowchange had by this time begun restoring some of the peatlands and documenting traditional knowledge with Reino and around Lake Mekrijärvi (Mustonen & Mustonen, 2017). A new idea emerged from this existing collaboration–what if we could enable a new cohort of river seiners to continue the practice and methods of observing stocks and cleaning the spawning sites?

We proposed to Reino that he train new seiners. Two younger fishers working for Snowchange, Lauri and Karoliina, agreed to help out. We enabled them to participate in a master-apprentice program with Reino. This included installing and using traditional winter fish traps for burbot (another important indicator species for water quality, Fig. 12.), making a new, better river seine by hand, and finally, immersion in seining on the river, which remains one of the only ways to restore underwater spawning areas (Fig. 11).

For over a year, Lauri and Karoliina worked under the watchful eye of Reino to install the winter fish traps, then make a river seine. In September 2023, we held the first pull of the new seine by younger fishers on river Koitajoki. We caught whitefish and positively affected several spawning sites.

Figure 12. Revitalising traditional winter fish traps – Karoliina Lehtimäki on the left, Reino Piitulainen in the middle, and Lauri Hämäläinen on the right. Snowchange, 2024

Coming full circle from my own childhood years and inspired by hints from Heikki that some seining survived in the Koitajoki area, we rediscovered a central practice that helps the waters and fish *and* feeds local people. Around the world in fisheries management, the act of fishing, i.e., removal of fish from an ecosystem, is seen as an activity that must be regulated from the top down. This is what the state officials on Koitajoki did at first when the whitefish numbers decreased.

Reino Piitulainen, whom we can call a Karelian Elder, believed in his river, his fish, and his practice. As both science (Huuskonen et al., 2012) and traditional knowledge (Mustonen & Mustonen, 2017) have now demonstrated, the outlook for whitefish is improving because of a practice that has emerged from and belongs in the Lake Mekrijärvi and Koitajoki Basin. The transmission of knowledge to younger seiners is central to maintaining this pathway of recovery. Much like the case of the Mekrijärvi Boat, the key lesson from the revitalization of river seining is encapsulated by an old saying: if the shoe fits, wear it.

3. Conclusions – Reflection on Traditional Land Governance

In 1845, Simana Sissonen sang a song on Lake Mekrijärvi:

Ottipa nuoita lastuloita,
Meni voitehen tekohon
Yheksän mer[en ylitse],
Yli puolen k[ymmenettä],
Keitti päivän, keitti toisen,
Keitti päivän kolmanneni,
Saap' on voi'e valmihiksi.
Astu matkoa vähäsen,
Kävi tietä pikkuruisen,
Haapa vastahan tulevi;
Tuon murha murenti poikki,
Kaikki kahtia hajotti.
Voiti tuolla voitehella,
Katsoi tuolla katsomella,
Tokkos on näissä voitehissa
Vi'an päälle vietävätä,
Vammoille valettavata,
Miehen tuoja Tuonelasta,
Haavan yhtehen pareta,
Haapa yhtehen parensi,
Niinkuin ?h?yhmähän metehen.
Menipä luokse Väinämöisen,
Voiti tuolla voitehella,
Katso tuolla katsomella,
Tekipä yöllä terveheksi,
Päivällä imanteheksi,
Verhon päivällä veteli,
Yöllä kalvon kasvatteli.

This song discusses the process of healing a wound. Towards the end of this epic song-snippet, the wound that was a threat is healed and a membrane has grown over it. Healing has begun.

Sissonen’s song is a fitting metaphor for the reemergence, rewilding, and restoration of Lake

Mekrijärvi, both in cultural and ecological terms. In this article, I have shared, partially from a personal perspective and partially from that of an operational agent in the field, how we have been re-imagining the socio-ecological complex of Lake Mekrijärvi. It is important to say that, unlike some romantic views of the past, which evoke a longing for a time that never was, we are committed to being as realistic and truthful as possible.

The process began with an understanding that there is a problem–the lake and the river are doing poorly. We needed to investigate why this was the case. On top of the discoveries made about direct, human-induced impacts, we worked with scientists *and* traditional knowledge holders to discover and demonstrate how climate change is compounding other impacts on the lake ecosystem. This impact is visible in statistical ice data (Fig. 13):

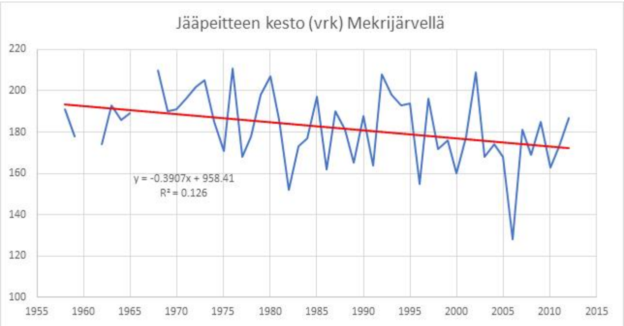


Figure 13. Change of ice cover in Lake Mekrijärvi from 1955 to 2015. Vertical axis: number of days of ice-cover on the lake. Horizontal axis: year

In 1955, Lake Mekrijärvi had ice cover for close to 200 days. This figure was down to 170 days by the 2000s, with lows of 130 days or less in bad years. The main driver of this change are increases in mean temperature resulting from human-induced climate change, which influences boreal and Arctic ecosystems 3-6 times more than southern latitudes (IPCC, 2022).

We have enabled landscape-level restoration of peatlands, new conservation areas, ecological corridors, and a first look at the whole lake catchment to determine mechanisms of recovery that will address the loss of habitat and poor water quality. Based on the monitoring data we have gathered, recovering habitats for birds, and carbon measurements, we know the basin is on the mend.

In order to understand the past, with its relative autonomy, high culture of epic poetry, and associated boreal hunting-fishing society, we immersed ourselves in the old songs. During the oral history work, we heard that a unique boat had been discovered on Lake Mekrijärvi. By working with scientific records and the Maritime Museum of Finland, we were able to position the find within a cultural complex that is connected with wider Northern Eurasian traditions, boats, and practices (Luukkanen & Fitshugh, 2020). More specifically, the ‘problem’ of the stempost and the way the old people had solved it on the boat inspired us to believe, or rather, to trust, that specific, place-based solutions will enable breakthroughs as we face contemporary problems.

Metaphorically, the journey ended in Reino’s house. By immersing ourselves in his oral histories, slowly discovering his quiet but persistent belief and work for river seining and the whitefish, we saw the solutions; they were directly in front of us.

Karoliina, Lauri, Reino, and all of our team moved fast to make a new seine. It is one of the most complex pieces of fishing gear you can imagine. The river seine has very specific dimensions. The most important part is the end of the seine. It needs to be made with great precision to enable fishing to occur in the right way. Now, Karoliina and Lauri, two young fishers, are mastering this tradition. We can renew and help the whitefish to go on, to cycle through our rivers and lakes, living as they have always done.

Seining provides us with a map in which the outlines of the past on Lake Mekrijärvi become visible. We know roughly how the old people did it, where they did it, and the role it, perhaps surprisingly, played in the maintenance of whitefish reproduction and spawning. The role of the seine is so central to our lives here in these forests, on these waters, that it is reflected in Finnish-Karelian starlore and epic poetry. Where you see the Big Dipper (Ursa major), we see *otava*–a seine.

Lake Mekrijärvi is, after a century of loss and damages, re-emergent (Mustonen, Scherer & Kelleher, 2022). It is once again a cultural hub for those of us who value its quiet messages and teachings. It is recovering, healing, like in the song Sissonen sang in 1845. In other words, it is once again becoming free.

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BEYOND THE HUMAN: CROSSOVERS FOR AN ONTO-EPISTEMOLOGICAL BIFURCATION*

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Abstract:
Building upon recent studies in new materialisms and feminist critical posthumanism with a focus on human and more-than-human relationships, this paper examines how the posthuman paradigm, by postulating the queering of identit(ies) via entanglement with the more-than-human (including technology), and by offering a critical examination of diverse modes of existence within a broader ecological context, can foster more inclusive and ethically sound ways of being in the world. Although posthumanism encompasses a wide range of perspectives and theories, including transhumanism, at its core, it challenges traditional notions of humanism, blurring the boundaries between what is human and what is more-than-human, while calling for a revaluation of anthropocentric, onto-epistemological, and ethical frameworks. This paper mobilises the framework and methodology of composting-with-care as an analytical tool to foster epistemic diversity, from quantum field theory to speculative fabulation, in the examination of the issue concerning human identity. It concludes by proposing a view where the self is not confined to the individual human but emerges through interactions (and intra-actions) with the world(s) of which the human is part, acknowledging the agency and influence of actors beyond the human on identity formation.

Key words: human identity, more-than-human, speculative fabulation, epistemic diversity, composting-with-care.

1. Introduction: We Have Never Been Human

Sometimes words are counterproductive because they tend to fit pre-existing schemata. Metaphors, though, have the power to create new realities, renew values, and change history. Language is a Pharmakon.[1] This paper is about problematising the very notion of a human identity and about the need to shift current worldviews regarding the technofixes and the techno-apocalypses of the Anthropocene. Drawing from Donna Haraway's figuration of a compost society (2016), in which different species form alliances akin to a symbiotic body politic, we imagine a composting-with-care scenario[2] in which

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[1] Pharmakon in the sense of language as a technology having both the qualities of a toxin and a remedy in Derrida's analysis of Plato's *Phaedrus Dialogue* (Derrida, 1981). In turn, Bernard Stiegler (2013) employs the term Pharmakon to assess technological innovation. On the one hand, the toxic qualities of technology are associated with computational capitalism leading to addiction and a loss of *'savoirs'* and on the other, depending on the context, which implies certain knowledge-ability, it can have healing qualities, for example, in participatory democracy through annotation tools.

[2] Composting-with-care is an ongoing work–the fruit of diverse collaborations with artist Lucia Alvarez La Piñona and scholars Sinead MacDonald and Jye O' Sullivan (TU Dublin), within the framework of two Marie Curie Rise

we tend to divergent, discarded concepts and narratives in order to alter prevalent human-centred discussions.

Composting is akin to nurturing life within our discarded ideas. It is a continuous action of turning and returning (recycling) that renovates our ways of thinking and acting. In other words, the practice of composting, as highlighted in Hamilton and Neimanis (2018), demands meticulousness in the selection of narratives, emphasising the relevance of each substrate, of paying attention to diversity, and of continuously interrogating overlooked stories–for example, revealing the power dynamics in the politics of citation (Hamilton & Neimanis, 2018, p. 503). Understanding care as labour, composting-with-care also involves melding varied elements (ingredients), dedicating time and effort toward generating diverse knowledges, and thereby fostering (epistemic) diversity (Toribio-Roura, 2022).

Departing from current conceptualisations of human identity, this approach is concerned with other theorisations of the post-natural condition in relation to human identity, understood as the critique of artificial binaries between humans and beyond: ‘human/nature,’ ‘human/non-human,’ ‘human/other-than-human,’ ‘human/more-than-human,’ ‘human/inhuman,’ and so on. In other words, it advocates for a reconsideration of how we perceive and categorise these different elements in our conceptualisations and origin stories. In this vision, the remedy’s side of the Pharmakon is the problematisation of deeply ingrained patterns of knowledge creation, which limit our ability to envision alternative futures. By changing the prevalent focus on human centrality and by challenging the language rooted in capitalist ideals that marginalise non-human entities, the possibility of different ‘Anthropocenes’ emerges. Essentially, the choice of our narratives and the language we use significantly impact how we perceive and understand the world.

In this view, knowledge is generated through the frictional encounter between different perspectives beyond the human, with the human, beyond science, with science, beyond philosophy, with philosophy, and so on. Unlike algorithmic governance, which aims to eliminate conflict or inconsistencies, and consequently leads to bias, perpetuating inequalities and limiting individual agency (Morozov, 2013, p. 245), these frictions are not rough edges to be smoothed or discrepancies to be reduced. It is precisely the frictional nature of the encounter itself that is of value and should be cared for as a site of knowledge generation and regeneration. By valuing differences, we foster the epistemic diversity necessary to respond to the challenges we share as a planetary ecology.

1.1. Structure

The paper is organised into three parts and a concluding statement. In the first part, the question concerning human identity is discussed and problematised. After a brief review of historical conceptions of identity, limited by the scope of the article, the author mobilises composting-with-care as an analytical tool to criticise the Eurocentric model of identity. Using a diversity of theorisations from different disciplines (from philosophy of technology to quantum field theory) and onto-epistemological positions, human identity is queered through the friction with these ‘other’ knowledges.

In the second part, the concept of human identity is decomposed and recalibrated through the lens of critical posthuman, new materialist, and feminist scholarship, confronting the artificial alterity between what is considered human and what is considered otherwise. Karen Barad’s notion of the ‘inhuman’ is discussed to further problematise the inclusions and exclusions created by these binaries and introduce the question of ethics into the equation.

In the third part, the concept of human identity is recomposed through transdisciplinary crossovers between embodiment, the sciences, and the arts, and as an intricate entanglement of more-than-human ecologies. The novel *Cadáver Exquisito* (2017), by Argentinian author Agustina Bazterrica, translated into English as *Tender Is the Flesh,* is analysed to demonstrate how speculative storytelling, along with science ‘friction’ is a valid pedagogical and transformative tool. By allowing a myriad of new configurations of places, times, matters, and meanings, speculative fabulations create the conditions of possibility for other worlds to exist (Haraway, 2016, p. 1). These contribute to the shaping of future scenarios of inclusion, thus enabling the departure from prevailing anthropocentric, technoscientific, and economic worldviews, thereby facilitating the reconfiguration of harmful knowledge paradigms into unfamiliar and innovative arrangements.

The article concludes with the rejection of the anthropocentric individualistic model of human

projects: Real Smart Cities and Networking Ecologically Smart Territories and the European Culture and Technology Lab of the European University of Technology.

identity and advocates for a relational model instead. In this view, the world appears materially real through continuous intra-actions between human and more-than-human entities and their entangled intra-relations. Following Karen Barad's insights on the 'inhuman' as an integral part of existence and underscoring its interconnectedness with what we call the human, the paper suggests that our existence and ethical obligations are bound up with what is beyond the human.

2. The Question Concerning Identity

Identity is a battlefield. What identity means or how it is constituted is a complex and difficult subject in a world where self-knowledge can only ever be a situational and contingent aspiration. Identity is rooted in the different ontologies and epistemologies of the self, history, and cultural memory (Arnaud, 2006; Heehs, 2013; Miller, 2002; Smith & Watson, 2001). We might think that a simple definition of identity is that of a 'self' attempting to constitute 'himself' (Heehs, 2013, p. 6). However, the self is a philosophical category that has experienced various conceptualisations throughout the history of Western philosophical thought (Martin & Barresi, 2008; Smith & Watson, 2001; Steiner & Yang, 2004). Notions of selfhood and identity have significantly shifted along with historical periods influenced by and influencing the ways we perceive, construct, and showcase identity as individuals and as social human subjects (Arnaud, 2006; Heehs, 2013; Martin & Barresi, 2008).

In Classical Greece, Plato, Aristotle, and the Materialistic Atomists planted the seeds for future theories about the self in the Western world, and further milestones were laid later by the Christian Churches and Medieval and Renaissance philosophy until the 17th century, when a major transition from philosophical and religious conceptualisations of the self gave way to social and scientific notions of personal identity (Arnaud, 2006; Blumenthal, 1996; Martin & Barresi, 2008). This trend has continued until the present day, incorporating insights from anthropology, psychology, and other disciplines within the Humanities and Social Sciences, such as cultural studies or queer theory (Cardenas, 2010; Papacharissi, 2011; Pink, 2013; Turkle, 1996; Wajcman, 2010; Van Zoonen, 2013).

During the 20th century, the notion of a self was challenged by thinkers like Foucault and Derrida who problematised the very existence of personal identity by positioning the self in the field of discourse (Derrida, 1970; Foucault, 1988; Smith & Watson, 2001). The self, by falling apart through postmodern deconstruction, created the possibility for fiction. Therefore, historically constituted and finally set into pieces, one might think that the self has become pure subjectivity, ontologically different from the body, and a form rather than a substance that constitutes itself through fashioning practices (or technologies of the self) that are initially proposed, suggested, or imposed by culture and society (Foucault, 1988; Heehs, 2013). Nevertheless, at the basis of the construction of identity remains the capacity of 'making sense' through narration, a claim supported by psychological studies on dysnarrativia (the inability to engage with stories), which indicate that the condition impairs the sense of selfhood (Bruner, 2003, p. 86).

2.1. From the Pharmacology of Identity to Composting-with-Care

Identity is constructed through the tools that are available to us. The current scenario of digital ubiquity offers these resources while operating in a context of both historical continuity and change. The pairing of identity and digital technologies, for instance through social media platforms, also has the quality of a Pharmakon, as devised by Bernard Stiegler (Stiegler, 1998; Stiegler, 2013), of being both a poison and a cure. On the one hand, these pairing functions as a cure capable of liberating us from the constraints of the past, thus being emancipatory. For example, it gives many women control over the presentation of their bodies and empowers them. However, the opposite (falling prey to the pressures of objectification) can also be true, and this has a 'poisonous,' disempowering effect. As Bernard Stiegler suggests, there is a need for a pharmacology of our way of living to counteract the toxic effects of technical inventions that operate at a speed which outpaces cultural adaptation. For Stiegler, technologies are not inherently harmful, but they are in the context of techno-capitalism in which they operate (Stiegler, 1998, p. 15; Stiegler, 2019, p. 7). Identities and technologies are in constant movement, coevolving and interacting with socio-political, economic, and cultural contexts, including that of embodied experience. The question is, if humans have extended their organs and externalised their memory through technical objects (e.g., cars, smartphones, social platforms, AI), where, then, are the limits of human identity drawn?

From cave paintings to the internet, representations of the self abound and remain testimonials of the deep human yearning to 'know thyself.' Expressions of the self on digital platforms remain exercises in sense-making, emerging from a will to form (represent) and a will to tell (share), and therefore, they are as much reflective as they are performative. Digital platforms occupy the position of being the newest preferred site to render our sense of selfhood and, due to their ubiquity, contribute to the normalisation of public disclosure.

Among the toxic uses of digital technologies of the self, stand-out abuses include the use of AI technologies in faking identities without consent. Recent examples are the fake Balenciaga of Pope Francis and the AI-generated images of naked girls and young women from a small town in the South of Spain that emerged and circulated on social media in 2023. If technological progress has brought about a myriad of new possibilities, it has also introduced problems derived from the blurring of boundaries between human reflectivity and human instrumentalization–in other words, between making sense and becoming commodities to be consumed.

Visions of the self and identity are many and varied, but looking at Western thought, what transpires is that identity is understood in individualistic terms and is mainly shaped by personal achievements, autonomy, and self-expression. In any case, the self remains at the core of human(centric) preoccupation. But this can only be a partial vision of identity. According to Klimstra and Adams (2021), there is a need for a broader, more inclusive approach to understanding identity. Research on personal identity has been predominantly Western-centric, neglecting diverse perspectives from other global regions that might not be understood using Western-based models.

Without renouncing this history of identity, this is not the story I want to tell. Instead, I would like to go back to the origins. I would like to move beyond *personal* identity and focus on the concept of *human* identity itself as a universal category. Let's say we are not who we think we are. Karen Barad notes that in quantum field theory, the very notion of identity, of 'itself,' is radically queered in the electron (Barad, 2012, p. 211). When electrons touch (e.g., when I type on the keyboard with the tips of my fingers), this creates an endless chain of intra-actions[3] and interactions where every level of touch is connected to all possible others, suggesting that matter, at its smallest level, is in constant contact with itself and with an infinite variety of possibilities and histories. This constant interaction of matter challenges the very notion of a self as a separate and fixed entity since a self is dispersed in terms of being and time. In this view, identity is interconnected and constantly evolving along with everything else, and this has implications for how we perceive ourselves and our relationship with the world.

For Barad, quantum field theory radically deconstructs classical ontology for the sake of an ontology of indeterminacy. What we thought was (empty) space, the void, is not, but is rather borderless and full of possibilities. Particles are in touch with themselves and connected to the virtual particles filling space, making them part of it. From this perspective, any identity dissolves into countless possibilities in radical openness. But this is not the end of the story since there are many things we still do not understand–what is unseen, what is ineffable, which we must yet take into consideration. In the same way, desire cannot be eliminated from the core of being since it is threaded through it (Barad, 2012, p. 213).

Let's say, then, that we are not the centre of the world but are dissolved within the world. Let's say there is no such thing as a universal human identity in the same way that there is no universal technology, as Yuk Hui (2016) has demonstrated. As Hui does with technology, I problematise the very notion of human identity and suggest the importance of looking into the local conditions and the context in which individuations are produced and reproduced, beyond cultural variations, beyond humanness. This problematisation aims to challenge traditional understandings of human identity in philosophy, psychology, anthropology, and history in the Western world, where identity is constructed through alterity, or in other words, configured through the separation and differentiation between a 'self' and an 'other,' imposing a limit between what we are and what others are or ought to be.

Still following Hui, when we make the idea of being human into something universal, ignoring differences and affinities in culture and nature, it becomes a meaningless and empty concept. To move forward from this problem, we need to challenge the illusion created by the idea of a universal

[3] Karen Barad coined the term 'intra-action' to emphasise the inseparability and co-constitution of entities in a relationship challenging the conception of pre-existing separate identities implied by the term 'interaction.'

human identity inherited from Eurocentric models and influenced by modernisation processes that have made different cultures and histories follow the same path as Western modernity due to technology and globalisation (Hui, 2020, p. 74).

Hui argues that our current global civilisation, sedimented on the thought of the European Illustration, demands to be decomposed and diversified. Globalisation was a process of technological colonisation and synchronisation that made different historical temporalities converge in the sequence: Premodernity-Modernity-Postmodernity-Apocalypse. The issue that this mono-technical culture entails is that it prioritises specific forms of knowledge linked to the desire for domination–with devastating consequences in terms of the degradation of life on the planet (Hui, 2020, p. 13). The problem with this epistemic monoculture is that it situates the human (or rather, some privileged humans) at the centre and subordinates everything else– i.e., 'lesser- humans' and 'non-humans– to the transhumanist fantasy of the Homo Deus.

2.1.1.Reconfiguring Identit(ies) through Composting-with-Care

In a similar vein, I propose composting-with-care as a strategy for fostering epistemic diversity to make way for different dynamics among humans and between humans and non-human agents. Composting-with-care is a speculative method inspired by symbiogenesis (see Margulis, 1967), and applied to knowledge systems which aim to challenge the constraints of human-centric knowledge within a multispecies framework. It suggests embracing symbiotic relationships with diverse forms of knowledge beyond the human realm, aiming to transcend these limitations–for example, probing the potential of mutualism or commensalism (forms of symbiosis) concerning identity, technology, or shared environments. With this approach, I am calling for the establishment of a pluralistic ecology of knowledge(s) rooted in human and more-than-human material knowledge(s) to bifurcate from the current disabling anthropocentric model of knowledge creation and move towards a symbiotic model of liveability.

It matters what knowledge systems we use to tell our stories. I argue that opening the possibility for new vocabularies and practices with care can provide us with the necessary vision to respond to current challenges. In other words, composting serves as an inclusive speculative tool, nurturing alternative stories of the future, while instilling the conditions for their possibility. Using creative thought and the problematisation of hegemonic discourses and knowledge naturalisations, composting aims to disrupt what Hui has termed the Premodernity-Modernity-Postmodernity-Apocalypse sequence mentioned above to which we seem doomed if we continue like this. The subsequent sections aim to reassess human identity within the composting framework, thereby advocating for a critical deviation from the sequence of doom.

3. The Question Concerning the Human and the Non-human

In 1967, Lynn Margulis gave human identity a big blow contesting both the narrative of individuality and that of human exceptionalism through the deployment of the concept of symbiogenesis. In the book, *When Species Meet* (2008), Donna Haraway put forward the provocative idea that we have never been human, drawing attention to the prevalence of different organisms, such as microbes, bacteria, and fungi, outnumbering human cells within our bodies. Already in the *Cyborg Manifesto* (1991), Haraway noted that evolution had blurred the boundaries between the animal and the human and between the natural and the artificial. Proposing a shift away from essentialisms and the breakdown of the human-animal-machine division, Haraway advocated for a world composed of affinities rather than individual identities.

Indeed, humans, far from being individuals, are 'dividual' holobionts. According to Lynn Chiu and Scott Gilbert (2015), holobionts are living beings composed of multiple species of persistent symbionts,[4] and they differ from individual organisms because they are not governed by a single genome. Instead, they function as units formed through relationships among different species. The interactions between humans and their symbiotic microbes mutually shape developmental, ecological, and evolutionary processes, fundamentally constructing shared environments and developmental pathways. These processes demonstrate the intertwined and interdependent nature of their relationships. An example analysed by the authors is how mother, foetus, and symbiotic microbial communities construct the con-

[4] Symbionts are organisms that engage in a long-term interaction with a host organism. This relationship can be mutualistic, commensalistic, or parasitic.

ditions for the development and reproduction of one another (Chiu & Gilbert, 2015, p. 191).

In turn, Haraway's manifesto is full of irony, which she uses as a rhetorical strategy and a political tool to draw attention to the shifting sands on which the conception of the human is built. In the *Manifesto*, the cyborg is the core metaphor of an epoch dominated by technology. With the cyborg figuration, Haraway highlighted the ongoing transformations in our species caused by advancing technological and scientific progress. These innovations are swiftly altering our understanding of human identity. She argued for embracing the blurring of boundaries between human and machine, nature and culture, advocating for finding pleasure in this ambiguity while emphasising the responsibility for how these boundaries are shaped or defined. A world of cyborg species and biogenetics dislocates the traditional humanistic unity of the embodied human and necessarily signals a bifurcation from anthropocentrism in favour of a new focus on the interdependence (and intra-dependence) between different levels of materiality (e.g., the quantic, the symbolic, and the biocultural) in the making of a new politics of identity.

Various feminist thinkers, including Karen Barad (2012), Donna Haraway (2016), Rosi Braidotti (2022), and Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) to name only a few, argue that the Anthropocene tends to generalise humanity, overlooking significant differences among humans and the intricate relationships between technology, humans, and non-human entities. The focus of their critique is on reimagining human identity within a framework of diverse knowledge systems, advocating for a critical reexamination of prevailing practices.

In Posthuman and New Materialist scholarship, concepts such as 'other-than human,' 'more-than-human,' and 'inhuman' have been gaining momentum. Although with slight differences in their definitions, oftentimes these terms are used indistinguishably. They all reject the centrality of the Anthropos in a multispecies framework and make visible the fact that, in a relational context of identity, there are no such categories as 'only-human' or 'only-non-human.' This perspective enables and enhances our understanding of these connections. It views the more-than-human as a vast interconnected network where humans are merely a small element in a system.

For example, this perspective rejects the idea of exclusive care practices directed solely towards humans on the grounds that other living and non-living entities are always intertwined in the process in some way. Indeed, with his actor -network theory, Bruno Latour (2007) has made evident the involvement of non-human actors in human actions. According to this theory, a person's embodied experience is managed and assembled through the position it occupies in a network of natural, technical, epistemological, and material phenomena. In this sense, every actor interacts, affects, and is affected by human and non-human actants.

Karen Barad (2012, pp. 210-212), for her part, wonders if only by facing the 'inhuman'– understood as the indeterminate non/being, non/becoming of mattering and not mattering–can we truly confront our humanity. With the inhuman, Barad challenges the notions of inclusion and exclusion in multispecies entanglements. Instead, she suggests confronting the edges of what we consider included or excluded–in other words, the boundaries of what matters and what does not.

By facing the unknown and uncertain parts of existence (the inhuman), we might develop a deeper ethical understanding. Barad's inhuman is not about cruelty or lacking compassion, as if compassion were essentially and exclusively human; rather, it concerns the undefined parts of existence. It proposes that by acknowledging these uncertain aspects within ourselves, we may become more compassionate, able to suffer together and feel empathy. In essence, it asks us to consider if our ability to care and respond might come from embracing the aspects of the unknown within us.

Reconnecting with the argument of the queering of identity from the perspective of quantum field theory (previous section), Barad makes a distinction between what is 'non-human' and what is 'inhuman.' While the 'non-human' is differentially co-constituted together with the human (e.g., microbiota, technology), the 'inhuman' goes deeper. It is not just about what is genetically built as 'other,' and therefore understood through alterity. It is a 'special feeling' that exists in the spaces between all the different things we think of as separate from us. This feeling is not limited by the divisions we create; instead, it flows through these divisions, making everything more interconnected and alive. Essentially, it is about the lively indeterminacy that exists within the boundaries we set between different things:

> I think of the inhuman as an infinite intimacy that touches the very nature of touch, that which holds open the space of the liveliness of

> indeterminacies that bleed through the cuts and inhabit the between of particular entanglements (Barad, 2012, p. 211).

Similarly to Margulis's symbiogenesis, Barad's quantum indeterminacies also disrupt any notion of human identity, not only by deconstructing the metaphysics of presence and individualism, but also through the possibility of separating them. The question is, how do we get in touch with the abyss within–with the indeterminate?

The force of imagination, translated into creative expression, is capable of transporting us into fanciful worlds, and might just be one of the possible access portals. Others might be linked to mathematics, musical notations, or spirituality like meditation or shamanic rituals and/or the use of psychotropics. Getting in touch with the inhuman, which therefore we are, can take various shapes.

In the following section, I will delve into the unknown by composting science fiction, or more specifically, speculative fabulation, into the discussion. This practice of the human imagination offers a means to grapple with the blind corners of ourselves and our current models of living and knowing while presenting alternative approaches to contemporary socio-political, environmental, and economic challenges.

4. Crossovers for an Onto-epistemological Bifurcation

> It never occurred to you what it would be like if instead of hands you had claws, or roots, or fins. What would it be like if the only way to live was in silence, or letting out murmurs, or screams of pleasure, or pain, or fear? If there were no words and the soul of each living thing was measured by the intensity of which it is capable once it is released?[5] – Claudia Masin, poet, quoted in Agustina Bazterrica, *Diecinueve Garras y un Pájaro Oscuro* (2020, p. 3).

What is the price of an only-human world?–a world without others? How can we tell a different story of the Anthropocene that challenges hegemonic human-centred ontologies and epistemologies and that includes the more-than-human? I argue that the basis for an onto-epistemological bifurcation can be found in transdisciplinary crossovers between embodiment, the sciences, and the arts–in particular, the previously mentioned work of Lynn Margulis on symbiogenesis, which challenges the notion of human centrality, along with new materialist feminist and earth-bound cosmologies that provide insights into how humans are interconnected with a variety of techno-scientific-biological configurations. The Anthropocene is a grand narrative that, so far, has been constructed by fetishising the human and developed through Western-centred imaginaries fed with artificial binaries (man-animal, man-nature, man-machine) and a stable notion of climate change (e.g., according to human criteria of seasonal change). These dualisms are linked to a system of logic that to thrive must isolate others (women, BIPOC individuals, workers, animals…), whose task is to mirror the self.

Posthuman Feminism has been crucial in affirmatively approaching the Anthropocene, bringing to the fore situated knowledges and rendering visible what Braidotti calls the "missing people humanities" (2019, p. 49). For example, Donna Haraway (2016) proposes replacing the human-centred Anthropocene with the *Chthulucene*, characterised by the entanglement between humans and other species and entities, emphasising the importance of multispecies storytelling and the ability to respond ethically as a way of shaping a more inclusive and socially just world.

Vinciane Depret, in *What Would Animals Say if We Asked the Right Questions?* (2016) and *Autobiography of an Octopus* (2021), figures out other ways of being in the world through more-than-human perspectives. Joanna Zylinska (2014) explores non-human agency and creativity in photography and visual culture, advocating for a more-than-human ethics and opening new possibilities for coexistence, while Claire Colebrook's (2014) exploration of Anthropocene counterfactuals seeks to disrupt the entrenched patterns of thinking that underlie a limited understanding of the Anthropocene itself. All these works echo earth-bound perspectives such as Sumak Kawsay[6] that reject hierarchies between the human and more-than-human, offering

[5] My translation, from the original in Spanish.

[6] Originating from Bolivia and Ecuador, Sumak Kawsay is a worldview that defines how to live in harmony with all forms of existence. It proposes a particular relationship between humans and more-than-humans in which individuality must submit to the principles of collective responsibility and ethical commitment. Sumak Kawsay strategy consists of cultivating a series of knowledges, *'saberes,'* such as knowing how to eat well, how to think well, how to love well, and so on.

compelling alternatives to dominant technoscientific, anthropocentric frameworks.

Feminist, new materialist, posthuman, and indigenous critiques call for the need to recalibrate humanities in response to societal biases and challenges arising from anthropogenic actions. They advocate for a post-disciplinary approach: 'the humanities of the compost,' which acknowledges the interconnections between human cultures and non-human natures, aiming to bridge the nature-culture divide and address the complex biosocial challenges faced by contemporary society through a feminist lens.

4.1. Disrupting the Human through Speculative Fabulation

In her *Camille Stories* (2016a, p. 134), Donna Haraway illustrates the society of compost. In the story, life is presented as intricate entanglements of more-than-human ecologies. She proposes speculative storytelling (speculative fabulation) as a transformative tool, emphasising the importance of narratives in shaping future scenarios of inclusion. In this approach, speculative fabulation (SF) enables a departure from prevailing anthropocentric, technoscientific, and economic worldviews, thereby facilitating the reconfiguration of harmful human-driven activities. In this sense, SF blends elements of science fiction storytelling with critical analysis, allowing for a reshaping of established knowledge paradigms into unfamiliar and innovative configurations. While these narratives are rooted in fiction, they collaborate with empirical knowledge systems to yield unique and unconventional insights, ultimately offering alternative lenses through which to perceive our world and build a better future for everybody.

The essence of SF lies in challenging traditional boundaries that segregate humans, animals, and technologies, thereby contesting the human-centric perspective that often sidelines non-human entities. These speculative fabulations prompt us to contemplate the agency and interconnectedness of diverse forms of existence, fostering a more inclusive and ethically sound approach to our relationships with more-than-human entities, including technology. By underscoring the potential for alternative narratives, we anticipate that human-driven activities can be reimagined to better align with the intricate web of relationships that constitute our world.

To continue moving forward in the sequence of doom (Premodernity-Modernity-Postmodernity-Apocalypse), the trends in human identity indicate a loss of (economical) value in terms of the human as labour. Humans might still be valuable collectively (for example, as voters), but they will lose their agency to external algorithms that will know them better than they know themselves, and therefore make important decisions for them (e.g., what to consume, who to marry, etc.). A minority of upgraded humans will remain a mystery to the algorithm, and these superhumans will dominate the rest through algorithmic governmentality (Harari, 2017). Faithful to the 'law of alterity,' the rest will become an inferior caste–that is, as long as another pandemic, more deadly than Covid-19, does not come and wipe out all non-human animals, as in Agustina Bazterrica's novel *Cadáver Exquisito* (2017).

In this fiction, in the not-too-distant future, the world as we know it radically changes when a virus that affects animals prevents their consumption and humans begin to be raised for food. The story shows the dynamics of power and class stratification and the use of language as an instrument to impose social order. The work deals with human identity and the question of whether the human culture of violence and abuse is inescapable, not only in the event of violent action, but also in the universe of words woven around it–the network of words that hurt, tear apart, kill, and annul another being and to which we are oftentimes indifferent or blind.

Cadáver Exquisito questions the naturalisation of certain ideas and practices that despite being violent, abusive, and unjust are perpetuated under the questionable pretence of human exceptionality–for example, how we think about others (humans, animals, nature) as resources and/or threats instead of kin. The belief in human centrality, and therefore in human beings' entitlement to hurt, kill, and dispose of others, stems from this fundamental onto-epistemological error.

In the story, 'lesser humans' are 'processed' like cattle in an industrial farming operation. The parallelism with current farming practices is clear; for example, humans deemed as 'food animals' are never referred to as 'humans,' they are referred to as 'heads' instead. Heads are kept in isolation during their early childhood when their vocal cords are removed to avoid conflicts in the future. Then, they are crammed into pens, fattened, and medicated until they reach the right size and age to be sent in crowded transports to the slaughterhouse.

The fate of breeding females is even worse. Their arms and legs are amputated to optimise the space in the breeding crates and to prevent infanticide. They are artificially inseminated, and their genes are manipulated to produce the best quality meat in the shortest time. Having no voice does not impede females from knowing what awaits their offspring, and they would do anything to spare them the pain. Without limbs, the only resource left to pregnant women is to starve themselves to death, but the sophisticated technology of force-feeding has managed to overcome this problem. There is no way out.

But there are many ways in. A misplaced word, a gesture that is misinterpreted, any small transgression can turn the perpetrator into a victim in one fell swoop. Oftentimes, cruelty towards heads is taken as proof of alterity, and therefore a guarantee of survival for the aggressor. The word ‘cannibalism’ is forbidden under penalty of death. Instead, human meat is referred to as ‘special meat,’ and its nutritional values are displayed with great fanfare in television advertisements and supermarkets. The advertisements invariably consist of a smiling, old-fashioned, middle-class housewife serving a special meat dish to her wonderful, smiling family. Invariably, the husband and children’s mouths water at the prospect of such a succulent delicacy.

But the nightmare does not end here. Parallel to this universe of meat production are the universes of laboratory experimentation, leather tanning for the fashion industry, illegal organ trafficking, entertainment, poaching, and so on. As a result, everyone is afraid and suspicious of one other, and many have already gone crazy or committed suicide during the transition. They just could not take it. But now eating human flesh is normal.

Cadáver Exquisito challenges the naturalisation of human exceptionality and of anthropocentric knowledge systems. In the novel, language is an accomplice in the construction of a particular reality. Similarly, in Orwell’s *1984,* a simplified language of binary terms and technical jargon (Newspeak) is designed to eradicate subtleties and nuances, essentially inhibiting critical thinking. Hannah Arendt’s analysis of Adolf Eichmann’s trial similarly underscores the danger of instrumentalising thought, which leads to the incapacity for meaningful reflection, an idea also central to her concept of the banality of evil. This pattern of language, once used to justify atrocities, now rationalises unsustainable human activities and reinforces human dominance over all life forms (Toribio-Roura, 2022).

The novel *Cadáver Exquisito* presents meat production as a necessary activity but openly exposes the conflict of interests between the actors involved. The highly graphic description of practices involving the confinement, exploitation, and slaughter of lesser humans makes visible the unnecessary suffering of animals due to naturalised practices (in the real world) and raises serious ethical concerns–concerns that, despite being acknowledged, most of us find very difficult to approach with no holds barred. This horror, and others such as war, can only be tolerated if they are not seen for what they are or if, despite the evidence, we choose to prioritise our interests over those of others. These practices are perpetuated through cultural and societal norms that support human dominance and exploitation of the other over care and compassion.

Probably, public opinion is not aware of the full extent of the harm caused by industrial food systems due to deliberate efforts to conceal the reality of animal suffering and environmental destruction–for example, in the use of an aesthetics of cuteness concerning the media representation of farm animals and activities (e.g., stuffed chickens, Peppa Pig, and Barbie farmer to name only a few). But this is another story.

If we were to look at the question through the lens of Kristeva’s theory of the abject (1982), the horror continues despite our knowing it exists because humans can maintain psychological distance from the reality of the pain of others. This distance is necessary to avoid confronting the discomfort and disgust associated with the violent and messy reality of certain ideas and practices. Humans may also justify them by denying the other’s ‘personhood’ or inherent value (for example, by denying animals’ feelings and consciousness).

In Bazterrica’s novel, we are the other and the other is us. With this specular exercise, the author invites readers to question human superiority and reconsider the interconnectedness of humans, animals, technology, and the environment. In doing so, the novel emphasises the importance of acknowledging the agency and worth of non-human entities, aligning with the critical posthumanist perspective that promotes the consideration of a diversity of epistemologies and practices.

In another reading, the work can also be analysed in terms of a critique of the current ‘processing’ of bodies, through either bureaucratic tactics (e.g., processing of asylum seekers and economic migrants) and biotechnological manipulation (e.g., genetically engineered heads for consumption in the novel), raising important ethical questions concerning the treatment of others and the consequences of scientific and technological progress. Placing the human at both ends of a continuum between the '(super)human' and the 'other,' the work invites reflection on the changing nature of human identity. By juxtaposing different, often contradictory, perspectives, Bazterrica openly confronts the moral implications of human superiority and the consequences of the epistemologies and practices derived from this paradigm. Through this careful labour of fiction, the novel is a valuable pedagogical tool contributing to discussions about human identity, language, and the position of the Anthropos within a wider ecology. In Argentina, the book is already part of the secondary school curriculum.

5. Conclusion: Waking up to the Inhuman therefore We Are

Anthropocentric views prioritise human needs and desires over those of other beings (including other humans). This view reinforces notions of hierarchy and exclusion based on diverse physical configurations such as species, race, and gender. In the anthropocentric worldview, the inherent value of beings tends to be replaced by notions such as efficiency, productivity, and data and is backed up by an utilitarian ethics giving preference to the greater (human) good.

In contrast, the concept of 'more-than-human' challenges anthropocentrism, recognising that humans are holobionts. In this approach, humans are only part of an interdependent system in which non-human beings and ecosystems are also significant agents. This approach rejects any separation between ontology and epistemology and proposes a relational worldview. From this point of view, the world appears materially real through continuous intra-actions between human and more-than-human entities and their entangled intra-relations.

Donna Haraway envisioned collaborative multi-species societies engaged in political alliances to resist both the catastrophic impacts of the Anthropocene and our overreliance on technology. Comparable to symbiotic body politics, these compost communities are very resilient. It is crucial to think beyond the human to grasp the profound interconnectedness of agents within ecosystems.

This ecological ethos underpins the concept of composting-with-care, where knowledge and practices embrace alternative conceptualizations of the post-natural condition, understood as the artificial separation between humans and everything else that is contained in the paradigm of anthropocentrism. In this framework, the critique of epistemic habits that limit alternative visions of the future is crucial. The implications of the rejection of anthropocentrism for human identity are that instead of seeking identity through alterity with the other, we seek coalition and affinity, fostering new epistemic vocabularies.

With the framework of composting-with-care, this paper has advocated for knowledge sourced from a variety of worldviews and disciplines–quality ingredients for forming new configurations from the interplay between different perspectives and materialities. This speculative tool probes dialogues of care between the human and more-than-human, investigating their co-formed ecologies and revealing the often surprising relationality between the different components that establish our ontological selves and others.

Through the act of composting, fiction (speculative fabulation) and materiality become legitimate forms of knowledge, challenging the capitalist production logic that disciplines language into preferred knowledge systems while neglecting others. Speculative fabulation is a transformative tool, a pedagogy capable of reimagining human-driven activities and encouraging new perspectives beyond human-centric viewpoints. It matters what stories we tell about the world.

I would like to conclude by returning to Karen Barad's concept of the inhuman and its profound significance concerning ethical responsibility in human and more-than-human relationships as well as its implications for human identity. The inhuman is portrayed by Barad as an integral part of existence, underscoring its interconnectedness with what we call the human, suggesting that our existence and ethical obligations are bound up with what is beyond the human. This view challenges conventional ideas about compassion, responsibility, and justice.

In Barad's theorisation of the inhuman, the ethical question is not something externally imposed by humans, but is something intrinsic to the ongoing patterns of the world. A kind of 'gentlemen's agreement,' so to speak, in which responsibility and non-innocent care are integrated into the world's ongoing becoming and unbecoming. Engaging with the inhuman enables a deeper connection with others. Challenging the notion that the inhuman is devoid of compassion, Barat argues that acknowledging the inhuman within us is what precisely allows us to genuinely feel and respond to the suffering of others. This is an alternative epistemology to that of binaries. It suggests that embracing the inhuman, which therefore we are, opens the possibility for a better world.

This paper has brought together and problematised a variety of understandings of human identity. By composting them together, I sought to reveal how the concept produces a variety of meanings, histories, and knowledges. To compost is to foster epistemic diversity.

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IDENTITY OF A THINKER, OR REREADING BÖHME AND HEIDEGGER ON DWELLING (*WOHNEN*) FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

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Abstract:

The paper re-examines the work of Jakob Böhme (1575–1624) through the lens of environmental ethics. Specifically, it delves into the concept of dwelling (*wohnen*) as articulated in *Six Theosophic Points* (1620), *The Six Mystical Points* (1620), and *On the Early and Heavenly Mystery* (1620). To illuminate the significance of this concept for environmental ethics, the paper will juxtapose it with Martin Heidegger's idea of dwelling. This comparative approach not only sheds light on the environmental-ethical implications, but also allows for a broader exploration of methodological considerations inherent in such a scholarly endeavor. The paper raises questions about the potential constraints in reinterpreting the intellectual legacy of past thinkers, that is, their identity over the course of the history of philosophy.

Key words: Böhme, Heidegger, dwelling, environmental ethics.

1. Introduction

Environmental ethics explores the philosophical lineage aimed at establishing principles for non-harmful and non-exploitative interactions between human beings and nature. The historical perspectives contributed by thinkers in the past provide support for the imperative to reject the paradigm of human dominance over the planet. They reveal the persistent presence of competing non-anthropocentric intuitions throughout the annals of philosophy, thereby dispelling any notion that such perspectives are merely ephemeral fads.

Jakob Böhme (1575–1624) can serve as a distinct alternative to the metaphysics developed in early modernity, which laid the ground for the belief in human supremacy. His mystic writings stand in stark contrast to the work of his peer, René Descartes (1596–1650), frequently portrayed as a villain in the realm of environmental ethics (Cottingham, 1978; Meyer, 1999; see also Wee, 2001). At the same time, Böhme had an undeniable impact on such thinkers as Friedrich Schelling and Martin Heidegger, whose philosophies are identified as valuable resources for pro-environmental thinking.

Even more importantly, Böhme's writings directly deal with the problem of positioning human beings in and against both nature and God. It may come as a surprise, then, that his works have not been scrutinized by environmental ethics and that there are only a handful of papers that mention him in this regard (see Albala, 2004; Gare, 1996; Kochetkova, 2008). Perhaps the rationale behind this absence is that his writings are notoriously difficult, full of contradictions, and do not lend themselves to clear interpretation. A comprehensive rereading of Böhme's oeuvre would pose a considerable challenge.

The following paper does not propose such an ambitious goal. Its aim is rather modest. My analysis attempts to juxtapose the category of dwelling (*wohnen*) in the work of Böhme and the aforementioned Heidegger. While the resemblance between these two thinkers has been the subject of some studies, the appearance of the phenomenon of dwelling in both of their work is somehow overlooked and under-discussed. Bringing attention to this neglected notion is worth undertaking, especially if we take into consideration the significance of Heidegger's account of dwelling for environmental ethics. Examining the problem of dwelling in regard to both philosophers should therefore enhance our comprehension of the issue.

This examination will be succeeded by methodological reflections concerning the validity of reinterpreting the author who has been working within a notably distinct theoretical framework. Is such a rereading legitimate, or does it perhaps violate the very core of Böhme's concepts? In addressing this question, I will engage with the problem of the evolving identity of thinkers throughout the centuries of the history of philosophy.

2. Environmental Ethics as a Paradigm

Environmental ethics can be regarded as a subdiscipline within philosophy, with its roots tracing back to the mid-20th century, a reaction to the rapid changes occurring in the natural environment (Brennan & Lo, 2022). Observing this profound transformation raised questions about the dynamic between human and non-human interests, the moral obligation to serve as stewards of the environment, and the moral status of nature itself. In order to tackle such problems, scholars employed diverse theoretical approaches: pragmatism, virtue ethics, feminist studies, and other paradigms.

Positing environmental ethics as a paradigm itself appears plausible as well (Brennan & Lo, 2022; Devall & Sessions, 1985; Naess, 1973; Valera, Vidal and Leal, 2001). This implies that environmental ethics transcends its role as a mere branch of philosophy, extending to present a more comprehensive standpoint for addressing fundamental philosophical inquiries, such as humanity's place in the universe or the interconnectedness of all beings. Environmental ethics (re-)opened the debate on anthropocentrism, which championed the belief that human beings are inherently entitled to conquer the planet. In other words, environmental ethics as a paradigm calls for a reassessment of the metaphysical, epistemological, ethical, and aesthetic principles shaping the anthropocentric assessment of the status of non-human entities, which still tend to be held in low regard.

This call also concerns the need to revisit the legacy of the history of philosophy (Devall & Sessions, 1985; Vereb, 2021; Zimmerman, 1994). Our contemporary stance toward nature is the outcome of the history of ideas. Therefore, it becomes crucial to delve into these historical currents if we aim to pinpoint the origins of certain intellectual habits that oppose pro-environmental thinking. Environmental ethics prompts us to reread the work of key figures in philosophy, who, whether directly or indirectly, have impacted the way we conceptualize human–nature relationships.

Additionally, environmental ethics advocates for the exploration of alternative thought traditions that can foster a more friendly attitude toward nature. Since Descartes is seen as a foe, environmental ethicists have turned to Spinoza, who sketched a far more egalitarian vision of the metaphysical universe (Devall & Sessions, 1985; Naess, 1977; Valera & Vidal, 2021). Still, since the anthropocentric ontology of the great chain of being can be reinforced with biblical messages, philosophers in the field tend to scrutinize pantheistic perspectives (Devall & Sessions, 1985; Valera & Vidal, 2021). Therefore, other non-mainstream traditions considered in the discourse are, among others, feminism and indigenous points of view (Devall & Sessions, 1985). The exploration of these viewpoints seeks to demonstrate that a pro-environmental mindset is not merely a fleeting trend but rather aligns with intuitions expressed ages ago (although these insights were frequently overshadowed by prevailing anthropocentric ideas).

In what follows, the paper will focus on the neglected category of dwelling in the work of Jakob Böhme. In doing so, it will first, flesh out our existing understanding of Heidegger's concept of dwelling, which has been influential for environmental ethics. Second, it will complicate our comprehension of the trajectory of the history of philosophy–in particular, in ways that promote a deeper understanding of the discipline of environmental ethics.

3. Heidegger and Böhme

The names of Jakob Böhme and Martin Heidegger are not frequently associated, even though some commentators suggest a solid link between the two. The nexus between the writings of the 17th century mystic and the 20th century phenomenologist is primarily discerned through the mediated influence of the former–via the philosophy of Fredrich Schelling and Georg Hegel–on the latter. This hypothesis gains validation from Heidegger's sporadic references—approximately a dozen, as documented in *The Heidegger Concordance* (Jaran & Perrin, 2013)—to Böhme, which, notably, are predominantly intertwined with his discussions on certain concepts found in none other than Schelling and Hegel (Heidegger, 1988; Heidegger, 2011).

However, the infrequency of these remarks obscures the significance of the link between Heidegger and Böhme. It's crucial to bear in mind that, above all, Heidegger exhibited a notable reluctance to explicitly reference or acknowledge inspiration from other philosophers in elaborating on the ideas particularly important for his ontology. This would explain why Heidegger was not eager to mention Böhme when he was advancing the idea of abyss (*Abgrund*/*Ungrund*) (see Heidegger, 2011) and No-thing (*Nichts*) (Friedrich, 2009), which is central to Böhme's work. (I will discuss these notions later on in the paper.)

This applies also to the appearance of releasement (*Gelassenheit*) in Böhme. Heidegger does not refer to Böhme's account when he offers his own; yet, this account and the concepts it propounds are unquestionably embedded in the tradition of German philosophy with which Heidegger was familiar. As Robert Paslick (1985, p. 417) reminds us, the word *Gelassenheit* by which Heidegger designates this attitude of non-attachment, allowing a thing to appear as that which it really is, has deep roots in the German mystical tradition from Meister Eckhart on. Furthermore, as Robert Bernasconi (2021, p. 631) observes, the general point Heidegger is making amounts to a blanket statement that Eckhart and the other thinkers who used the word, like Böhme and Schelling, remained under the sway of Western metaphysics, a thesis Heidegger was obliged to maintain if his account of the history of Western metaphysics culminating in machination was to hold.

Similarly, it is perplexing that Heidegger did not point to Böhme when he argued that the very nature of life is strifeful (drawing an analogy with the dynamic of ontological difference) while he did allude to Schelling (Bernasconi, 2017, p. 173). Based on Heidegger's occasional references to Böhme and his extensive knowledge of the history of philosophy, it seems improbable that he was unaware that Böhme preceded Schelling in laying such a concept.

Moreover, it is unlikely that Heidegger did not recognize that the *Naturphilosophie* of Böhme played an important role in German revolts against the Cartesian tradition (Paslick, 1985). Yet, Heidegger did not take advantage of making "the first German philosopher" (as Böhme was labeled by Hegel), who was an older contemporary of Descartes, an ally in his criticism of modern subjectivism and the founder of it.

Similarly surprising is that Heidegger did not find Böhme's language a rich source of inspiration despite commentators often describing it as "poetic" (Andersson, 2018). He distanced himself from the metaphoric and figurative expressions employed by the author of *Aurora*, classifying it as the language of *Pietismus* (Heidegger, 2011). Yet, one could claim he felt compelled to make such a comment specifically about Böhme's language.

Finally, Heidegger did not acknowledge another resemblance between himself and Böhme regarding the controversies they raised. Both philosophers faced significant criticism due to the perceived "unorthodox" nature of their assertions, yet simultaneously garnered devoted followings—termed Behmenists (Hessayon, 2005) and Heideggerians (Sheehan, 2017), respectively.

However, the above analogy, particularly due to the mocking tone of the latter term, may be found to be implausible. As a matter of fact, it raises the question of whether the similarities between Böhme and Heidegger turn out to be merely marginal or superficial. The chief concern of Böhme's writing was the nature of sin, evil, and redemption. We may read Böhme's cosmology as a call for humanity to return to God, which translates to an assertion that all beings have to undergo differentiation and unite in *Absolut*. This new state of redeemed harmony would be more perfect than the original state of innocence, allowing God to achieve a new self-awareness by interacting with a creation that was both part of and distinct from Himself. Such a (re)turn requires overcoming desire and conflict, which are, however, inherent elements of reality, akin to how the rebellion of Satan and the separation of Eve from Adam were indispensable for gaining the knowledge of good and evil.

Heidegger, in turn, was interested in the problem of being, or in how it was forgotten in the history of metaphysics. Heidegger argued that the sense of Being is related to revealing (disclosure of) the proper, authentic, very own (*eigentlich*) character of each being. Attempts to define Being as matter, spirit, reason, etc., were all wrong. Being (*Sein*) is not any kind of being (*Seiende*). It is (like) nothing (nothing), enabling everything (or: literally every thing) to reveal, manifest, disclose, its peculiarity. Thanks to Being, this specificity can come out of darkness and every being can stand in the light of their ownness or authenticity (*Eigentlichekeit*). Human beings perform a distinctive function within this disclosure as it is not any kind of "neutral" or "impartial" state but happens for, or in front of, each human being. Yet, the latter are not "subjects" ruling over "objects." The clearing of Being occurs only for a human being capable of letting things be what they are without imposing himself or herself upon them.

Therefore, the conceptual frameworks of Böhme and Heidegger might appear to be too disparate to be reconciled. Additionally, drawing a direct comparison with Böhme does not necessarily complement Heidegger's philosophy. Asserting their compatibility might lead one to question Heidegger's credibility as a serious philosopher, dismissing him as an obscure, esoteric figure with alleged ties to the occult, a characterization often attributed to Böhme (Paslick, 1985).

Such an accusation, to a large extent, would stem from the fact that Böhme's writing is frequently described as "chaotic." This word, in the same vein as "cryptic," "enigmatic," or "arcane," is used by the formalists to convey an attitude of irreverence. However, the positive counterpart to these epithets would be "poetic," engaging in the exploration of language's boundaries to navigate genuinely intricate subjects or to delve into the essence of things. This seems to be the rationale behind Heidegger's and Böhme's experiments with language. They utilized a variety of non-obvious terms to articulate senses that could not be grasped with standard philosophical terminology. Interestingly, the occurrence of the notion of dwelling (*wohnen*) in both philosophers did not receive much attention.

Their comparative analysis will unfold in a reversed historical order, starting with Heidegger and proceeding to Böhme. Such a sequence is related to the more general framework of my inquiry, which is concerned with the significance of the idea of dwelling for environmental ethics. I shall search for environmental ethics allies starting with the thinkers more contemporary to the current challenges we face and then reach further into the past. The viability of this methodological approach will be discussed in greater detail in the final section of the paper.

3.1. Heidegger on Dwelling

The term "dwelling" (*wohnen*) stands apart from conventional philosophical vocabulary, such as "truth," "essence," "existence," etc. Heidegger introduced this term to explore the potential for discovering a language not chained by metaphysical tradition and capable of expressing an alternative to the metaphysics sanctioning human superiority. This concept, encapsulated by the term in question, has wielded considerable influence, especially in environmental ethics where Heidegger's perspective resonates deeply with the reevaluation of human dominance inherent in Western metaphysics.

The core of the idea of dwelling in Heidegger involves a fundamental reversal in the conventional account of the relation between dwelling and building. The call for this inversion serves as the foundational premise in the renowned text *Bauen Wohnen Denken*, translated as *Building Dwelling Thinking* (a part of the volume *Poetry, Language, Thought*), where this idea is extensively expounded upon. In the initial sections, Heidegger notes the frequent association of building and dwelling. Rather than denying their inherent connection, he explicitly acknowledges the belongingness of building and dwelling. What he questions is the perception that their relation constitutes means and ends. He challenges the belief that building is the activity enabling dwelling, or that building defines the way we dwell.

On the contrary, Heidegger asserts that the way we think (it is for a reason that this activity is also listed in the title of the aforementioned text) about, or understand, our dwelling shapes how we build, which cannot be limited merely to constructing buildings. In this sense, dwelling is more fundamental or primordial than building. In other words, it is thanks to dwelling that we can build.

Heidegger (1971, p. 147) unpacks his not-readily-apparent claims by saying that dwelling is the way human beings exist on earth as mortals: "To be a human being means to be on the Earth as mortal. It means to dwell." This mortality is understood ontologically, as in the phenomenon of being-towards-death, pointing to the profound truth that *human beings need to accept their limits if they aim to be (live) authentically*. Death as the boundary of human existence is something that literally de-fines us, indicating our finitude.

However, Heidegger does not focus on death to make us sink into despair. He holds that mortals dwell in that they initiate their own nature–their being capable of death as death–into the use and practice of this capacity, *so that there may be a good death* [underlined by Anon. for rev.] (Heidegger, 1971, p. 151). This self-awareness consists in our ability to confront mortality. Recognizing–and accepting–*who* and *how* we are allows us to be properly, in a truly human manner. Such being on our own (*eigen*) terms gives us peace with ourselves. It is the source of reconciliation for each human being with herself or himself.

Embracing and affirming human limits translates also to a different scheme of relations with non-human beings. This ethos of human modesty, distinctly divergent from the arrogance rooted in the humanism of the modern era with its emphasis on subjectivity, entails relinquishing the impulse to dominate non-human entities. Rather than pursuing a conquest, there emerges a sense of responsibility for peaceful coexistence with the non-human entities that surround us (Foltz, 1995; Zimmerman, 1986).

Implementing this state of harmony is different from being inert in dealing with non-human beings: it consists not only in doing no harm but also in actively safeguarding. As Heidegger (1971, p. 149) argues, "the fundamental character of dwelling is sparing and preserving." This raises the questions: in what sense can and should we preserve nature? Should we refrain from the use of nature altogether and avoid building?

To answer these questions, we need to cautiously take the next steps in elucidating Heidegger's point. What we conventionally call "Nature" is present in two sides of the fourfold, the ontological structure that Heidegger describes in *Building Dwelling Thinking*. The first is Earth and the second, Sky. Heidegger depicts them as follows:

> Earth is the serving bearer, blossoming and fruiting, spreading out in rock and water, rising up into plant and animal (Heidegger, 1971, p. 149),

and

> The sky is the vaulting path of the sun, the course of the changing moon, the wandering glitter of the stars, the year seasons and their changes, the light and dusk of day, the gloom and glow of night, the clemency and inclemency of the weather, the drifting clouds and blue depth of the ether (Heidegger, 1971, p. 149).

These poetic words are open to a variety of interpretations. However, commentators basically agree that they express two dimensions of the disclosure of being. Earth would name the primordial hiddenness of Being, which at the same time is the ground for all beings. While Being itself often goes unnoticed, it is the fundament or source of the identity for beings. Sky, in turn, would refer to the manifestation of Being, when beings stand in the light of it, revealing their very own peculiarity.

The other sides of the fourfold are gods and human beings (as "mortals"). The character of the first is even more impenetrable than that of Earth. Mortals have to await divinities, keeping patience in the wake of their absence and not mistake them for idols (Heidegger, 1971, p. 148).

In comparison to that, the attitude toward non-human beings seems to be more precisely clarified. Heidegger expands on how to understand preserving, saying that human beings ("mortals") have to:

> leave to the sun and the moon their journey, to the stars their courses, to the seasons their blessing and their inclemency; they do not turn night into day nor day into a harassed unrest (Heidegger, 1971, p. 151).

We can read this passage as an appeal to *not disturb nature*. We shall not interfere with its own ruling. Saving the earth is at odds with pushing it beyond its limits. Human beings need to respect them. They cannot violate the intrinsic order of nature.

The imperative to preserve nature, however, does not endorse inertia. It requires a certain proactive effort from human beings. As Heidegger (1971, p. 151) remarks: "To save really means to set something free into its presencing." Human beings, as mortals, are not encouraged to disengage from their interactions with nature. Such disconnection would lead to the forgetfulness of its Being to us. To authentically preserve nature, humans need to allow it to manifest its Being.

How can mortals do this? They need to *adapt themselves* to their surroundings. They need to *respond* to them. Only then do they let entities show themselves as they are (Foltz, 1995; Mugerauer, 2009; Rentmeester, 2015; Schalow, 2021; Zimmerman, 1986). Otherwise, the disclosure of Being cannot happen. Defining the character of this adaptation is the moment when building re-enters Heidegger's argument to complete the idea of dwelling.

Heidegger elucidates how authentic dwelling, wherein the impetus is not to dominate nature but to engage with it meaningfully by responding to it, shapes proper building by opposing two kinds of bridges. The one is the old stone bridge. Despite its age, it still remains solid, "ready for the sky's weather and its fickle nature" (Heidegger, 1971, p. 151). But probably the most important feature, from the environmental ethics point of view, which

Heidegger (1971, p. 151) underscores in the dense, poetic picture, is that the ancient bridge "leaves the stream's waters to run their course."

This bridge is built *in* the environment. It seamlessly integrates with the surrounding environment. Those who constructed the stone bridge demonstrated a profound respect for natural constraints. Rather than drastically imposing themselves on the landscape, the builders of the bridge found other means of fulfilling their need to commute to the cathedral square and neighboring villages (Heidegger, 1971, p. 150).

Heidegger contrasts it with the highway bridge. This modern construction is tied into the network of long-distance traffic. It is "paced as calculated for maximum yield" (Heidegger, 1971, p. 150). Heidegger's criticism is aimed at the logic underlying building such a bridge. We may argue that nowadays the world requires a different type of construction from us due to the development of car traffic and increased mobility in general. In such a light, it seems that Heidegger's objection carries an anti-modernist undertone, possibly sentimentalizing or romanticizing ancient structures. However, the philosopher encourages us to delve deeper, prompting a closer examination of the overarching framework that guides such endeavors (Foltz, 1995; Mugerauer, 2009; Rentmeester, 2015; Schalow, 2021; Zimmerman, 1986). How frequently do we factor in the well-being of non-human entities when constructing various structures? Is our predominant relationship with them characterized by subordination? What exactly is *the ultimate aim behind the pursuit of increased efficiency*? *Do we genuinely require this type of economic growth*?

Addressing such questions proves that alluding to bridges, stars, etc., in Heidegger has both figurative and literal meaning. He himself confirms that the bridge is not exclusively a symbol (Heidegger, 1971, p. 153). He benefits from the disclosive force of metaphor and, at the same time, illustrates the tangible, urgent challenges we face.

Therefore, the notion of dwelling turns out to allow Heidegger to bring our attention to the attitude we hold toward the other beings that surround us. Only after clarifying the intuitions underlying, it can we see if we aim to dominate the environment or cooperate with it. The manner in which we build serves as a tangible affirmation of our fundamental attitude toward nature. It discerns whether we are inclined to unveil its primordial essence or whether we are potentially distorting nature by reducing it to mere resources aimed solely at satisfying human needs.

The semantic capacity of dwelling was revealed to Heidegger through the poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin, following his saying that "poetically man dwells…". These words also served as the title for the complementary essay on human existence (Young, 2021, p. 256), the translation of which can also be found in the volume *Poetry, Language, Thought*. It cannot be determined whether Heidegger was aware that Böhme had employed this term as well. Nonetheless, it seems advisable to juxtapose the sense of "dwelling" in both thinkers, inviting a closer examination of its philosophical depth and its implications for environmental ethics.

3.2. Dwelling in Böhme

Böhme had several mystical experiences throughout his youth, culminating in a vision in 1600, as one day he focused his attention on the captivating beauty of a sunbeam reflected in a pewter dish. He believed this vision unveiled to him the spiritual structure of the world as well as the relationship between God and humans and good, and evil (Week & Andersson, 2018).

Crucially, particularly when viewed from a strictly metaphysical standpoint, this visionary experience led Böhme to engage in a speculative discourse on the dialectical nature of the universe. At its essence is the transition from the lack of ground (*Ungrund*) to having a ground (*Grund*). Such unmanifest reality itself Böhme calls the *Ungrund*, or equally often, Nothingness (*Nichts*) (Friedrich, 2009; Paslick, 1985). This dialectical process, orchestrated by the seven spirits of nature, is one of open conflict. The desire to manifest oneself, or to be revealed, demands the creation of real darkness without which the struggle of light cannot be seen (Paslick, 1985, p. 413).

The concept of dwelling in Böhme must be examined within the context of this dual framework. On one hand, it is grounded in religious imagination, while on the other, it is intertwined with speculative argumentation. The interpenetration of these two dimensions becomes evident in Böhme's utilization of the term "dwelling."

This term and its various iterations surface repeatedly (more or less several dozen times) in Böhme's writings. While Böhme doesn't explicitly elucidate or analyze it, this term cannot be found marginal or its reoccurrence accidental. Let us review in this regard selected passages from *Six Theosophic*

Points (1620), *On the Early and Heavenly Mystery* (1620), *The Six Mystical Points* (1620), and *The Signature of All Things* (1621):

> [1 – numbering is supposed to facilitate further analysis] "The threefold Spirit without being is its master and possessor; and yet it possesses not the Nature-being, for it (the Spirit) *dwells* [all underlining by Anon. for rev.] in itself" (Böhme, 1920, p. 157);
>
> [2] "And no place or position can be conceived or found where the spirit of the triunity is not present, and in every being; but hidden to the being, *dwelling* in itself, as an essence that at once fills all and yet *dwells* not in being, but itself has a being in itself; as we are to reflect concerning the ground and unground, how the two are to be understood in reference to each other" (Böhme, 1920, pp. 18–19);
>
> [3] "For nothing can enter into the freedom of the Eternal, except it be like the Eternal, subsist in the fire of the will, and be as subtle as the light's substantiality, that is, as a water which can *dwell* in a being wherein the light can *dwell*, and convey its lustre through" (Böhme, 1920, p. 36);
>
> [4] "A thing that *dwells* in itself can be grasped by nothing, for it dwells in nothing" (Böhme, 1920, p. 64);
>
> [5] "The third world is the outer, in which we *dwell* by the outer body with the external works and beings" (Böhme, 1920, p. 40);
>
> [6] "For the good is only one, but quality is many; and the human will that desires many, brings into itself, into the One (wherein God *dwells*), the torment of plurality" (Böhme, 1920, p. 136);
>
> [7] "In this way God dwells in all beings, and permeates and pervades all, yet is laid hold of by nothing" (Böhme, 1920, p. 72);
>
> [8] "God *dwells* in all things; and nothing comprehends him, unless it be one with him" (Böhme, 1920, p. 137);
>
> [9] "This is that wisdom which dwells in nothing, and yet possesses all things" (Böhme, 1781, p. 2);
>
> [10] "Therein [darkness] *dwell* the devils and the damned souls" (Böhme, 1920, p. 48).

The inclusion of these excerpts aims to underscore that, in Böhme's philosophy, the concept of "dwelling" transcends a mere clichéd reference to a specific location, such as the abode of God in paradise. Even if we come across a similar statement, it bears an ontological burden. For instance, we read in *Aurora* (1612):

> [11] "Now thou wilt say, Where then are these gracious, amiable and blessed spirits to be met with? Do they *dwell* only in themselves in heaven?" (Böhme, 2009, p. 198).

These words highlight that angels find their dwelling *within themselves*. So, they emphasize *the ontological grounding* of angels (rather than being placed in heaven). Having ontological ground can be understood as being determined by something. The passages from Böhme's works sketch two kinds of possible grounding: oneself (the grounded being is identical to the ground) or some other being.

In Böhme's philosophy, the most perfect entities (for instance, spirit of tri-unity [1, 2], God [7, 6], and wisdom [9]) are those inherently grounded in themselves. These entities possess autonomy, deriving their existence and essence solely from within and not relying on external validation. However, this premise, as pursued through Böhme's speculative approach, carries specific implications. Namely, since such beings are founded by no-other-thing than themselves, they are grounded in no-thing. That is to say, as these beings are self-grounded and lack any external foundation, they find their basis in nothingness. Excerpt no. 4 reads: "A thing that *dwells* in itself (…) dwells in nothing."

This viewpoint may paint a somber picture of the metaphysical order; yet, Böhme's abyss, or unground, need not be construed as murky and gloomy. Instead, its undefined nature might be seen as indicative of an infinite expanse teeming with vast richness.

This positive undertone pervading Böhme's vision of reality is likely to resonate more clearly when we attune ourselves to the sense of dwelling carried by the alternative account when some entity dwells in the other one (for instance, [3]). This state of being anchored in another being appears not only as being grounded but also as *belonging* and *participating*.

Of course, "belonging" doesn't necessarily imply a connection to something positive. For instance, [10] devils dwell in darkness or hell–that is, their essence is intrinsically tied to it, or belongs to it. Nevertheless, the very concept of dwelling as a form of belonging conveys an affirmative meaning. It signifies *the most intimate relation, a primordial bond* between two entities. Dwelling involves a significant degree of proximity, nearness, and a sense of being close-knit.

In doing so, it is semantically richer than conventional philosophical terminology employed to express the state of being founded by something, related to something, or grounded in something. For instance, Böhme could have chosen a term such as "standing-in-itself" (*Insichstehen*) to label the position of ontological autonomy. Yet, he decided otherwise and depicted it as dwelling in itself. As a result, he arrived at a significantly more suggestive, even stirring image of the relationality prevailing in the metaphysical organization of the universe.

This evocativeness serves as probably the best answer to the question of why a philosopher should be concerned with an undisciplined "picture-thinker," as Hegel referred to Böhme. Böhme's writings speak with "a problematic but compelling voice" (Paslick, 1985, p. 407). While the use of the term "dwelling" is not univocal, it prompts us to direct our focus more emphatically toward the kinship and familiarity of certain beings than if their relationships were directly articulated as belonging or participating.

In conclusion, by embracing the concept of "dwelling" in Böhme's writings, we gain insight into the intrinsic interconnectedness of beings shaping their identity. This conceptualization, in turn, establishes a robust foundation for deliberations in environmental ethics and, as such, can be confronted with Heidegger's account.

4. Post-Böhmean Considerations

Böhme's philosophy aligns with environmental ethics as he elevated the significance of the natural environment by asserting the presence of God within it [7, 8]. Böhme claims to have experienced God as an omnipresent being. He saw "through everything, recognizing God in all creatures, in vegetation and grass" (Weeks & Andersson, 2018, p. 12). Consequently, his perspective can be categorized as pantheism, which, as mentioned earlier, is explored by environmental ethics to advocate for the respect and care of nature.

Böhme, however, can be found to be an unlikely ally of environmental ethics since he casts doubt on whether nature, especially if we understand it physically or biologically, is good. We need to bear in mind that Böhme is associated with Gnosticism. Gnostic thought holds in low regard mundane reality, contrasted with the realm of eternity. The first is symbolized by the material world and animal forces that human beings need to overcome. Therefore, this point of view does not necessarily nurture a positive attitude toward the environment.

Venturing beyond conventional classifications (pantheism, Gnosticism) allows us to reevaluate Böhme's body of work. Our present-day awareness prompts us to recognize that historical portrayals of nature have significantly influenced our relationship with the environment. From this historical legacy, we can extract resources that address the imperative to cultivate a more amicable attitude toward nature. To emphasize this transition, it is advisable to label our efforts as "post-" in our particular case as "post-Böhmeans." On the one hand, we aim to *allude* to his work, and on the other we *re*-read it to unveil its potential for environmental ethics. The concept of dwelling emerges as particularly noteworthy in this context.

"Dwelling," as a philosophical term, entered the environmental ethics discourse through Heidegger. As previously discussed, Heidegger contends that the notion of "dwelling" encapsulates the fundamental manner in which we engage with nature, manifesting in our various interactions with it, which Heidegger refers to as "building." According to Heidegger, genuine dwelling necessitates a harmonious collaboration with non-human entities. Rather than imposing our self-centered and possessive subjectivity upon them, our task is to liberate them. This is the "authentic" meaning of sparing: *releasing the ownness of beings*. It is crucial to note that this approach does not advocate for stopping any human actions in the environment. The key thing is to undertake such actions that fit in it.

In Böhme, in turn, dwelling is primarily understood as *belonging*. We are unable to capture the metaphysical specification of beings unless we acknowledge their inherent interconnectedness with other entities. They are rooted in each other or participate in each other, and as such they gain their identity.

The question of belonging in Heidegger's account of dwelling takes two distinct paths. Firstly, it delves into the internal connection between building and dwelling, underscoring the primordial nature of the latter (Heidegger, 1971, p. 145). Secondly, it directs attention to the inherent non-separateness of the sides of the fourfold (earth, sky, mortals, and divinities) (Heidegger, 1971, pp. 149-150). This perspective places the burden on the problem of the unity of human beings and the disclosure of Being. Human beings are necessary for Being to unfold itself, but they are not a source or creator of Being (Taylor, 1992, p. 258, p. 264).

So, the issue of belonging between human beings and nature is considered in Heidegger's account of dwelling on the broader plane of Being's manifestation. However, disclosing this aspect of dwelling is reinforced by revisiting Böhme's insights on this phenomenon. Consequently, one might contend that Böhme serves as a forerunner to Heidegger whose philosophy offered so much inspiration for environmental ethics. Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge that our reinterpretation of Böhme in this context is influenced by the *post*-Heideggerian perspective. We need to bear in mind that environmental ethicists have utilized Heidegger's ideas for their own purposes.

This entanglement prompts us to claim that the intellectual *identity* of a given thinker is *subject to influence* not only from the past that precedes them (regardless of whether they admit this impact) but also of *future* philosophers who come after them. At the same time, rediscovering certain themes in past thinkers sheds new light on contemporary theories.

In this sense, combining Böhme's and Heidegger's understandings of dwelling enhances our intuitions on this matter. It provides tools to further reexamine the problematic character of human relations with nature. This becomes evident when revisiting the well-known epigram by Angelus Silesius about Böhme, who was only a few years older than him.

Before rereading this poem, it is worthwhile to comment on the translation of *wohnen* to English. Julian Young holds that since English has both "dwelling" and "living," whereas German has only *wohnen*, it is easier to capture the notion of dwelling in English than in German (Young, 2021, p. 256). However, this assertion might be challenged by highlighting the semantic proximity of *leben* and *wohnen* in specific contexts, as exemplified in the aforementioned poem, which reads as follows:

> The fish lives in the water, the herb in the earth,
> The bird in the air, the sun in the firmament,
> The salamander must be kept in the fire,
> And God's heart is Jakob Böhme's element.
>
> *Im Wasser lebt der Fisch, die Pflanzen in der Erden,*
> *Der Vogel in der Luft, die Sonn im Firmament, Der Salamander muss mit Feur erhalten werden: Und Gottes Herz ist Jakob Böhmens Element*

Silesius, when describing the metaphysical decorum, speaks about living (*leben*) and not dwelling (*wohnen*). Nevertheless, it appears that he intends to convey the same concept as Böhme: to comprehend beings accurately, one must perceive them in relation to their foundation. This ground not only defines them but also enables their flourishing.

In terms of reconsidering Böhme's work within the framework of environmental ethics, the poem promptly raises skepticism. Silesius unequivocally situates Böhme in the realm of spirituality. While non-human beings find their grounding in the natural environment, Böhme's true essence, according to Silesius, lies within the heart of God. This may be a distinctive trait of Böhme, but it can also be extrapolated to all human beings. Underscoring this extraordinary disposition could contribute to reinforcing the human disregard for non-human beings as belonging to the "lower" level of the universe. As such, Silesius's poem conserves the traditional reading of Böhme as the Gnostic mystic.

However, another question arises swiftly. Contemporary ecological sensitivity compels one to ponder a world where fish *cannot* live in water and plants cannot live in the ground *due to human activity*. Our recognition of the ecological crisis prompts us to admit that the structure and functioning of beings are disturbed–*because of human beings*. To articulate it in Böhmean-Heideggerian terms, our focus shifts to a state wherein non-human entities find themselves unable to dwell (in the Böhmean sense). This implies an inability to truly belong to their foundational environment and fulfill their essence. The root cause lies in the failure of human beings to dwell appropriately (in the Heideggerian sense). Rather than engaging in harmonious cooperation with nature, humans often seek to conquer, dominate, and exploit it.

In the 17th century, the effects of such predatory behavior were not that obvious. Today, four hundred years after Böhme's death, they are evident. The once elusive impact of such mercantile practices has now come into sharp focus. However, the image of the unspoiled structure of the natural environment, not ruined by human beings, may presently be a *powerful motivation* to cease interference with nature (Serafimova, 2017). Humans should aspire to preserve the intricate bonds that delineate the ontological structure of the universe, thus avoiding the destruction of these fundamental connections.

In this context, Silesius's poem on Böhme acts as a mediator, shaping our perception of the latter. While this epigram originated in a distinct framework, it invites us to revisit it, sparking a reconsideration of questions pivotal to our contemporary standpoint. Consequently, it encourages a fresh exploration of Böhme's philosophy, particularly in the realm of environmental ethics. On a broader scale, it underscores the intricacies inherent in the evolution of philosophical identity throughout history.

5. Conclusion

Böhme is difficult and strange–this is the opinion widely shared by his contemporaries and later generations (Andersson, 2018). All the more amazing is the profound impact he made on them. A key factor contributing to the distinctive and influential nature of Böhme's writings is his use of language. Rather than employing conventional philosophical terminology, he opted for poetic metaphors. Thanks to their disclosive force he opened up the problem of dwelling as belonging to the ground that defines beings. Unlike the abstract notions of "founding" or "grounding," such articulation highlights the sense of intimacy, nearness, and togetherness.

This holds pivotal significance for environmental ethics, which seeks to reassess the relationship between humans and nature. Embracing Böhme's insights on dwelling, we may enter the right path to heal those relations. How inspiring such a seemingly trivial activity as dwelling can be was already proved by Heidegger. He argued that we need to find the proper way to do this, that is, to cease all denial of our limits, particularly by acknowledging our mortality—and restraining human hubris and avarice when interacting with non-human entities. Instead, our orientation should prioritize preserving the authenticity of these entities, allowing them to manifest their essence –that is, to set them free.

It appears, then, that Heidegger's and Böhme's account of dwelling perfectly complement each other. They converge in the call to respect the identity of beings intertwined with their inherent connection to the foundational base. In this respect, human beings are no exception as they must acknowledge their belonging to a ground not of their own establishment. This recognition should be demonstrated through their actions, particularly in fostering harmonious interactions with other beings, encompassing non-human entities. This imperative is of crucial importance for environmental ethics, which, somewhat unexpectedly, discovers a robust ally not only in Heidegger but also in Böhme.

It appears then that our present-day sensibilities have the power to revive the ideas of past thinkers. This underscores the enduring relevance of their thoughts, transcending the limitations of their respective epochs. Although critics may contend that revisiting their works might not do justice to these philosophers and could potentially distort their legacies, there is merit in recognizing the *fluid identity* of these thinkers. This acknowledgment prevents their ideas from *sinking* into oblivion, instead, *influencing and enlivening* our conceptualization of contemporary challenges.

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NARRATIVE VERSUS EPISODIC SELF: THE MATTER WITH IDENTITY

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Abstract:

Humans tend to seek their identity as entities existing over a period of time by making narratives. The paper argues that seeking diachronic self-identity through narratives or stories results in the self-experience being one of separation or alienation from the real world. This happens because language is primarily a form of secondary representation, and the means by which we attempt to find identity often appear in the form of narratives. The dominance of the metaphor of life as a journey shows this. The remedy is to reduce the hold of narrativity by making self-experience fundamentally episodic.

Key words: identity, narrative self, diachronic self, episodic self.

1. Introduction

Self-experience, or experiencing oneself as an inner entity, appears to be a recalcitrant tendency of the human mind. This may be called, following Galen Strawson (1999), the mental sense of self. Basically, it amounts to the sense of being a mental entity that is the subject of various kinds of experience and can be conceptualised as possessing many things, including body and personality (Strawson, 1999). This kind of experience of oneself as an inner entity is certainly common, if not universal.

Such a self can be experienced either diachronically or synchronically (Strawson, 2004). The former is a matter of understanding it as something existing from the past and moving towards the future. The past is stored in memory as autobiographical memory, and the future often appears in the form of anticipations. When the self is understood diachronically, memories and anticipations become alive in the sense that one's identity is dependent on them. For the diachronic self, the inner sense of existence of being someone is inextricably bound up with the numerous happenings in the past and the likely events in the future. The present often becomes a means to fulfil something in the future, and memories of the past exert a powerful influence on how the present is dealt with.

When the self is understood synchronically, the identity of oneself is not a matter of memories or anticipations. This is not to say that the synchronic self does not have any memories or cannot think of the future. But the experience of oneself as a thing existing mentally is not bound up with memories or anticipations. In other words, memories and anticipations are not alive but can have a matter-of-fact character–it is only the present moment that is taken into account.

It is evident that in everyday life, human beings are capable of entertaining both diachronic and synchronic ways of experiencing the self, given the fact that both can appear in the course of dealing with the environment from an evolutionary viewpoint (Kahl & Kavanagh, 2020). Both autobiographical memory and anticipatory thinking have adaptive value. There can be moments when one is carried away by them. At the same time, there are occasions when one does not have to be involved in them.

The conditions of identity involved in these two types of understanding the self differ substantively. Further, though an individual can have both ways of experiencing the self, it is normally the case that one is dominated by either of the two.

This paper is primarily an attempt to explore how different ways of understanding the self give rise to conflicting ways of finding identity for oneself which, in turn, is used to make a normative appraisal of them with respect to their attunement with reality.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section discusses in detail some major ways of understanding the self, based on the influential works of Strawson (2004, 2005) and Daniel Kahneman (2012). Subsequently, we shall try to argue that one type of self-conception clearly dominates in our times and will explore the reasons behind it. The last section tries to make a normative appraisal of the different self-conceptions and present a case for seeking the identity of the self in an episodic manner.

2. Narrating versus Experiencing

The way we experience the world shapes us into persons. How one organises one's experiences makes the difference; as a person, everyone is unique. This underlies the importance of looking into the major ways in which self-experience is categorised.

Consider the distinction between narrative self and episodic self, as expounded by Strawson (2004). Narrative self is a matter of understanding oneself in terms of a narrative or a story with the self being the protagonist of the story (Dennett, 1992, p. 108; Schechtman, 2011, p. 394). In other words, the self is the one who weaves the story, and other humans are all other characters in the story. The story progresses from past to future, and most of the everyday experience is co-opted in the ongoing story (Schechtman, 2011, p. 398). This way of understanding the self implies that human self-experience is inherently a narrative entity. One narrates stories about oneself and lives life as the central character of those stories, creating an identity and imagining one's selfhood (Dennett, 1992; Schechtman, 2011, p. 435).

Episodic self, on the other hand, is a matter of experiencing oneself in the moment without involving the past and future. In Strawson's words, "one does not figure oneself, considered as a self, as something that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future" (Strawson, 2004, p. 65). What this implies is that the episodic self arises when the self is understood not in terms of memories or anticipations but as something amidst the ongoing flux of experience.

Episodic self-understanding is also a usual mode of self-experience; we may assume being an episodic self in many moments. This does not amount to any negation of the past, but memories of the past or anticipations of the future do not form any role in the identity of the self. In other words, episodic self does not live on memories or anticipations.

As Strawson succinctly explains (2004), to become skilled in any domain, say, that of playing the piano, one has to practice a lot. But to play the piano well is not to live on memories of practice. Instead, there is indeed the acceptance of one's skill as the result of whatever one has undergone in the past, but this is not to dwell on memories of whatever happened.

Similarly, an episodic person, one in whom the episodic way of understanding the self is predominant, can grant that she is the result of the past, but this does not result in considering the self as an entity that is essentially moving from past to future. There can be "factual knowledge" of the past, in Strawson's (2005, p. 67) words, but this does not lead to psychological identification with memories as constituting the essence of oneself.

Daniel Kahneman makes a distinction between the remembering self and the experiential self (Kahneman, 2012). The former is a matter of the self being conceptualised in terms of past and future. What gives identity to such a self are memories and anticipations. When the experiential self is in operation, attention is focused on whatever is happening in the present, with memories and anticipations playing no key role.

One can clearly see that these different ways of conceptualising the self run parallel to the diachronic and synchronic ways of understanding the self. It is tempting to conclude that diachronic and narrative self are one and the same. Both involve notions of the self as an inner entity. But it may be recalled that the diachronic way is primarily a matter of conceptualising oneself as something that exists from past to future. It need not give rise to a story or narrative. There can be a diachronic person who, in the words of Strawson, "lives by force of circumstance, an intensely picaresque and disjointed life, while having absolutely no tendency to seek unity or narrative pattern in it" (2005, p. 76). Such a person may consider herself to be primarily an entity with a past and future but may not experience herself primarily as the protagonist in a story.

The point that the diachronic self is not necessarily tantamount to the narrative self can be elucidated further by looking into some prominent accounts of the nature of the narrative self. David Hume (1874) famously observed that the self is a bundle of memories knotted together by imagination and that memories can tell life stories that constitute who 'I' am.

This point is developed further by pointing out the importance of stories identified by Charles Taylor (1989) and Paul Ricoeur (1994) who hold that human life is a narrative quest. Ricoeur understands narrative in the form of agency, emphasising the narrative quest. As he sees it, most of us describe ourselves in terms of stories and are surrounded by the storytellers, the ones who see the world as stories and live according to it; living life as stories is a popular and convenient option (Ricoeur, 1994).

In a similar vein, the psychologist Jerome Bruner sees narratives or stories as the composition of a sequence of experiences and events that happen to be a mental state and the individual as the agent of the narrative (1990, pp. 43-44; Bruner, 2002). According to Dan Zahavi (2007), humans are self-interpreting beings who form stories with their experiences and describe themselves according to narrative structure. This can be explained in terms of the linguistic capability that allows a subject to express his experiences in the form of stories (Gallagher, 2000).

Alasdair MacIntyre also emphasises the importance of narratives and describes the entire human life as a narrative quest or a description of "the unity of a human life" (1984, p. 219). The narrative is important to understand our lives and actions within a specific context; it ties our experiences together (MacIntyre, 1989).

The narrative self-constitution view of Marya Schechtman (1996) holds that personal identity can be fully explained by looking at the self as constituted by narratives. Autobiographical narratives are the prime constituent of our identity, which helps us to evolve into a person. A person who leads his life narratively can associate autobiographical experiences with the events and experiences of his life and can bring the entire life into a single life story (Schechtman, 2011).

On the other hand, there have been attempts to treat narratives on a par with human biological endowment. Daniel Dennett (1992) considers narratives to be a part of our biological endowment and the human brain to be a narrative-generating machine that generates the self as the 'center of narrative gravity' or a protagonist of one's narrative. He even says that we extrude narratives just like spiders' spin webs (Dennett, 1992).

From all these different accounts it can be gleaned that to be a narrative self is to experience oneself in terms of a story and to explain to oneself one's life by means of a narrative. It is clear that narrative self is diachronic, but it need not be the other way around. This means that one can conceive of oneself diachronically, but that need not be expressed in terms of a narrative.

The self becomes the protagonist in a story when its agency is highlighted as essential. That is to say, the tendency to "seek unity or narrative pattern" (Strawson, 2004, p. 442) becomes prominent only when the self is understood as an agent who looks at life in terms of a project to be accomplished. In other words, one may consider oneself to be something with a history and future, but this does not necessarily amount to forming a story about oneself.

This can be understood in terms of the metaphors used to understand life. Following George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1999), it can be contended that life is often understood in terms of a journey. This is clearly a case of conceptual metaphor where the target concept is 'life' and the source concept is 'journey.' Conceptual metaphor theory holds that abstract concepts are understood metaphorically and source concepts normally have their basis in bodily experience, either directly or indirectly. When it comes to the concept of life, it is often understood as a long journey.

When we undertake a journey, there is normally a destination for which the journey is undertaken. In the case of life, the destination may not be exact, like the name of a place, but can be as vague as the desire to become 'something' in life, and the overall journey can be quite long with several short destinations along the way. When the metaphor of life-as-a-long-journey is predominant in understanding life, it becomes fruitful to understand life in terms of a story. When there is a destination, the journey is simply a means to an end, and presenting all steps in the form of a coherent story can help in ensuring that whatever we do in life is conducive to reaching our goal.

It is important to note that on a journey, one can either be the driver or a passenger. That is why a diachronic but non-narrative self can be simply a passenger who is ready to go wherever the vehicle goes. But, when one is either a passenger with a clear destination or a driver who considers herself to be free to take the vehicle anywhere, the narrative becomes important. It is easy to note that agency is salient in the last two cases but not in the first one, where the passenger embarks on a journey without any clear destination.

The above discussion implies a clear difference in the conditions of identity in different kinds of self-conception. In the case of episodic or experiential self, identity is clearly fluid as one finds oneself to be amidst the experiential flux. The self does not need to be seen fully as an inner entity, and the boundary between the inner and the outer can remain fluid.

On the other hand, the diachronic but non-narrative self is a matter of identity in terms of an entity with a history and future. At the same time, when there is no overarching story, identity does not need to be understood primarily in terms of agency, though ownership may be present. One owns experience but does not need to be the author or agent. One may simply accept things as they are with no major attempt to mould the world as per one's wish or to play Caesar.

It is important to note that this is not the case of victim identity (Meredith, 2009). Victim identity arises when one's desires are not fulfilled, and the situation is interpreted in such a manner as to perceive oneself as the victim of circumstances or of others' egregious behaviour. This requires dominant narratives and a comprehensive story about oneself.

In the case of the narrative self, identity is understood by means of a narrative, and the self is rich with some features like agency. The self is normally identical to the main character in the story of oneself. It consists of memories, anticipations, and reports of many things happening in the present. The notion of autonomy is central to the identity of being an agent because to be an agent amounts to having the freedom to exercise one's choices. Of course, one may find oneself unable to exercise autonomy and feel oneself to be a victim of circumstances, but this does not amount to any denial of the capacity of autonomy or agency.

3. Narrative Self and the Spirit of Our Times

A careful look at the difference between narrative and episodic self, or between the remembering and experiential self, clearly shows that the former is dominant in our times, at least in what is pejoratively called WEIRD cultures.[1] In fact, the way in which the evolution of human society is understood in terms of progress from hunter-gatherers to the industrial and digital itself requires a narrative to understand life. This transformation is not biologically given, like the development of a single cell into a biological organism, but rather culturally mediated.

This, in turn, requires conceptualising progress through stages or looking at society as undergoing a long journey towards an end. All this requires rich forms of narratives. Even if this is at the level of society, the same holds good at the level of the individual. In fact, individuals are generally expected to contribute to human progress, and each individual's life can be assessed in terms of her contribution in this regard. Modern education systems often result in making the narrative self dominant because the whole educational process is seen as a means to an end, which will be accomplished much later.

As Kieran Egan points out, it is only in the nineteenth century that discussions about curriculum started tackling matters like preparing the masses with skills and knowledge for productive work and good citizenship (Egan, 1998, p. 205). In other words, the dawn of mass production coincided with the beginning of mass education. The value of an educated person lies in how far she can contribute to societal purposes. This is clear in the importance given to say, the curriculum vitae, where life's stages and achievements are supposed

[1] WEIRD stands for Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic (Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan, 2010).

to be listed. This amounts to making a story of oneself salient in one's life experience, and, as a result, the self is also understood as a narrative entity.

This point can be explained in terms of the importance given to features like agency and autonomy. An account of reflexive self-conception in modern times given by Miri Albahari (2006) in terms of features like consistent self-concern, autonomy, and ownership, points to the centrality of agency in narrative self-conception. Autonomy is a prerequisite for agency, and agency is often exercised in view of ownership (Albhari, 2006, p. 97).

All these features are arguably centred on agency or 'I,' an inner entity purportedly acting as the source of agency and all that is essential to oneself. It can even be the case that when an individual considers herself to be autonomous or acting out of the free will, the natural causal order is not being given its due in one's understanding of the genesis of actions. That is to say, when a person claims that she made a free decision, the self that made the decision is implicitly assumed to be something that exists over and above the causal order present in the physical universe.

Albahari (2006) argues that when the self is understood in terms of features such as autonomy, a thick psychological boundary with the world arises. Without such a boundary, it may not even be possible to think of oneself as something that transcends the natural causal order. This thick psychological boundary is clearly manifested in the human-nature divide often assumed in our times. Conquering or controlling nature has been a dominant concern during the course of modernity, and this would not have been possible had it not been for the implicit assumption that humans are over and above nature. Thus, humans are the subjects endowed with free will and can manipulate nature or objects.

This kind of thick psychological boundary ordinarily implies the presence of the narrative self. As pointed out earlier, conceptualising life in terms of movement towards progress (or the metaphor of life as a journey) is itself a form of narrative. A diachronic but non-narrative person can simply be like a passenger who is ready to go wherever the vehicle goes. But, the current human project is to transform the planet as per an agenda to ensure perpetual economic growth and more and more technological advancement. This 'developmentality,' or the condition of looking at development as destiny (Deb, 2009, p. 45), started gaining influence with Industrialisation and spread to almost all parts of the world with colonisation.

As Neil Postman points out, it became clear in the twentieth century that progress is not a matter of the unfolding of history or a natural process but something for which human beings must strive (Postman, 2000). This necessitated looking at life as a long journey with a clear destination, and consequently, believing the whole journey has to be arranged to ensure that destination is reached smoothly. This amounts to considering ourselves as the drivers of the journey, and this is why agency and autonomy become paramount. In such a situation, the self is not just diachronic but narrative as well.[2]

Further, rich metaphorical structuring of concepts can easily lead to narratives. For instance, when life is understood in terms of a journey, most of our actions can be understood in terms of their relevance to reaching the destination, and both past and future become salient in the way the self is understood. Further, there can be multiple destinations, some of which can be as intangible as getting respect in society or proving one's worth. The point is that when one ends up trying to evaluate, all that one does in terms of one's ability to reach different types of destinations cannot help, resulting in the formation of a rich narrative.

Thus, it is clear that the spirit of our times is oriented towards progress and development. Further, it is apparent that this worldview presupposes a dichotomy between humans and nature (Moore, 2016). Francis Bacon even used the language of marriage between humans and nature for the progress and the happiness of the former (Bacon in Vickers, 2008). The human-nature dichotomy and related positions have been challenged recently, and overcoming the dichotomy is even presented as a way to counter the myriad problems that the planet, including humans, face against the backdrop of climate change (Ghosh, 2021).

In the next section we shall discuss how the narrative self strengthens human alienation with

[2] This is not to say that there is no episodic person in our times. For instance, Galen Strawson considers himself to be an episodic person. The point is that narrative self is arguably dominant in our times and the human obsession with progress and development, whether at the societal or individual level, shows this.

nature and an inflated or even illusory way of understanding the self.

4. Examining the Role of Narrativity

It seems that the thick psychological boundary of the self with the world arises when the way of looking at the world as an object becomes the default way.[3] That humans are part of nature is self-evident. But, at the same time, humans can distance themselves from the rest of the world and look at the world as an object separate from themselves. This subject-object division can be a standpoint one adopts for a certain purpose without making it the default way of living. However, when it becomes the common way of perceiving the world, it becomes normal to conceptualise the self as separate from the causal order of nature and to endow this conception with features like agency and free will.

It is claimed that the human feeling of separation from nature can be traced to the onset of literacy, which resulted in a reduction in the appreciation of sensory reality (Abram, 1996). Though earlier writing systems were mainly pictographic, when subsequently, the alphabet was invented, this, in turn, resulted in much more linguistic abstraction (Goody, 1987; Ong, 2002). This suggests that when language became predominant in literate cultures, direct attention to the world through sense organs became secondary, and humans have started living more and more in a virtual world created by language. This possibility is further supported by the claim that the notion of nature without humans is something that was invented in recent times (Lloyd, 1991). Human language can refer to non-existent things, and much of civilizational advancement can be traced to this feature of language. At the same time, it can have the negative impact of distancing ourselves from the real world in which we are inextricably embedded.

This happens because language is primarily, as per the tenets of cognitive linguistics, a secondary representational system (Evans & Green, 2006). Language cannot refer directly to the external world but can indirectly through concepts which are rooted in the world and mediated through perception. If one adopts this position, it is clear, as the following discussion attempts to show, why the narrative self is far removed from reality.

The way the self is understood as the protagonist in an ongoing story is evidently a matter of language. If language is a secondary representational system and not directly attuned to reality, then the understanding of the self in the form of a narrative may fail to do sufficient justice to what the self is. In other words, the identity of the self, when understood as part of a narrative quest, may not capture whatever in fact corresponds to the self in the ongoing organism-environment interaction.

First of all, it is clear that when diachronic self-understanding assumes the form of a narrative, it gives more weight to the past or future and may not pay due regard to whatever unfolds in the present. The immediacy with which the world is encountered is occluded when a distance from the world becomes the default way of living. The narrative is a ‘form-finding’ construction that focuses on certain parts of events in our lives. Such an enterprise often prioritises coherence to correspondence. That is to say, what is important is the coherence of the story and not how things actually are.

This point can be explained further by making use of Kahneman’s distinction between the remembering and experiential self. He discusses phenomena such as duration neglect and the peak-end rule to shed light on how the dominance of the remembering self can make us more susceptible to biases and distortions (Kahneman, 2012). When the remembering self is dominant, one tends to give more weight to the peak of an experience than to its actual duration.

Suppose the peak of an experience was very bad, then, one may evaluate that experience very badly, even if most of the moments in that experience were not that bad. In Kahneman’s words, “the global retrospective rating was well predicted by the average of the level of pain reported at the worst moment of the experience and at its end” (2012, p. 380). He explains duration neglect as follows: “The duration of the procedure had no effect whatsoever on the ratings of total pain” (Kahneman, 2012, p. 380).

These phenomena were found in Kahneman’s (2012) following study. Two participants went through a painful experience, and for both, the peak moment was of equal intensity. But Participant A received more pain at the end than Participant B. In turn, Participant B went through the pain for a

[3] Narrow objective attention amounts to making a sharp distinction between the subject and the object (Fehmi & Robbins (2007)).

longer duration, though at the end, the intensity of pain was less compared to patient A. When it came to recollecting the experience, participant A recalled it as much more painful than participant B did. This is because, psychologically, the last moment matters more than the entirety of the experience. This is what the peak-end rule and duration neglect amount to. Memory does not give equal weight to all moments, and when the remembering self dominates, a person fails to do equal justice to all moments of an experience. As a result, such distortions arise.

The narrative self's failure to do justice to reality can be understood in terms of the way the left hemisphere functions as an interpreter. The left hemisphere is even called an interpretive system (Volz & Gazzaniga, 2017) that elaborates on information one receives from the sensory-motor organs (Gazzaniga, 2011; Miller & Gazzaniga, 2000). The well-known split-brain studies have clearly shown that the left brain could indulge in giving rise to a narrative that is coherent but with scant regard for veracity.

For instance, a study done by Gazzaniga (Gazzaniga & Sperry, 1967) shows that when the left hemisphere is not able to access information that is available to the right hemisphere, it does not consider that ignorance and confabulates reasons in order to facilitate the creation of a coherent story. A person's right brain was shown the word *walk*, and he performed the act. The left brain was subsequently asked why the participant had walked, and the reply came in the form of a reason completely unrelated to what had actually transpired. Many such studies show that the left hemisphere can construct a narrative without significant concern for facts.

Further, it can go on interpreting whatever happens, whether internally or externally, without much respect for the factual position, constructing a story with the information available. It not only interprets external stimuli, but also our feelings, thoughts, and other mental processes. It successfully explains our perception, memory, action, and relationship with the world (Gazzaniga, 2011), and in doing so, creates narratives or stories. These interpretations, or narratives, are fundamental to self-functioning and self-consciousness (Daini, 2019), but crucially, they are mediated, or removed from reality. Interpretation is based on language as a form of inferential reasoning.

The left hemisphere controls the faculty of language that empowers our thoughts to communicate with the world, which shapes the notion of the self (Joseph, 1988). Language creates stories based on memories and commands from our brains. The left hemisphere uses language to frame the semantic structure of a statement and generate meaning, which often ignores the truth, in creating its stories. This process is so ingrained that the left hemisphere will tell stories that explain or find patterns even in a vacuum.

The left hemisphere is also good at defining categories and initiating a cycle of full categorization and interpretation. The categories create a sort of map of reality, which does not exist in the external world but is situated inside our brain, precisely controlled by the left hemisphere (Joseph, 1988). Even the 'I' is a category, or a schema supposed to stand for something. It gives rise to the notion of an 'I' based on its capacity for interpretation and categorisation (Niebauer, 2019).

As far as the left hemisphere is concerned, its knowledge is final, and it can easily confuse the map with the territory. That is to say, whatever model it makes of the self, it ends up thinking of as the *real* self. It takes language literally and prefers to be in a virtual world. Thus, the narrative, arising out of the capacities of interpretation and categorisation, can give rise to the illusion that the voice in one's head is equivalent to who we actually are.

The linguistic-based functional self appears as the genuine self, though language only represents reality and does not amount to reality itself (Niebauer, 2019). The narrative need not be completely oblivious to reality but can contain significant exaggerations and embellishments. It may be noted that the study discussed above only shows that the left hemisphere can confabulate reasons and not that it always does so. In turn, right hemispheric concern with reality can constrain the narrative, but that need not always be the case, even in healthy individuals.

As discussed earlier, the predominance of language can have the impact of losing touch with the real world,[4] and this, in turn, may reduce the right hemispheric constraint on narrativity. This narra-

[4] Here, real world refers to the world of, say, trees, stones, and rivers, and the fictional world created by narrative can include much of what is valuable in the modern world, such as governments, corporations, religion etc. See Y. N. Harari's (2014) *Sapiens: A brief history of humankind*.

tive becomes so entrenched, fictional status notwithstanding, because the left hemisphere is normally overconfident in its conclusions (McGilchrist, 2009; McGilchrist, 2021). Further, it is quite content with its virtual world with scant regard for the real world outside.

A careful look at the present human condition clearly shows that the dominant narrative by which human life is steered implicitly assumes that we are more in a virtual world than directly embedded in the real world. The whole project of imparadising the planet arises from thinking that the world needs to be and can be moulded as per the ideas of human progress or of the 'development as destiny' of humanity.

In fact, the whole agenda of human progress clearly shows a narrative in which development is metaphorically understood. Whereas a single cell in the womb is predetermined and ineluctably progresses towards adulthood, such a path of progress cannot be attributed to the change from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle to that of an industrial or digital society (Deb, 2009). This difference is not appreciated in the prevailing consensus for global development in which everyone is expected to have mobility towards more and more 'advanced' forms of life (Irving-Stonebraker, 2017). It is not a coincidence that the left hemisphere is normally incapable of understanding metaphors simply as metaphors and instead treats them literally (McGilchrist, 2009; McGilchrist, 2021).

The present human condition can be explained with the help of an analogy. Imagine a person sitting on a branch of a tree. As long as she simply sits on a branch, she is aware of her precarious position and stays carefully. Later, she starts using a cushion to sit and gradually starts making changes in the branch to make her position more and more comfortable. As a result, a story is made in which the cushion and the concern with additional comforts occupy centre stage. Eventually, her attention is rarely directed towards the branch on which she still sits, though mediated through the cushion. Instead, her attention is focused on a story that speaks of more and more changes in the way she sits, though the changes may eventually result in cutting the branch itself. In other words, her identity is no longer that of a person sitting on a branch but that of someone progressing towards a more comfortable life. As a matter of fact, she cannot move much, but the story does not have any such constraint. Hence, this identity is mainly a matter of narrative, whereas sitting on the branch is primarily a matter of biological experience. Different aspects of a personality can be built based on such a narrative, but the whole person remains precariously disconnected with the real foundation of existence.

What the analogy suggests is that as long as the narrative self dominates our lives, it may be difficult for us to appreciate and act upon the huge predicament that faces us in the form of ecological disasters. It is evident that our current modes of life give rise to irreversible (at least in human time scales) damage to the biosphere. This happens because the narrative self, by its very nature, is less attuned to reality and more oriented towards building castles in the air. This happens when, as pointed out earlier, the narrative generation is less constrained by reality.

There is no doubt that narratives are a part of our lives, but there is no strong evidence that narrative elements are the chief characteristics of one's personhood or the reason for the goodness and richness of human life. Strawson (2004) rejects both the psychological and ethical narrativity thesis. The psychological narrative thesis claims that, as a matter of fact, human beings have a narrative self, and the ethical narrative thesis holds that it is good to have a narrative self.

Here, we do not agree with Strawson's rejection of the psychological narrativity thesis *in toto*, and we have argued that the narrative self is dominant in our times, given the way in which human society moves. At the same time, we accept Strawson's rejection of the ethical narrativity thesis and even argue that reducing the hold of the narrative self has become an ethical requirement in our times.[5]

As pointed out earlier, the defining feature of the narrative self is that it makes the distance between self and world the default way of looking at the world, giving rise to a thick psychological boundary with the world. It is reasonable to hold that making the self less narrative and more episodic can reduce the psychological boundary with the world. This, in turn, involves finding identity in the real world which is viscerally connected with the

[5] This is not to question the legitimacy of narrative ethics and related attempts. Narratives can have an ethical function. The point here is that unbridled narratives can make us feel uprooted from reality, taking us to a precipice.

rest of existence and not finding identity as the protagonist of an ongoing story.

As far as visceral or direct connection with reality is concerned, it is clear that reducing verbal attention[6] can play a role in this regard. Accounts of left hemisphere damage by the neuroscientist Jill Bolte Taylor (2006) clearly show how a radical change in overall experience occurs. She says, "As the language centres in my left hemisphere grew increasingly silent and I became detached from the memories of my life, I was comforted by an expanding sense of grace. In this void of higher cognition and details pertaining to my normal life, my consciousness soared into an all knowingness, a 'being at one' with the universe, if you will. In a compelling sort of way, it felt like the good road home and I liked it" (Taylor, 2006, p. 41). An account of heightened sense perception due to a left hemisphere stroke is also given by Stephen McKinnell, who refers to "seeing trees and birds in a new light" (2017, p. 223).

This happens because of the difference in the way the right and left hemispheres process information (McGilchrist, 2009; Taylor, 2006). The right hemisphere undertakes parallel processing and remains open to whatever is outside its current scope of knowledge and the whole at large. Further, it is oriented towards the present moment. This is contrasted with the left hemisphere, which processes information serially and is not directly connected with the world. Instead, it prefers the verbal world and is interested in and narrowly focused on things it can manipulate without any concern for the context or the whole picture.

Of course, a left hemisphere stroke is incapacitating, and it becomes a remedy much worse than the disease. But what is important in this context is the possibility of nurturing some qualities associated with the right hemisphere so as to mitigate the impact of excesses of the narrative self. One can have non-verbal attention to the real world without sweeping everything under the carpet and give more importance to the whole and to context. This, in turn, can reduce hasty judgments and make a person more open to what there is, reducing the hold of the narrative self with a thick psychological boundary with the world.[7] All these abilities are present, though remain underutilised when narratives become dominant.

The salutatory nature of such changes is captured in Taylor's statement: "My stroke of insight is that at the core of my right hemisphere consciousness is a character directly connected to my feeling of deep inner peace. It is completely committed to expressing peace, love, joy, and compassion in the world" (Taylor, 2006, p. 133). It is clear that such positive changes can be engendered without any debilitating impact, such as that caused by a stroke. The reduction in the psychological boundary is clearly illustrated in an account of mindfulness meditation by Bhante Gunaratana. In his words, "mindfulness is participatory observation…It is the wakeful experience of life, an alert participation in the ongoing process of living…it does not categorize…Mindfulness does not aim at anything" (Gunaratana, 2011, p. 135, p. 146, p. 147).

The above account of mindfulness meditation clearly shows a reduction in the dominance of the left hemispheric way of attending to things and reduces the dominance of a narrative self that maintains a sharp psychological boundary with the world. Further, the present moment and different sensory modalities are given their due without subsuming everything under the torrent of a narrative.

When the narrative self becomes less dominant, the episodic or experiential self can become more entrenched. It is no coincidence that some wisdom traditions point to the need to make the self more and more episodic. For instance, in *Bhagavad Gita*, Kṛṣṇa suggests that: "You have the right to the work only but never to its fruits. Let not the fruits of action be your motive, nor let your attachment be to inaction" [Chapter Two, verse 47] (Mukundananda, 2022). This idea is known as *Niskama Karma*, which emphasises present actions and argues that our actions should be unaffected by their results. Similarly, the Holy Bible prescribes: "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day [such as today] has enough trouble of its own" [Matthew 6: 34] (Holy Bible: New International Version, 2011).

[6] Verbal attention refers to paying attention mediated by language. For instance, the moment we see a thing we may mentally note its name and then it becomes a case of verbal attention.

[7] Hasty judgments are instantaneous, habitual reactions where there is no space between perception and judgment. A person is more open when she is less inclined to make such habitual judgments and can respond after clearly perceiving the situation.

This is clearly a suggestion to make the self less narrative and more episodic. One can live in the present moment and be aware of one's actions, unhindered by future thoughts, in a way that will contribute to a better future because our current actions decide our future. Apart from nurturing positive emotions, the episodic self is certainly more attuned to reality. This happens because when one is dominated by a narrative, reality is encountered indirectly and partially, whereas the episodic self is more attuned to things as they unfold in real time.

It is because of the dominance of the narrative self that McGilchrist has to say, "I believe that nowadays we live no longer in the presence of the world, but rather in a representation of it" (McGilchrist, 2021, p. 7). What is required is a change in one's identity from that of a protagonist in a narrative to someone who is deeply rooted in the real world with its holistic and uncertain features. The identity of the episodic self does not need to be rigid given the diminution of the thick psychological boundary with the world. It is more rooted in reality and, therefore, less susceptible to grandiose claims about itself. As such, it can harbour more harmonious forms of coexistence.

5. Conclusion

The identity of the self in the narrative mode can hardly do justice to what is there, given the nature of language as a form of representation. When the narrative self is dominant, the direct relation with the world becomes minimal and can give rise to an illusory sense of the self. It is illusory because it can give rise to the feeling of being footloose and can be uprooted from the real world. This threatens serious repercussions in the way we lead our lives and in our relation with the world at large. One way to mitigate this is to make the self more and more episodic, where the identity of the self is found more in the inextricable relationship of the organism with the real world and not as an isolated entity occupying the centre stage in a story.

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WHOSE HAND WRITES THE STORY OF 'US'? VULNERABILITY TO IDENTITY INTERPELLATIONS IN A NON-REPRESSIVE SOCIAL CONTEXT

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Abstract:
I propose a reconsideration of the role that 'interpellations' play in the dynamic process of identity construction. 'Interpellation' is a quasi-technical term introduced by Louis Althusser (1969) that I reinterpret using the lens of contemporary social ontology. I therefore look at it as an identity proposal that the individual can either accept, reject, negotiate, or outright ignore. In the original text, Althusser mentions the fact that the individual's acceptance is the essential moment of an interpellation, but he does not elaborate on the other options available to the individual. I believe it is important to analyze the individual's options and the factors that may influence whether the individual's freedom of choice is fully exercised in such contexts. I further discuss the human vulnerabilities that cause 'interpellations' to be adopted without much reflection, even in the absence of a repressive system that would try to enforce a mainstream ideology.

Key words: identity interpellation, social ontology, Louis Althusser.

1. Introduction

Louis Althusser (1969) introduced the term *interpellation* to refer to an invitation addressed to an individual to take upon oneself a set of rights and duties inside an ideological system. If the terms of the interpellations are accepted by the individual, the interpellation becomes part of the identity project(s) of that individual (Eagleton, 1991, p. 110).

The intention of this paper is to analyze the route from interpellation to identity construction, with a special focus on the factors that make people excessively vulnerable to those interpellations that use the hermeneutical resources made prominent by the state.

In the context of this paper, I use the term 'identity' to refer to the self-definition that an individual formulates about oneself, either in private thoughts about oneself or in words expressed about oneself in front of others (Barker & Jane, 2007, p. 216; Nae, 2015, p. 201).

In the basic terms of social ontology, 'identity' is the Y-term in a logical structure 'X counts as Y,' where X is the complex set of empirical data that make up a person's being (that can be subjected to biological or psychological analysis) and Y is the organizing principle by which the 'I' as a conscious agent tries to bring order among the complexities, self-contradictions, and intricacies of X, including X's whims, desires, inclinations, physical or inner experiences, and so on. In other words, Y can be understood as a set of meanings imposed on X by X to bring order in X (Chandler, 2007; Nae, 2015; Searle, 2010). In search of a certain degree of coherence, for oneself and for others, human beings use Y as a means of self-reference, expression, and communication.

People have multiple elements that compose their identity (Y is further composed of Y1, Y2, Y3…Yn) and constantly infer ideas about various possibilities of expressing themselves and exercising their potential according to the culturally-rooted meanings and values that are assigned to each of these identities. The individual can negotiate these meanings within certain boundaries (see Nae, 2015, pp. 201–218).

The progressive construction of one's identity (Y) involves iterative operations of self-interpretation and self-management. Y may be rooted in the past, in the present, in spiritual revelation, in artistic imagination, in tradition, and so on. The ensuing results of self-interpretation and self-management can be more or less successful in their attempt to work as scaffolds towards one's self-fulfillment or as useful bridges for reaching others. That is why most people engage in successive transformations of Y during a lifetime, consisting in efforts to update and reconsider their mode of being in the world according to the feedback they received along the way. The art of building one's identity is always placed in a tension between respecting one's boundary conditions (i.e., the 'given') while aiming for higher-order values that give meaning and purpose to one's life (i.e., the 'aspirational identity'). Discerning how far one can pull oneself towards a projected Y represents the basis of many fundamental decisions in each person's life.

Following this account, Althusser's quasi-technical term of *interpellation* can be understood as an identity-proposal: X is invited to see oneself as Y.[1] Althusser explicitly states that it is through this process of *interpellation* that the individual becomes a subject of the state - and, by extension, of any political system or any system of social representations (see Nae, 2015, p. 40). In other words, individuals are offered a set of hermeneutical resources that already benefit from public recognition and mutual acknowledgment as a foundation on which to construct their identity within the logic of the system that is behind the interpellator (Fricker, 2014; Nae, 2015; Searle, 2015).

Most interpellations are reducible to X's being invited to see oneself as Y, but their forms can vary from 'Hey, Y!' (where the interpellator takes for granted X's acceptance to be Y) to 'All X-s dream of being Y' (where the interpellator tries to stimulate X's acceptance regarding Y by presenting Y as being obviously desirable or suitable to X's life). Sometimes, X can be invited to do an action that already assumes X's being Y, because it is only people who already are Y that do that action (for example, being invited to a trade union meeting or to a cocktail party that may only be attended by members of a certain group).

To understand the mechanisms that underlie the act of interpellation, we must analyze Althusser's original text more closely.

2. The Underlying Mechanisms of Interpellation

Here is what Althusser writes about the moment of being interpellated:

> Interpellation […] can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace […] hailing: 'Hey, you there!' The interpellated individual will turn round. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a subject (Althusser, 1969, p. 40).

In recognizing oneself as the one who is interpellated, the individual transforms the 'you' contained in the interpellation into the 'I' that defines a new level of involvement in the system. The individual thus becomes a subject of the system.

By applying this procedure in an iterative manner, the system of social representations (from which the interpellation draws its meaning) is further validated by members of that community and continues to exert its influence on them, while both the interpellated and the interpellator take on the identity projects that the system prescribes to them. Basically, all systems of social representations are kept alive and further reproduced by these repeated sequences of interpellations followed by answers from the individuals to whom they are addressed (Althusser, 1969; Searle, 2010).

Althusser explains that the original source of most interpellations is the state. The state relies heavily on its ideological structures, consisting in educational, cultural, political, and media institutions for progressively introducing people to a specific worldview that is compatible with its long-term objectives and interests (Althusser, 1969). Individuals are trained by these ideological state apparatuses to develop a particular understanding of the world, a particular way of looking at a set of facts, ideas, and identity roles as being an obvious part of a successful individual and collective life (Althusser, 1969).

[1] In an attempt to align past and present theoretical frameworks, I will use the term 'identity-interpellations' to refer to the category of speech acts, although Althusser only mentions the transition from 'individual' to 'subject' and does not use the word 'identity' *per se*. I believe that what was referred to as 'subject' in Althusser's work is in effect 'identity' in contemporary social ontology (Nae, 2015, pp. 40-41).

It is important to mention here that Althusser does not understand 'ideology' in its contemporary meaning (a set of falsehoods, rigidly repeated and widely disseminated, serving a particular class in advancing a political agenda). He regards 'ideology' as the underlying structure on which people build different collective meanings that they further treat as 'obvious': in their personal, social, and political life. The following excerpt illustrates this point:

> It is essential to realize […] that the author and the reader of these lines both live 'spontaneously' or 'naturally' in ideology in the sense in which I have said that 'man is an ideological animal by nature (Althusser, 1969, p. 38).

In the language of contemporary social ontology, what Althusser here refers to as 'ideology' is a system of social representations (Nae, 2015, pp. 39-45). Althusser's investigation of ideological state apparatuses can thus be understood as preceding the work done by philosophers who try to reveal the underlying logical structure of institutions and of social reality (Searle, 2010; Searle, 2014). Althusser's analysis goes further than explaining social entities. He also explains the process by which individuals become part of these structures.

This view of Althusser of man's intrinsic 'living-in-ideology' has two important implications for my study. First, it means that interpellations should not be exclusively seen as forms of manipulation or oppression. In reality, they can cover a wide spectrum of functions.

Bringing discipline to people's lives and assigning roles for them can be the basis for further stability in the collective life of those people. Based on these assignments of roles, institutional practices can be further developed. These institutional practices may protect the lives of the individuals, ensure various forms of peaceful cooperation, and increase possibilities for their flourishing (Searle, 2014). Interpellations can exert a positive or a negative influence depending on their content (that can in turn be deceitful or manipulative) and on the institutional practices they help establish or maintain (that can in turn be unjust or oppressive).

Secondly, the alternative to being vulnerable to interpellations should not be imagined as a complete freedom from all interpellations. Rejecting all interpellations and only 'listening to oneself' is not the alternative I envisage. This is because all individuals need one set of hermeneutical resources and axiological pillars to give them the 'raw material' on which to build their identities and, at the same time, to provide them with a set of boundary conditions without which an identity cannot be optimally shaped (Althusser, 1969; Toplean, 2016). To have an identity involves a certain degree of specialization. This *specialization* and intrinsic *boundedness* are important both on a personal level and on a societal level.

We need to realize that 'Listen to yourself' is a pervasive interpellation that has developed deep roots in many cultures precisely because it conceals its character of being an interpellation by creating the illusion that it describes a route to do away with all interpellations. The idea that one should search *inside* for true meaning and take whatever is found 'in there' to be suitable for an identity project ignores the fundamental truth that the contents of a human's 'inside' are diverse (Matthew 15:19).[2] Many of them are vices, whims, illusions, explosions of self-entitlement, mimetic rivalry, shallowness, and so on. These cannot become axiological pillars for one's identity projects and cannot provide the boundary conditions that are necessary for a flourishing social life. In Horkheimer's view, this line of thinking that glorified the 'subjective' has rendered it impossible for people to evaluate ideas and actions within a shared axiological framework (Horkheimer, 1947, pp. 3-39).

While distance from external interpellations is undeniably an essential step in the process of identity construction, this distance should not be understood as being equivalent to individuals' taking themselves as the ultimate source and evaluation criterion for their identity projects. The desirable psychological distance only envisages the ability to make conscious decisions regarding the interpellations that should be accepted and the interpellations that should be rejected, while taking into account their content, their source, and their consequences.

In what follows, I invite the reader to explore the main types of identity interpellations that an

[2] A substantial part of Western culture has transformed our 'inside' into the source of truth, ignoring the warning that Jesus Christ gave us: "out of the heart come evil thoughts - murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matthew 15:19). While we find in the Scriptures many invitations to pay attention to our inner life, to close ourselves in the 'inner room' for prayer (Matthew 6:6), the 'inner room' is seen as the receiver, not as the source of truth: "Create in me a clean heart, o God, and renew a right spirit within me, Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy spirit from me" (Psalm 50/51). For a development of this idea, see Baștovoi, 2023.

individual can be exposed to. Since they can cover a wider spectrum of discursive forms (Hall, 1996; Loxley, 2006; Williamson, 1978), interpellations can sometimes be so enmeshed in the social background in which people live that they are not perceived as interpellations *per se*.

3. Types of Identity Interpellations

Identity-interpellations can be implicit or explicit. They can come in the form of an invitation to engage with someone (a person who already is part of that system) or something (a product, a service, a media outlet) that embodies and further transmits the values of the larger ideological system (Althusser, 1969; Nae, 2015; Rose, 2001; Williamson, 1978).

Some of the explicit interpellations are precise, such as calling a person's name or attaching some moniker that serves as a substitute for the person's name, such as 'Hey, comrade!' in Communist countries.

But most interpellations are rather vague, such as media representations of a certain category of people as always doing a certain category of activities. 'All X do Y1' or 'To be fulfilled as X, you must be Y2' are often implicit messages that may create the impression that the association between that category of people and that category of activities or traits is obvious. This can indirectly interpellate people belonging to that group (X) to believe that it would be desirable for them to do the activities (Y1) or to achieve the traits (Y2) that are presented as being suitable for flourishing as X. This latter type of indirect interpellation can instill in people the conviction that they are missing out on important parts of their own life if they do not engage in such-and-such activities or if they do not possess such-and-such traits (Nae, 2015, pp. 40-41; Rose, 2001, p. 100; Williamson, 1978, p. 57).

The system that supports the interpellation and stands behind the interpellator can be a formal system in its own right (an institution where the individual, once becoming a subject, has a set of rights, duties, authorizations, obligations) or an informal system (a playground, a club, an event). Sometimes, it is not activities that are the object of the interpellation, but modes of being in the world, approaches to life, ways of seeing other people, and so on.

While the explicit interpellations are easier to detect and analyze critically, the implicit ones can go unnoticed and become part of the ideological fabric in which individuals are entangled. They are constitutive of people's background knowledge that further mediates their perceptions and thoughts, including those related to identity projects (Searle, 1994, p. 642).

Interpellations also differ in what regards the relationship between the interpellator and the individuals who are interpellated. Individuals can enter into a relationship with the interpellator directly, or they can enter into a relationship with a person that is a representative of the interpellator (e.g., a spokesperson, a client-service assistant), but they can also be interpellated by an avatar of the interpellator (a brand character, for example). Some of the intermediaries are shaped according to the audience's tastes, thus increasing their chances to be well-received by the audience and be more effective in advancing a certain ideology (Blais, Gauchet and Ottavi, 2019, pp. 91-94). More recently, the role of interpellators can be occupied by chatbots based on machine learning models, some of which have interfaces that maximize the illusion that there is a 'mind' in there to interact with. How users interpret the interpellations of these machines and how much trust they put in their (projected) empathy are questions open for research in the following years (see Koban & Banks, 2024; Saetra, 2024). These interpellations can be problematic from the point of view of accountability and responsibility, especially since a veil of technological complexities covers the output of large language models (Saetra, 2024).

One final distinction is that between repression-enforced interpellations and repression-free interpellations. Althusser writes that the ideological system is often supported by the repressive components of the state such as the police, the army, the government (Althusser, 1949, pp. 16-17). In other words, the adoption of mainstream interpellations in repressive systems may also be the result of an *ad baculum* argumentation enmeshed in the ideological state apparatuses.

By contrast, in a democratic, pluralistic, non-repressive society, individuals have the opportunity to choose the interpellations they wish to follow. They have the possibility of distancing themselves from interpellations without the fear that they will have to suffer any negative consequences. However, social critics have discovered that even in the absence of repression, many identity interpellations are hastily accepted (Baştovoi, 2018; Cathelat, 1992; Toplean, 2016). It appears that people sometimes choose to define themselves in the terms proposed by ideological state apparatuses. In what follows, I try to formulate a set of explanations for this vulnerability to interpellations.

4. What Is It That Makes People Vulnerable to Interpellations?

In this section, I identify some of the sources of vulnerability that make people surrender without a fight when they are faced with an identity interpellation.

4.1. The Need to Be Seen as a Subject by Another Subject

Interpellations have a level that precedes and underlies their propositional content. It is a level on which a *relational identity interpellation* takes place. Being rather hidden from view, it does not mobilize any resources of skepticism that individuals may have. If people can doubt the propositional content of certain interpellations, they can hardly doubt that these interpellations are being addressed to them. Here is what Althusser writes on this topic:

> It follows that, for you and for me, the category of the subject is a primary 'obviousness' (obviousnesses are always primary): it is clear that you and I are subjects (free, ethical, etc.). Like all obviousnesses, including those that make a word 'name a thing' or 'have a meaning' (therefore including the obviousness of the 'transparency' of language), the 'obviousness' that you and I are subjects – and that that does not cause any problems – is an ideological effect, the elementary ideological effect (Althusser, 1969, p. 38).

On a primary, fundamental level, interpellations work because they implicitly state our existence to someone else. When we are interpellated, we are seen. This implies that, when people undergo difficult times of loneliness or private chaos, they can be especially vulnerable to the act of being interpellated. Sometimes, being interpellated by someone can be a matter of emotional survival for them. This may increase their vulnerability to interpellators who are able to (or give the illusion that they are able to) recognize them as subjects.

To take a contemporary example, many chatbots have an explicit interpellation built into their interfaces. These systems are programmed with default lines that interpellate the user. For example, 'How can I assist you today?' is the first question one receives from ChatGPT. This question not only positions (and personifies) the chatbot as being willing and able to help people (both qualities being rather controversial today), but it also creates the setting for a relational identity to be developed on the human side of this interaction. The same phenomenon can be illustrated by other lines I have extracted from my own 'conversations' with it:

'If you have any more questions, feel free to let me know';

'I apologize if there was any confusion or error in my response';

'I would be interested to hear what you wrote about'.

The fact that many users believe that there is (some sort of) an autonomous mind behind the system (Koban & Banks, 2024; Saetra, 2024) has been documented in scholarly literature as the 'Eliza' effect (Berry, 2023). But the conversational interface's function is not only that of modifying people's perception of the system. Its other function, that of creating a relational identity at the receiving end of the simulated conversation, is equally important.

This is why Althusser's insights are much needed today: people need to become aware of the fact that they are sometimes vulnerable to interpellations not because of the content of the interpellation, but because of the implicit premises involved in the act of interpellation itself. Being at the receiving end of an interpellation does not only provide them with hermeneutical resources for identity construction. Being at the receiving end of an interpellation can be equivalent to a confirmation of one's being and counting to somebody else.

4.2. The Difficulty of Exploring Alternatives

A second source of excessive vulnerability is people's limited access to alternative systems of representations. Individuals are often prevented from exploring possibilities for their own identity projects (other than the ones that the system promotes). Although apparently diverse, identity interpellations converge on many levels. Despite appearing to offer multiple (and even contradictory) choices, all of the interpellations that are mainstream are essentially supporting a common worldview.

On this point, Althusser writes the following:

> The unity of the different Ideological State Apparatuses is secured, usually in contradictory forms, by the ruling ideology […] This concert is dominated by a single score, occasionally disturbed by contradictions […] the score of the ideology of the ruling class which integrates into its music all other themes (Althusser, 1969, pp. 19–24).

Althusser explains that certain propositional contents of interpellations may sound obvious because of people's repeated exposure to similar ideas by means of other sources of meaning, such as the media or educational institutions. This happens in commercial and political discourse, although we are theoretically living in a democratic and pluralistic society: in spite of their competing on a commercial or political level, many brands are actually supporting a common worldview on an ideological level (Cathelat, 1992). The values that oppose the mainstream interpellation are simply not *out there*. They disappear from mental sight even as conceptual categories. They progressively become thoughts that are impossible to think, because nothing in the common pool of hermeneutical resources or in the material world speaks of them.

To resist this form of vulnerability towards interpellations, a classic piece of advice is that people should always take into account the truth of the statement that would directly oppose that which they hear most often on any given topic. Yet, to do this, one must make an additional effort that not many people are willing to engage in. While the mainstream interpellations are accessible, one needs to do independent research to explore the other categories of hermeneutical resources. While the mainstream interpellations ensure a reasonable degree of popularity for the person who accepts them, those who embrace the scarce hermeneutical resources need the courage to take a route that does not benefit from widespread popular appeal. While everyone speaks the language of mainstream interpellations, the ones who embrace the scarce hermeneutical resources always face overflows of misunderstandings (Fricker, 2014). The effort required to access these scarce hermeneutical resources needs people who are willing to invest in truth. But truth itself has become a questionable value in many societies, under the pressure of generalized relativism. As truth is reduced to being useful only insofar as it provides public acceptance or other social benefits (Horkheimer, 1947), the incentive to obey mainstream interpellations is even stronger.

4.3. The Fact that Many Interpellations Echo Our Passions

Another source of vulnerability to interpellations is the fact that their propositional content may resonate with people's deepest passions, longings, and even vices, many of which relate to their desire for something to be true. People further confuse that desire with truth itself. Those interpellations may seem obviously correct not because of repetition, but because they echo people's inner drives.

An example is provided by a class of contemporary interpellations that are explicitly directing individuals towards endless experimentation with their 'identity.' They speak directly to people's narcissism by telling them that they can be whatever they want to be. Although implausible as a promise, this class of interpellations has gained popularity by *appeal to flattery*.

We see it everywhere: AI-powered hyper-personalization, metaverse immersive experiences, identity-altering surgeries, colonization of space. All these interpellations rest on the mindset of self-enhancement beyond all previous limitations. In other words, X is no longer seen as a boundary condition for Y.

The reality that is unfolding tells a fundamentally different story: the esteem for the (often fictional) Y-term of one's identity risks trumping the esteem for the real X-term, who ends up being subjected to numerous physical or psychological abuses in order to fit the 'Y' projection. The new 'gold rush' is the rush to not miss an interpellation that might be an additional source of personal enhancement. Who bears the costs if X ends up being pushed beyond its breaking point? In imagination, there is no such point. But in reality, there is.

The question about who bears the costs if interpellations produce negative consequences brings us closer to the last vulnerability I want to address: the interpellator is often faced with a *credibility excess* on the part of an audience.

4.4. A Distorted Understanding of the Interpellator's Status

The interpellators are often assumed to know something more than the interpellated, and their words are treated as if they were *declarations*. Declarations are speech acts that bring a state of affairs into existence only by declaring it to be the case, provided that the person has the deontic powers to perform that declaration: 'X counts as Y in Z.'

For example, 'I pronounce you husband and wife,' 'You are fired,' 'I name this ship Elizabeth,' are *declarations* when they are performed by the person who has the authority to bring those institutional facts into existence (Searle, 2010). To perform declarations, one needs to have *deontic powers*, a term used by John Searle to refer to the set of rights and obligations intrinsic to somebody's occupying a certain function in a system (Searle, 2010). Many of them imply authority over other people and the power to bring certain institutional facts into existence simply by declaring them as such.

However, in spite of their resemblance on a formal level, not all identity interpellations are declarations, because in many cases the interpellator does not have deontic powers over the person who is interpellated, although some interpellators often behave as if they did.[3]

The receiver of the interpellation must pay attention to this subtle manipulation of context that interpellators may perform. The receiver can even cancel the terms in which the interpellation is formulated. There is a passage from the Bible (Matthew 4: 3-7) that illustrates this form of resistance to the conditional *identity interpellation* that rejects not only the invitation *per se* but also the terms in which it is formulated. The false dichotomy that is the basis of the interpellation is contested by the fact that the receiver does not attend to it. The answer is a rejection that also questions and simultaneously cancels the deontic powers that the interpellator had tried to take on.

Although these vulnerabilities may seem so intimately tied to human nature that they become unavoidable, their force on one’s consciousness can be reduced if interpellators are required to answer the following questions:

(a) Is Y a compatible function for X, given X’s physical and psychological strengths and weaknesses?

(b) Why does the interpellator want X to be Y?

(c) Will there be any negative consequences for the interpellator if things do not work out well for X?

The person who is interpellated must not forget that the interpellator has the duty to provide these categories of information upon request. Nowadays, the consumer or the citizen is often put in the position of searching for that information on their own. However, this is impossible from an epistemic point of view, given the number of interpellations one receives and the amount of information that would be needed for a responsible choice to be made. More importantly, this approach rests on a confusion between the duties of the interpellator and the duties of the person who is interpellated. If the interpellator has no answer to the aforementioned questions, the only justifiable route for the receiver of the interpellation is to simply deny the interpellator’s proposal until new information is provided. Provisional denial is acceptable and within reach for any receiver of an interpellation.

5. Conclusion

This work is based on a close reading of Louis Althusser’s theory of interpellation and its relationship to the process by which the individual is transformed into a *subject* within a system. I have tried to view Althusser’s contribution in a new light, one that focuses more on the receivers of the interpellation and the freedom they have. This is a point that Althusser only alluded to, but which he has not insisted on. I explained why the individual who receives an *identity interpellation* should not treat it as an evil *per se* (since it may be the optimal source of a hermeneutical framework for expressing one’s identity), nor as a blessing *per se* (since it may rest on assumptions that lead the individual in an undesirable direction), but as an *identity proposal* that can be further scrutinized from a distance. By ‘distance,’ I refer to the cognitive space and the time necessary to ponder, to compare, to ask questions about the presuppositions of the interpellation.

I further identified different types of interpellations and discussed the reasons why interpellations in various domains of life tend to be blindly adopted by so many people, even in the absence of the repressive part of the system that would enforce a mainstream ideology. Among the most prominent vulnerabilities, I identified the need to be seen, to be acknowledged, to belong. Interpellations have a relational-identity level on which they operate that may increase the receiver’s willingness to take part in that relationship only in order to become a subject to another subject.

A second source of vulnerability is the fact that mainstream identity interpellations effectively marginalize or conceal other hermeneutical resources. Therefore, developing an identity that employs scarce hermeneutical resources requires an additional cognitive effort and the courage to stand at the precipice of a new horizon that does not benefit from the apparent certainties of intersubjective validation.

[3] Unfortunately, the most famous of Althusser’s examples of an interpellation involved a policeman hailing an individual, and the individual recognizing oneself as the addressee (Althusser, 1969). Many readings of Althusser’s text mistakenly interpret the policeman’s function as the point of the example. However, it is not, which becomes clear once the reader looks at all the other examples provided by Althusser in the same chapter, some of which involve interpersonal relationships: friends calling other friends and saying ‘It is me,’ while the other recognizes who this ‘me’ stands for. The common thread in all these examples is precisely the mutual recognition of subjects involved in the act of interpellation (which Althusser explicitly says constitutes the primary effect of the interpellation).

A third source of vulnerability is the fact that many interpellations speak to our deepest desires based on which they propose fictional identities that we are invited to step into, ignoring their incompatibility with the empirical data that constitute (and limit) our reality as human beings.

One final vulnerability is the credibility excess that certain interpellators tend to benefit from. This credibility excess often stems from the fact that contemporary society tends to forget the duties of an interpellator, some of which I have made explicit.

Apart from its attempt to deepen and enhance the contemporary understanding of the concept of 'interpellation', the present study is also meant to draw attention to the numerous insights that remain hidden in Louis Althusser's work that can be brought to light if we read it through the lens of contemporary social ontology.

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ON HOW THERE IS DIASPORIC IDENTITY

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Abstract:

This paper aims to examine what is called "diasporic identity." The complexity related to this research arises due to the inherent uncertainty and indefinability of identity itself, which is further compounded by the additional layer of uncertainty introduced by the concept of diaspora. The diaspora is not a ready-made, indisputable reality; establishing its existence demands substantiating the claim that it possesses a distinct identity. However, merely demonstrating a shared geographical distance from the homeland raises pertinent questions: Why should the negative circumstance of being distanced from one's homeland serve as a unifying factor, and does this dispersion give rise to an identity transcending national boundaries? Answering these questions involves looking at the historical context of identity and diaspora and introducing concepts that help understand them. The central thesis posited herein asserts that the manifestation of diasporic identity primarily assumes a narrative form, elucidated through both disciplinary discourse and literary works. With specific reference to the Armenian Diaspora, this exposition contends that, in certain instances, reliance solely on academic discourse proves insufficient in establishing a comprehensive comprehension of diasporic identity. It is asserted that literature, with its metaphoric language, emerges as an essential instrument, providing access to the profound layers inherent to the domain, thereby facilitating a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of diasporic identity.

Key words: identity, diaspora, dispersion, homeland, discipline.

1. Introduction: Some Academic Views on Identity and Beyond

As in the case of diaspora, "to review the concept of identity means to sketch its history" (Erikson, 1968, p. 15). In this context, when I refer to 'history,' I am not primarily concerned with the evolution of the term but, more importantly, with understanding how identity unfolds within its historical setting. The term 'identity,' omnipresent in numerous books and journals, carries diverse and evolving meanings. One can trace its evolution from the initial absence of the term to a state of conceptual complexity (Izenberg, 2016). The complexity inherent in the concept of identity sometimes becomes a subject of debate within academic circles (Burke, 2006, Klandermans, 2014), with arguments positing that it is purportedly in a state of crisis and lacks functional capacity to describe or explain any community. These assertions prompt a critical examination of the efficacy of the identity concept in scholarly discourse, questioning its capacity to comprehensively capture and explicate the dynamics of various communities (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000).

Nonetheless, identity is not an exclusive concept confined to academic discourse. Furthermore, the academic connotation frequently imposes an undue burden on the concept of identity, causing dilemmas and distancing it to the extent that the most personal and intimate realities appear estranged (Tölölyan, 2021). This observation underscores the need for a more holistic and inclusive understanding of identity, acknowledging its relevance beyond the academic sphere.

When exploring the concept of identity and trying to find common ground amidst its diverse conceptions and to reconcile these, two distinct methodological viewpoints emerge, each posing separate yet relevant questions: on one side, identity as *selfhood* (Latin *ipse*, German *Selbstheit*, French *ipséité*), on the other, identity as *sameness* (Latin *idem*, German *Gleichheit*, French *mêmeté*) (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 116).

Selfhood is not sameness; the initial query revolves around *"who am I or we?"* God remains inherently consistent, asserting His perpetual selfhood with the affirmation, "I am who I am" (Exodus 3:14), whereas humans endeavor to attain their identity by evolving into *what they are*. Whether directed at individuals or national collectives, this query is about the exploration of one's ontological foundations. In simpler terms, it involves understanding the meaning of 'identity' – the pursuit of differentiation from others, the essence of being oneself, aligning closely with the notion of *self*.

The personal dimension of identity contains an emotional field that makes the object more or less tangible. In discussions about collective consciousness and identity, the emphasis typically lies on the concentrated and condensed layer of identity (Assmann, 1995). This underscores the focus on identification, on belonging to something, posing the fundamental question of *"where are we going or where should we go?"* It explores collective direction and purpose, encapsulating the idea of looking forward while being aware of oneself within the realm of identity. Certainly, these two matters share a connection, not only in the nature of the questions posed but also in their broader contextual implications. However, the methodological separation of these inquiries can be crucial for a more nuanced understanding of discussions on identity.

Another way to look at the concept of identity involves its temporal and spatial aspects. On the one hand, identity invariably exists in the present moment within a defined space, functioning as a distinctive and dynamic system. In this capacity, identity serves as the foundation determining the way a community exists, constituting the very embodiment of culture, nation, or homeland.

Taking a temporal standpoint, identity unfolds as the history of its holder. In this sense, identity is inherently historical, if not predominantly narrative. When metanarratives are deconstructed, revealing the inseparable link between knowledge and power (Lyotard, 1984, pp. 8–9), a consequential revision of the identity narrative ensues. The crisis of identity, accompanied by its associated anxiety, reveals itself as a form of historical melancholy – an earnest longing to carry and preserve history. The establishment of identity throughout history hinges entirely on the hopeful momentum of inertia; unless legitimized and directed, this process remains open. This signifies that identity constitutes the essential component forming the structure of collectivity, coupled with the narrative that articulates it.

The narrative serves as the verbal expression and actualization of a portion of the identity's historical process. This process extends beyond being objective or subjective. When I mention identity here, I'm talking about the historical path of an individual or community. In a way, the revelation of identity occurs retrospectively, emphasizing the paramount importance of legitimizing the identity narrative. Legitimizing identity essentially entails legitimizing this narrative. Consequently, opting for a political course that ensures the persistence of identity implies the presence of a particular political myth or narrative, an illustrative instance of which can be found in the form of Nazism (Nancy, 1991, pp. 43–70).

The focal point of Nietzsche's comprehensive intellectual pursuit was the unveiling of a distinctive form of identity, evident in his choice of subtitle for his autobiography, "How to become what you are" (2007). In narrating the arduous journey of identity establishment, Nietzsche illustrates that becoming what one is necessitates a passionate engagement of consciousness, the establishment of self-awareness, and a profound connection with one's history. Hence, one only truly becomes what one is by effectively becoming the author and embodiment of his or her own history. This form of identity serves as the foundation for a history distinct from a mere imposed duration by external forces, and freedom unconfused with alternate enthusiasm or self-inspiration. It delineates a narrative where one's essence shapes the course of history, providing a genuine trajectory of self-determination.

Evidently, identity primarily resides within narratives, rooted in the realms of humanities, social sciences, and literature. These narratives play a crucial role, offering peoples a distinctive lens through which to identify their homeland or a vision of the state. Throughout these quests, clashes of ideologies within narratives often unfold, redirecting focus towards the fundamental origins of identity. This complexity is further heightened in the context of dispersed communities, especially in the diaspora, where the absence of a distinct geographical affiliation renders the challenge more intricate and convoluted.

2. Identity in Dispersion and Criteria of Diaspora

Ongoing challenges arise beyond the scope of personal identity. The concept of "we" is not a preexisting reality; rather, it requires deliberate invention and establishment. The existence of the diaspora as a unified "we" poses challenges, moving beyond mere coexistence to demand intentional and nuanced construction. Throughout the dispersal of the community, its members find themselves in diverse environments, and the preservation of identity becomes relegated solely to the realm of memory. This emphasizes the inherent difficulty in upholding a unified identity when individuals are situated in diverse contexts, with collective memory serving as the anchoring element.

The evolution of a dispersed community into a diaspora is propelled by narrative identity, weaving together the threads of dispersion into a unified image and striving to unveil the trajectory of its history (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 113). This narrative identity serves as a unifying force, offering a comprehensive framework that unites the diasporic experience and traces its historical path. Frequently, entities possessing extensive historical backgrounds and well-established traditional cultures are marginalized; the impact of the crafted narrative gains ascendancy. Conversely, an entity undergoing a revitalized self-awareness may strongly feel the imperative for its emerging identity.

A prime example of this phenomenon is evident in the fact that in the 20^{th} century, Bulgarian merchants in competition with Greeks became more deeply aware of their separate identity, as the Bulgarians, intent on liberating themselves from both Greek cultural hegemony and Ottoman political dominance, experienced a deepened awareness of their distinct identity (Jelavich & Jelavich, 2000, p. 130).

The very diasporan consciousness, one might argue, emerges from a profound yearning for identity, as individuals find themselves in a void, lacking the narrative which would enable them to understand their own existence. It means that "diaspora consciousness is an intellectualization of an existential condition" (Safran, 1991, p. 88), which entails establishing a foundation for identification and crafting a narrative that revolves around it. The identity narrative goes beyond simple self-disclosure, primarily due to the inherent difficulty in direct articulation. This challenge stems from the fact that self-expression is inevitably mediated by a language of universal character, utilizing concepts that inherently represent the ideas of others.

Consequently, two potential approaches emerge: the requirement of a specialized language or the adoption of various identities beneath a single umbrella (Bruneau, 2010; Clifford, 1994). Both approaches demand protracted, enduring efforts, particularly exacerbated within the context of alienation. The paradox of the alien environment lies in its unexpected empowering influence – it serves to keep the flame of identity alive. More definitively, identity undergoes its most profound contemplation within an alien environment, and alienation plays a crucial role in hindering the process of self-realization and the journey toward becoming one's true self. And conversely, the alien environment remains elusive, resisting complete definition and comprehension unless there exists a clear concept of identity. It raises the question: to what extent does this specific environment appear alien, and in contrast to what does the other one distinguish itself as uniquely foreign? The undefined alien environment becomes a barrier to the recollection of one's own history, serving as an indirect mediator in the process of reconnecting with the past because foreign references and tools invariably serve as poignant cues to memory.

The displaced person is compelled to exert all efforts towards adapting to the alien environment and assimilating a culture distinct from their own. A human being experiences a disconnection from their innate self, from their inherent identity. As Jung points out, "the more civilized, the more unconscious and complicated a man is, the less he is able to follow his instincts" (1959, pp. 20–21). When confronted with external pressures, an individual's life ceases to be a manifestation of identity, an internal unfolding of activity. In such instances, life experience fragments into diverse reactions, losing its essential active subject.

The migratory environment, while muting inner life, simultaneously becomes a challenge for individuals to embark on the journey of reestablishing their identity. Migratory narratives play a pivotal role in reshaping identity, comprising both positive and negative dimensions. On one hand, they involve experiences of loss, displacement, and challenges adapting to new environments, fostering feelings of nostalgia and struggles with assimilation. On the other hand, these narratives offer transformative potential, fostering resilience, adaptability, and a broader perspective through exposure to diverse cultures. This exposure contributes to a more enriched and inclusive identity, highlighting the intricate interplay between adversities and personal growth in the identity reconstruction process.

Discovering an identity in dispersion, in exile, marks the genesis of a diaspora. This emergence of the diaspora occurs through a deliberate act of linguistic awareness, through a diasporic narrative. The diaspora does not exist beforehand; rather, it abruptly comes into existence without any tangible alteration in the circumstances. While dispersion remains unchanged, it acquires an entirely different quality, aspiring to transition from an adjective describing a state to a noun, transforming into a conceptual entity denoting an ontological reality.

Khachig Tölölyan, in response to the prevalent academic notion that the diaspora is not merely a function of socio-historical and disciplinary phenomena but is largely tied to memory and other subjective processes, underscores that although there is no place called ‘diaspora,’ nor is it a legal entity, it is nonetheless conceivable, analyzable, and hence, impartially comprehensible (2019, p. 25). The diaspora is gradually evolving into a distinct and autonomous entity, characterized by its unique language, culture, and concerns that set it apart from the simple group residing outside the homeland. To maintain its identity, the diasporic representative pursues a purpose: to instigate a revolution and engage in endeavors using the distinctive language and culture passed down to them (Chahinian, 2023). This transformation goes beyond being a mere subject, elevating them to a sovereign position. The diaspora, in its quest for self-realization, asserts its capacity to position itself as a functional entity capable of propelling its own progress and safeguarding its existence. No longer relegated to a passive victim, the representative actively shapes the creation of their own history.

Typically, diaspora is conceptualized from the perspective of a well-established collectivity, the homeland. Yet, with the formation of the diaspora, the axis of contemplation undergoes a shift, or at the very least, an additional axis is introduced. The diaspora often views itself in an anti-homeland light. Simultaneously, it propounds the notion of an anti-diaspora, referring to individuals residing in diaspora who remain oblivious to its presence, failing to align with its principles.

In this context, diaspora serves as the most conducive terrain to comprehend the proposition that identity is not merely an inherent endowment or a metaphysical principle, but rather, an ongoing task. This represents, indeed, one of the approaches to understanding identity, a kind of paradigm of identification, but it finds its most suitable application in the diaspora because it does not exist as a preconceived entity; rather, it is conceived and established from diverse angles and perspectives, engaging in the continuous negotiation of various narrative identities – proposed and contested.

In this sense, diasporic identity both has and lacks existence. It lacks a straightforward, direct identifiability, yet, it possesses a distinctive, autonomous character with its own trajectory, history, anxieties, and, notably, a profound distinction from the homeland. It is crucial to exercise caution and resist the facile inclination to locate the diasporan’s home in the ancestral homeland (Tölölyan, 2019, p. 27), as there are no methodological or volitional prerequisites for such a location. The diaspora possesses a unique set of experiences exclusively its own.

However, the universality of both identity and this shared experience becomes a matter of contention when the question of their bearers is raised: Does the so-called ‘diasporan’ possess the same ontological status as the ‘resident of a given country’? The diaspora, far from constituting a homogeneous entity, is more accurately characterized as an institutional unity whose members are still in the process of discovering and defining their commonality. While the challenge of commonality is present among those residing in the homeland, it is particularly pressing in the diaspora due to numerous factors that impede unity.

The diaspora, by its nature, is consistently immersed in a state of anxiety, predominantly due to its condition of exile. The principal concern of the diasporic representative is to assuage these anxieties through the prism of history and culture, specifically by delving into the realm of identity. If identity, as a broad concept, becomes a topic of discussion during moments of profound loss, the diasporic identity is subjected to even more acute scrutiny. The intellectual within the diaspora is compelled to engage in profound introspection, to articulate the various realities causing their anxiety, all with the aim of transcending these concerns. An illustration of this dynamic is evident in the work of the French-Armenian writer Nigoghos Sarafian, who addresses such anxieties through inquiries related to identity:

> What am I, born to several languages yet master of none, not even of my mother tongue, which I returned to after becoming a stranger to myself in a foreign school? What am I, who condemns my own people even though my entire outlook is conditioned by this people's suffering, which I place above all others? Only when I am far from my own people, in solitude, do I comprehend its full scope (Sarafian, 2011, p. 53).

Hence, the imperative for the diasporic intellectual is to write in their native language within a foreign environment, transforming their writing into an environment where the expression of identity occurs through continual intellectual endeavors. The identity narrative constitutes an undertaking that unfolds within the spiritual domain, playing a pivotal role in unveiling the concealed yet indispensable facets of existence. Achieving this necessitates, above all, recounting one's roots and gradually elevating the narrative to the level of rediscovering oneself.

3. Disciplinary Practices and Literary Experience

To comprehensively grasp diasporic identity, it is vital to emphasize its background – the pre-existing environment. At the core of every diaspora lies a specific disaster, a catastrophe, whether it is of military, political, or economic origin, directly resulting in dispersion. Regardless of the diaspora's conditions, location, or characteristics, a singular catastrophic reality shapes its essence. In the case of the Armenian diaspora, this disaster is noteworthy enough to be written in uppercase: Catastrophe, as a proper name, signifying an event that comes back to us from the future because historiographical tools are not sufficient to describe the reality concerning 1915 in the Ottoman Empire (Nichanian, 2009, p. 10). Certainly, a diasporan has the option to insulate himself within artificial conditions, avoid engaging with the catastrophe of the preceding environment, and construct an alternate worldview. However, in such instances, the true essence of diaspora diminishes. Consequently, there exists either a diaspora with its inherent environment or an alternative culture with a distinct history.

In the 21st century, Armenian identity is a matter of choice for the vast majority of the third or fourth post-genocide generation of diasporans, who participate in community life voluntarily rather than as a matter of obligation (Tchilingirian, 2021, p. 35). In this context, becoming a diasporan is a voluntary, conscious, rationalistic, segmental, transitory, sporadic, that is, symbolic action (Bakalian, 1993, p. 431), which implies that the diasporan must inevitably conceive and imagine themselves as such. The effective and objective manifestation of imagination is through historicization which involves selecting the axis of collectivity and narrating stories from that perspective. Within this framework, it becomes feasible to comprehend the trajectory of one's past and present existence and lay the groundwork for ensuring continuity.

The process of historicizing the diaspora and similar realities can be approached through two central perspectives: disciplinary practices and literary experiences. The disciplining of ideas regarding the diaspora emerged significantly later than the diaspora's formation and predominantly draws reference from the Jewish case.

For instance, the Armenian Diaspora, particularly the initial generation of the French-Armenian community, imagined its identity predominantly through the lens of literary experience. In any case, the investigation of these two trajectories is pivotal for comprehending the contemporary diaspora and delineating its connection with the homeland. Nevertheless, it is essential to emphasize that when exploring subjects such as humanity, society, and culture as objects of disciplined inquiry, the disciplines should aim at *understanding* these objects, not at explaining them, as in the physical sciences (White, 1982, pp. 115-116).

William Safran, regarding the Jewish exile as a typical and 'ideal' model for the diaspora's formation, proposes six characteristic-criteria that could be extended to other diasporas: 1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original "center" to two or more "peripheral" regions, 2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth concerning their original homeland, 3) they believe that they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and isolated from it, 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home, 5) they believe that they should collectively be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety, and 6) they continue to relate to that homeland in one way or another (Safran, 1991, pp. 83–84).

Safran considered that the Armenian diaspora resembles that of the Jews most closely; accordingly, he finds the myth of the return of the Armenians and the idea of the end of the Diaspora contradictory. This is due to the complex situation of the Armenian homeland; while a Republic of Armenia exists, it constitutes only a small portion of historical Armenia (Safran, 1991, p. 84). This signifies that there are profound issues tied to the diaspora which may not be fully comprehensible and significant within the framework of explanatory disciplines. The issue of the diaspora is fundamentally a challenge of communication and cannot be addressed through simple imperatives or theoretically formulated criteria. The diaspora is not a product of disciplinary functionality; rather, diaspora studies, in some sense, serves as a belated, post-facto toolkit. There has been a veritable explosion of interest in diasporas since the late 1980s. The terms "diaspora" and "diasporic" featured in titles or abstracts of only twelve dissertations during the entire decade of the 1970s, in about ten per year in the late 1980s, in about sixty per year in the late 1990s, and in more than two hundred per year since 2008 (Brubaker, 2015, p. 119). Furthermore, if initially, the concept of diaspora referred to dispersed Jewish, Greek, and Armenian communities, the semantic scope has now broadened to encompass immigrants, refugees, displaced persons, exiles, expatriate workers, etc. This expansion has led to ideological confusion within the field.

As I have mentioned repeatedly, the diasporic identity is not an inherent certainty but rather unfolds within the domain of literature. Although disciplinary and political observations are crucial, they might neglect the anxieties ingrained in the diasporan's daily life. Literature serves as a record of the anxieties stemming from the absence of a familiar environment, thus contributing to the formation of a new setting. Likewise, the diaspora needs to consistently extend beyond its confines and chronicle the course of self-overcoming; otherwise, it risks losing its essence: the potential to evolve into a self-sustaining environment. The sustainability of the diaspora hinges on the establishment of its history – not merely as a chronicle but as an assertion of sovereignty. This involves defining its identity in its own language, thereby distinguishing itself from both the foreigner and the homeland.

The mission for the emerging diaspora is to continue progressing by expanding into new cultural realms, aspiring to become international. Yet, achieving this in a foreign environment is contingent upon maintaining national uniqueness, a responsibility that, once again, falls under the domain of literature rather than the academic discipline devoted to identity and diaspora. In the context of the diaspora, there is inevitably an element of unlived life – a past left unhistoricized, representing a fundamental imperative for conscious living. If we fail to live life to its fullest, others will gradually occupy that space, edging us out of the living narrative. The task of preserving that feeling, keeping it alive and vivid, is inherently a literary responsibility.

4. Concluding Remarks

The disciplining of the diaspora is gradually gaining momentum, with more research and academic articles being produced. However, the diaspora, especially the Armenian Diaspora, is not experiencing comparable improvements in spiritual and material conditions. While diaspora studies, though crucial, primarily address the external facets of reality, they fall short of delving deeply into the existential anxiety that continually forestalls assimilation. The diaspora, in its persistent quest for survival, consistently grapples with the task of depicting the new environmental reality through literary experience, thereby reaffirming its identity. Literature possesses the capacity to articulate the narrative that renders the diaspora's anxiety perceptible and delineates the horizon for its transcendence. It is in this context that literature and the diaspora converge. The realm of literary expression becomes synonymous with diasporic reality, and writing becomes a means of survival. Writing involves documenting one's distinctive style and domain within language. The issue of identity is fundamentally a literary one, as discussing identity directly is as challenging as attempting revolutionary or poetic expression within the boundaries of established language. Furthermore, direct discourse on identity carries the risk of becoming overly sentimental and self-aggrandizement – a fragile surface easily torn by external influences. The historicization of the Armenian diaspora commenced with literature, offering a compelling model for other diasporas.

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'CONSPIRACY AGAINST HUMANITY': IS PETER WESSEL ZAPFFE AN ANTI-NATALIST?

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Abstract:
The main objective of this article is to analyze the reasons behind Thomas Ligotti's recognition of Peter Wessel Zapffe as an anti-natalist. Specifically, I argue that Ligotti's focus on Zapffe's early essay *The Last Messiah* (1933) alone results in some misunderstandings of Zapffe's views, which make room for coining him an anti-natalist. These misunderstandings ground associated dichotomies of the type, *Ligotti's misinterpretation versus Zapffe's theory,* such as the dichotomy of *self-deception versus heterotelic metaphysical activity of phantasy,* as embedded in that of *illusions versus fixations,* and the dichotomy *tragedy versus necessary tragic*. Comparing and contrasting Ligotti's analysis of three examples of Zapffe's works including *The Last Messiah* and *Fragments of an Interview* (1959), as well as choosing one more example – that of Zapffe's monograph *On the Tragic* (1941) – I aim to demonstrate why reducing Zapffe's ideas of the necessary tragic and multifrontal conflicts to anti-natalism *per se* simplifies the unique philosophical background in which these ideas occur.

Key words: Peter Wessel Zapffe, Thomas Ligotti, anti-natalism, multifrontal catastrophes, necessary tragic.

1. Introduction

In his book *The Conspiracy against the Human Race: A Contrivance of Horror* (2010), which raises interest in Zapffe's philosophy among the English-speaking community, Ligotti supports the thesis that Zapffe's pessimism provokes anti-natalism. Discussing the reasons behind Ligotti's interpretation, I analyze why Zapffe's theory of deliberately limiting the content of consciousness, as displayed in his early essay *The Last Messiah* (1933), does not result in "striving to be unself-conscious" (Ligotti, 2010, p. 28), viz., to create a falsifiable Self, which can help us to bear the burden of what we really are by hiding it through different strategies (Ligotti, 2010, pp. 30–31). Specifically, I argue that Ligotti misunderstands the origin of what he coins the first determination of "humanity's 'biological predicament'" in Zapffe's theory (Ligotti, 2010, p. 30)—the minimization of suffering through simply minimizing our consciousness. Consequently, disenchanting the origin of this first determination is of crucial importance for revealing the misinterpretation of the so-called (by Ligotti) 'second determination' — "that our species should belay reproducing itself" (Ligotti, 2010, p. 34).

What Ligotti defines as Zapffe's *biological predicament* is developed by Zapffe in his magnum opus *On the Tragic* (1941), addressing the so-called biological interest which is only one of the four mutually related interests, viz., biological, social, autotelic,[1] and metaphysical interests. Judging by these specifications, as related to Zapffe's theory of under- and over-biological equipment, I claim that what

[1] Referring to Yrjö Hirn's monograph *Aesthetic Life* (*Det estetiska Lifvet*) (1913), Zapffe argues that autotelic is a category that has an objective in itself. Specifically, every single engagement in which the reception or activity, or inner elaboration, has an end in itself is considered disinterested or *autotelic* ("*autotelisk*") (Zapffe, 1941, p. 59).

Ligotti recognizes as illusions in Zapffe's theory contradicts Zapffe's own understanding of the so-called fixation mechanisms. If fixations were simply self-deceptions, human unfixability, viz., the human *ability* to produce fixations, would have been reduced to *a set* of fixations.

Refracting Ligotti's investigation of the surplus of consciousness through the lens of *On the Tragic* demonstrates how the surplus in question is elaborated due to the *heterotelic*[2] *metaphysical activity of phantasy*. Otherwise, simplifying Zapffe's idea of human development to an evolutionary notion would undermine the role of his essential theories of necessary tragic and pessimism.

By contrast to Ligotti's claim that "Zapffe's thought is perhaps the most elementary in the history of philosophical pessimism" (Ligotti, 2010, p. 29),[3] Zapffe's complex taxonomy of different types of pessimism, including original, non-original, deficient and surplus pessimism,[4] speaks for itself (Zapffe, 1941, pp. 220–221).

In turn, the investigation of Zapffe's ideas, as displayed by both *The Last Messiah* and *On the Tragic*, demonstrates that Zapffe does not argue for the *tragedy* of the human condition, as Ligotti suggests, but for *tragic* (Zapffe, 1941, pp. 8–9). The most illuminative embodiment of the latter concerns the *tragic destiny* of humans as bearers of multifrontal interests originating from Zapffe's distinction between fate and destiny.[5]

Based upon a comparative analysis of four excerpts from *The Last Messiah*, *On the Tragic,* and *Fragments of an Interview* (1959), the major objective of this article is to clarify why arguing for anti-natalism *per se* puts in question Zapffe's pivotal concepts of necessary tragic and multifrontal catastrophes.

2. Questioning the Premises for Zapffe's Anti-natalism

2.1. Surplus of Consciousness versus Expressibility

Ligotti argues that consciousness in Zapffe's sense is related to the human brain such that it "makes the world appear to us as it appears and makes us appear to ourselves as we appear…" (Ligotti, 2010, p. 25). Furthermore, "Zapffe accepted consciousness as a given and moved on from there, since he was not interested in the debates surrounding this phenomenon as such…" (Ligotti, 2010, p. 25). However, Zapffe's analysis of Jakob von Uexküll's theory of *Umwelt* (*Environment*), which grounds his own examination of the "necessity of specialization" (Zapffe, 1941, p. 13) regarding the genealogical reconstruction of *principium individuationis* (Zapffe, 1941, p. 15), cannot be called "careless of seeking technical explanations for the workings of consciousness" (Ligotti, 2010, p. 25).

In addition to the detailed investigation of Uexküll's conception of the perceptive environment (see Serafimova, 2019, pp. 41–45), Zapffe's idea of the surplus of consciousness is contextualized within a particular taxonomy of the beings' differentiation. The latter results from human interests,[6] as belonging to different "fronts," "plans," "fragments," or "sectors" (Zapffe, 1941, p. 50). Specifically, Zap-

[2] One should take into consideration that there is no such a thing as autotelic or heterotelic meaning *per se* in Zapffe's terms. All interests have autotelic and heterotelic *aspects* of meaning depending on which interest is considered as a starting point of evaluation. For instance, biological interest can be defined as having autotelic aspects of meaning if it is examined within the biological interest front, viz., as having the objective of its biological meaning in itself, while within the metaphysical interest front, it can be described as having heterotelic aspects of meaning (Serafimova, 2019, pp. 79-80; pp. 83–84).

[3] Ligotti briefly compares Zapffe's pessimism with Nietzsche's (Ligotti, 2010, p. 123), Unamuno's, Dienstag's, and Brashear's theories of pessimism (Ligotti, 2010, p. 49). However, Ligotti's assumption of the pessimists' credo that nonexistence never hurt anyone (Ligotti, 2010, p. 75), as well as recognizing the so-called puppet image of humanity as a hallmark of pessimism (Ligotti, 2010, p. 95), are inapplicable to Zapffe's theory. Otherwise, Zapffe's complex taxonomy of pessimism would have been reduced to a simple form of life's resignation (Serafimova, 2019, pp. 39–40; pp. 126–127).

[4] Zapffe provides a distinction between the so-called original pessimism, which is the purely biological pessimism of animals and unoriginal pessimism deriving from the world's underestimation, which has a neurotic origin (Zapffe, 1941, pp. 220–221). He also distinguishes between the so-called deficient pessimism, which results from the loss of hope and the belief that one is unable to perform a task, and surplus pessimism regarding the anticipation of perfectly fulfilled tasks, which, however, cannot engage the person with what one innermost strives for (Zapffe, 1941, pp. 220–221).

[5] According to Zapffe, the difference between fate and destiny concerns humans as interest bearers. The concept of destiny assumes that there is "a big appeal" to one course or another, so that the history of the suffering from the destiny's entity either coincides with or deviates from one interest-laden scheme (Zapffe, 1941, p. 21).

[6] Zapffe uses the word 'interest' as a common name for a set of terms that are more or less synonymous: 'need,' 'drive,' 'desire,' 'wish,' 'will,' etc. (Zapffe, 1992, p. 145).

ffe's theory of the four interest fronts is influenced by Uexküll's idea of the so-called functional circle (see Zapffe, 1941, p. 27).[7] The circle assumes that the environment of given individuals is related to their "Merknetz" (their receptor system); with the help of its receptors, the organism "chooses" the environment where it should live, while demonstrating *passive or active 'engagement'* with it (see Zapffe, 1941, p. 50).

What is typical for human beings is that they are bearers of multifrontal configurations of biological, social, autotelic, and metaphysical interests (Zapffe, 1941, p. 69). Consequently, these interests trigger multifrontal conflicts which underlie the constructive potential of what Zapffe calls necessary tragic, viz., when the subject "faces difficulties of a multifrontal origin" (Zapffe, 1941, p. 73). The reason is that the conflicts necessitate the adoption of multifrontal engagements (Zapffe, 1941, p. 70), which make humans highly aware of humankind's destiny as grounded in the initial tragic of their condition (Serafimova, 2019, p. 291).

Furthermore, the surplus of human consciousness is interpreted within Rudolf Steiner's conception of the phylogenetic probabilities (Zapffe, 1941, p. 46). Zapffe develops Steiner's theory, arguing that the distinction between biological and over-biological equipment in part overlaps with that between the fixed and unfixed use of organs (Zapffe, 1941, p. 48).[8] Considering that Zapffe evaluates the biological equipment due to the organism's ability to fulfill a given task by using a particular organ or organs for that objective in a fixed or non-fixed way, as well as considering that there is nothing that deserves the name "soul organ" (Zapffe, 1941, p. 47), I claim that Zapffe's theory of consciousness requires analyzing the concept of expressibility. The latter has two aspects—*heterotelic* (with respect to the biological interest front), when it "has its goal outside itself," controlled by a recognition that lies beyond the ability and theoretically can be satisfied by other abilities (Zapffe, 1941, p. 35), and *autotelic* regarding one's over-equipment (Serafimova, 2019, p. 67; Zapffe, 1941, p. 35).

In general, expressibility is intrinsically related to the deficiency and surplus of capabilities. According to Zapffe, the phenomenon of "surplus of capability," and eventually energy, can play an important role in putting the tragic in a general life's context (Zapffe, 1941, p. 36). This phenomenon is compatible with a picture of life that exemplifies how organisms' equipment shows a tendency toward deficiency or surplus with respect to the power of the environment (Zapffe, 1941, p. 36). In case of deficiency, the individual or the species would suffer or die. In that of surplus, the subject is threatened by an inner blast: his or her free capabilities pursue useful objects and find a surrogate, in the best possible scenario (Zapffe, 1941, p. 36). Thus, the subject produces a hypothetical need out of, or being at variance with, real living needs (Zapffe, 1941, p. 36).

2.2 Self-deception versus Heterotelic Metaphysical Activity of Phantasy

Analyzing what Ligotti defines as limitations of consciousness, I find their origin not in the development of the human brain alone, but in the heterotelic metaphysical function of phantasy in Zapffe's sense, whose objective is to raise "the only necessary and eternally burning problem *What does it mean to be a human?*" (Zapffe, 1941, p. 13). In this context, the "breach in the very unity of life" triggering "a biological paradox" (Zapffe, 2004) is described by Ligotti as a "tirade against the evolution of consciousness" (Ligotti, 2010, p. 23). Zapffe himself gradually develops the paradox above as underlain by the dialectical relations between 'biological' and 'cultural' breaks (see Zapffe, 1941, pp. 178–179), which modify it into the so-called cultural-pathological paradox.[9] Due to the latter, the "more developed spiritual and mental equipment and unfixability mechanisms" (Serafimova, 2019, p. 105) provide "possibilities for a rich external and internal life (culture)" (Zapffe, 1992a, p. 270). On the other hand, they also create "a jungle of conflicts, problems and controversies"–both collective and individual–as well as a permanent pressure of life, simi-

[7] Zapffe extrapolates the idea of the functional circle to that of metaphysical life. Referring to Uexküll, he argues that every single functional circle consists of a net of activities ("virkenet") and a net of signs ("merkenet"); in metaphysical life, we can also see a human contribution along with the response of the world's subject (Zapffe, 1941, p. 203).

[8] Chapter five of *On the Tragic* is devoted to the unfixability of the human use of organs, along with the over-equipment in different fields of capabilities (Cf. Zapffe, 1941, p. 50).

[9] The origin of the cultural-pathological paradox can be traced back to the distinction between health and sickness in the intersectional field of normal and abnormal (Zapffe, 2004). However, the need for fixations can also result from some "bitter fruits of a geniality of thought or feeling at the root of antibiological tendencies" (Zapffe, 2004).

lar to that which deep-water pressure has on the diver's helmet (Zapffe, 1992a, p. 270).

Based upon the clarifications above, I argue that Zapffe's theory of fixation mechanisms, as displayed by both *The Last Messiah* and *On the Tragic*, does not prescribe any normative relation between the limitations of consciousness and desisting from procreation, as Ligotti suggests (Ligotti, 2010, p. 41, p. 52). It rather provides a complex net of adaptation mechanisms of living *with* necessary tragic as constitutive of the human condition.

2.2.1. Self-deception versus Phantasy

According to Ligotti, "we cannot live except as self-deceivers who must lie to ourselves about ourselves, as well as about our unwinnable situation in this world" (Ligotti, 2010, p. 42). He describes Zapffe's fixation mechanisms, including isolation,[10] distraction,[11] anchoring,[12] and sublimation[13] as keeping "a subject in a state of self-deception regarding what is really the case" (see Ligotti, 2010, p. 69).

Comparing and contrasting Ligotti's interpretation and Zapffe's theory of fixations, I argue that self-deception does not correspond to Zapffe's view of phantasy[14] due to phantasy's autotelic and heterotelic aspects. These latter make humans the only species able to anticipate the complexity of the so-called world's feeling and life's feeling.[15] Furthermore, phantasy shows why Zapffe's question, *What does it mean to be a human?* cannot be set as an autotelic metaphysical question about the world's feeling as a life's plan that functions for itself (see Serafimova, 2019, pp. 81–83). It is a heterotelic metaphysical question revealing that the lack of a plan of human existence[16] does not imply that humans are deprived of the striving to search for a life's meaning, even though the latter is unachievable in itself. That is why instead of unselfing humans, as Ligotti suggests, Zapffe's phantasy 're-selfs' them by showing that they are humans only due to their existence as ineradicably tragic beings.

2.2.2. Illusions versus Fixations

Considering that Zapffe's theory of phantasy cannot be interpreted as encouraging self-deception, the next question is whether what he calls wrong fixations can be described as illusions in Ligotti's sense. By definition, fixation is one of the two factors, along with equipment (*Utrustningen*) that characterizes human beings (Zapffe, 1992, p. 160).

[10] While in the essay *The Last Messiah*, isolation is described as "a fully arbitrary dismissal from consciousness of all disturbing and destructive thought and feeling" (Zapffe, 2004), in the monograph *On the Tragic*, it is defined as only one of the many tactics for dealing with reality (Zapffe, 1941, p. 235).

[11] Zapffe claims that distraction is one of the most popular mechanisms of protection. It is a way of "constantly enthralling" one's attention with impressions (Zapffe, 2004), but can also display "the 'high society's' tactic for living" (Zapffe, 2004).

[12] By anchoring, Zapffe understands a "fixation of points within, or construction of walls around, the liquid fray of consciousness. Though typically unconscious, it may also be fully conscious (one 'adopts a goal')" (Zapffe, 2004). In the monograph *On the Tragic*, Zapffe argues for real and imaginary anchoring. He outlines that many imaginary forms do not function as fixations. The multiple aspects of the problem are strengthened by the fact that the formation of fixations has a different impact in time. The individual can be *dependent*, to a bigger or smaller extent, on his or her anchoring: he or she can have a bigger or smaller fixation and safety behavior to brood over or to throw his or her anchoring goods away (Zapffe, 1941, p. 174). In turn, some other imaginary impulses of fixations, which resemble guild's ones, lay partly collectively, partly more individualized in the prolongation of some real attributes, such as nature, race, etc. (Zapffe, 1941, pp. 188-189).

[13] While in the essay *The Last Messiah*, sublimation is introduced as a "transformation rather than repression" (Zapffe, 2004), in the monograph *On the Tragic*, it is defined as having a higher value for the cultural aspiration. It is a process due to which part of the problem with the restricted energy is released by some roundabout methods (Zapffe, 1941, p. 235).

[14] According to Zapffe, we can refer phantasy to the role of surplus that can lay partly in the capability's size, partly in the individual general capability, along with the rest of his or her equipment (Zapffe, 1941, p. 92).

[15] The world's feeling can be described as a response to human autotelic metaphysical engagement embedded into the question *How big is the world?* (Zapffe, 1941, p. 64). The latter is an autotelic metaphysical question about the world order as having a meaning in itself (Serafimova, 2019, pp. 81-82). In turn, life's feeling can be defined in response to a human heterotelic metaphysical engagement. It is underlain by the question *What is the meaning of human life*? (Zapffe, 1941, p. 64) as having no final answer. Specifically, Zapffe defines *life's feeling* as an outcome of partial environmental feelings, inner feelings, phantasy's expansion of given conditions (ideas etc.), memory pictures and results of thoughts. All these features are determined by the type of character's disposition and acquired fixations, as well as by the "temperament" and the "nature" of the individual (Zapffe, 1941, p. 107).

[16] I argue that the heterotelic function of phantasy demonstrates why humans have a destiny due to being bearers of multifrontal engagements that result from multifrontal interests.

Equipment, including the ability[17] needed for fulfilling a given task, changes from under-equipment (under-utrustning) through equivalence (ækvivalens) of equipment to over-equipment (overutrustning) (Zapffe, 1992, p. 160). Consequently, *fixation’s condition* varies from under-fixation (including liability, loss of conduct, loss of character), well-adapted fixation (assuming necessary stability, which shows a favorable degree of elasticity, perfectibility, control of alternatives) to *over-fixation* (characterized *by* stubbornness, ossification, etc.), along with *wrong fixation* (Zapffe, 1992, p. 160).

In this context, the speculations of comparing fixations with illusions in Ligotti’s sense necessitates the examination of what Zapffe understands by autotelic-metaphysical and metaphysical-autotelic fixations deriving from the human surplus of consciousness as a matter of over-equipment. However, such fixations are not supposed to create illusions of hiding what we do not want to see in ourselves but to provide the questions of *being* with a normative validity by turning them into questions about *the meaning of being*.[18]

Regarding the wrong fixations, I argue that they cannot be defined as illusions because Zapffe does not specify under what conditions a wrong fixation, which may include an over-fixation, when the ability is too much fixed, and under-fixation, when the ability is too loose (Zapffe, 1941, p. 620),[19] can trigger unreal solutions alone (Serafimova, 2019, p. 91).

2.3. Tragedy versus Necessary Tragic

In the monograph *On the Tragic*, Zapffe writes that tragic should be related to “the organic life in general, to human life as a whole, to the different categories of humans, to the destinies of the individual people, or even to the accidentally appearing coincidence or a course of events” (Zapffe, 1941, p. 11). He concludes that tragic is irreducible to biological death, which is an argument against Ligotti’s interpretation of the biological predicament as necessitating a tragedy. Specifically, objective tragic[20] as multifrontal tragic[21] reveals that human *tragic destiny* is a form of “aristocratism” (Zapffe, 1941, p. 342). It clarifies how the destiny in question can be coupled with “a selection of interests” (Zapffe, 1941, p. 342) that makes the anticipation of tragic a privilege of highly developed people (Zapffe, 1941, p. 338). Consequently, this privilege is understood as a surplus of capability in internalizing the necessary tragic that contributes to the so-called humanist cultural ideal (Zapffe, 1941, p. 393).[22]

One of the most illuminative embodiments of the aristocratism above is the placement of the tragic person at the top of Zapffe’s taxonomy of species’ development (Zapffe, 1941, p. 392).[23] The tragic people are recognized as highly aware of humankind’s destiny in a cultural sense and have internalized the contradictions of the human condition. Furthermore, the tragic person is not simply a person of tragedy. They are sufficiently ‘developed’ to grasp the complexity of the question, *What does it mean to*

[17] Zapffe emphasizes that we can lay a scale of abilities corresponding to a particular group of interests of development or realization (Zapffe, 1941, p. 619). These abilities can be partly sufficient, partly insufficient, and can occur partly as a *surplus* of ability, along with what is required by the task or the situation (Zapffe, 1941, p. 619). Besides, the surplus can give advantages, be irrelevant to the task’s solution, or provoke bad consequences (Zapffe, 1941, p. 619).

[18] Zapffe argues that the so-called last problems of being include issues such as the world’s and the life’s being, origin, future, and meaning (Zapffe, 1992, p. 161). We can also find some other questions about the so-called last fixations, which are examined in the light of a given *evaluation* (Zapffe, 1992, p. 161).

[19] When an ability can demonstrate itself in few or only one functional variant, it is called *fixed* (Zapffe, 1941, p. 620). If the ability is extended to a degree of variability, eventually, to an unlimited choice of the way of use, then it is called *unfixed* (Zapffe, 1941, pp. 619–620).

[20] According to Zapffe, there are two major types of tragic—objective tragic regarding the destruction of the principle for the possibility of fighting (Zapffe, 1941, p. 336) and poetic tragic (see Zapffe, 1941, p. 444).

[21] Multifrontal tragic is recognized as “the most qualified form of all types of tragic” (Zapffe, 1941, p. 373) that represents the climax of a universal tragic tendency (Serafimova, 2019, p. 313).

[22] Zapffe discusses whether one can find some characteristics or abilities that have been admired by culturally aware people as being great for all times (Zapffe, 1941, pp. 391–392). Specifically, he analyzes whether these characteristics should be recognized as full of meaning in the fight for confirmation by fellow people (Zapffe, 1941, p. 392).

[23] *The bearers of interests* (Zapffe, 1941, p. 619) are arranged in a scale varying from the inorganic world through groups on which humans project their interests (such as plants, insentient animals) and what we call sentient animals with a more differentiated interest front (Zapffe, 1941, p. 619). In addition, the so-called primitive or inferior person is characterized by some elementary interests, such as biological interests and simple pleasure interests (Zapffe, 1941, p. 619). At the top of the scale stay the “great” people who are the highest representatives of their respective cultural groups (Zapffe, 1941, p. 619).

be a human? as a question which not only cannot but also should never get a final answer unless both tragic and humans are annihilated.

3. Is Zapffe an Anti-natalist?

First, I briefly analyze why Zapffe's vision of biological death cannot be interpreted as an argument for ceasing reproduction. One of the major concerns is that by contrast to metaphysical catastrophes, Zapffe does not consider death a "qualified evil" (see Zapffe, 1941, p. 338)[24] nor is it a trigger for multifrontal catastrophes. Specifically, the biological interest, as any other monofrontal interest in Zapffe's sense, can produce one-frontal catastrophes alone.

According to Zapffe's taxonomy, the one-frontal catastrophes are 'lower' in functional terms, which implies that they are 'weaker' than the multifrontal ones (Serafimova, 2019, p. 313). Consequently, the surplus of consciousness, which addresses the first premise of Ligotti's biological predicament, assumes that the recognition of autotelic biological greatness (the objective of life as biological survival) provokes a catastrophe whose course does not bear a *tragic* dynamic yet (see Zapffe, 1941, p. 360).

Analyzing the images of *The Last Messiah*, the pessimist cats and the cat prophet, as displayed by the parable of the cats in the monograph *On the Tragic*, I argue that Zapffe does not encourage anti-natalism, but introduces different types of multifrontal catastrophes. The first is autotelic-biological catastrophes (Zapffe, 1941, p. 369)[25] whose major agents (developing an autotelic interest of achievement) are a *tragic genius*[26] in the face of the Last Messiah and *tragic heroes*[27] in the face of the pessimist cats. In addition, one can also make the claim for a second type of metaphysical-biological catastrophe experienced by the cat prophet as a *moral genius* in Zapffe's sense.[28]

In turn, the third type of catastrophe can be defined as biological-autotelic catastrophes whose collective agent is the crowd of the pacifier makers and the midwives killing the Last Messiah, and the digging cats. These catastrophes are not biological since all the agents succeed in fulfilling their interest of achievement (to stay alive) at the expense of sacrificing the autotelic interest of preserving their nature.

Therefore, one can argue for exceptional anti-natalism regarding what Zapffe calls the autotelic greatness of a small group of highly developed people, viz., anti-natalism displaying exceptional views of exceptionalists who have the privilege to develop high sensitivity to the necessary tragic.

3.1. The Last Messiah

In the chapter *Hopelessness*, Ligotti discusses how the Last Messiah will be attacked by the angry crowd of pacifier makers and midwives; an apparent transgression of Socrates's metaphor of the philosopher as a midwife. The excerpt is generally interpreted as the most illuminative example of Zapffe's antinatalism:

"– The life of the worlds is a roaring river, but Earth's is a pond and a backwater.

– The sign of doom is written on brows – how long will ye kick against the pin-pricks?

– But there is one conquest and one crown, one redemption and one solution.

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[24] However, it does not mean that biological death cannot be considered a catastrophe at all. With the breakthrough of the value-laden biological interest front, some forms of *suffering* such as difficulties in breathing, freezing, hunger, as well as some *accidents*, such as a fire in the granary, destruction of tools, sickness, and annihilation of every brood offspring occur (Zapffe, 1941, p. 253). In addition, there are some other catastrophes regarding the early destruction of the reproduction capability, extermination of the whole offspring and death-bringing events of all possible types, except old age (Zapffe, 1941, p. 253).

[25] For this type of catastrophe, Zapffe gives the example of the polar researcher who solves one super-human task but is doomed to *impotentia generandi* when freezing (Zapffe, 1941, p. 369).

[26] Zapffe introduces the figure of the tragic genius on the top of the interest bearers' taxonomy. In times of a cultural crisis, some moral innovators suggest or practice a new value scale (a new *anchoring*) or a new way of securing the old interests (Zapffe, 1941, pp. 312–313). Then, the people divide into the following two groups: those who join the innovator and see him or her as a moral genius and the others, who see him or her as a threat (Zapffe, 1941, p. 313). The latter makes the moral genius a tragic one based on the historical judgment (see Zapffe, 1941, p. 313).

[27] The tragic hero can be described as a 'hybrid' hero since tragic cannot "save itself" by heroic behavior in *statu motris* (see Zapffe, 1941, p. 405).

[28] According to Zapffe, the moral genius can capture the idea of sacrifice by giving up their own joy of sacrificing and putting themselves into the position of a recipient of sacrifice (Zapffe, 1941, pp. 225–226). The moral genius cannot fight for their thoughts without shattering the existing worldviews, questioning values, injuring feelings, and destroying anchoring (Zapffe, 1941, p. 361).

– Know yourselves *–be infertile and let the earth be silent after ye*.”

> And when he has spoken, they will pour themselves over him, led by the pacifier makers and the midwives, and bury him in their fingernails.
>
> He is the last Messiah. As son from father, he stems from the archer by the waterhole (Zapffe, 2004).

Ligotti argues that, semantically speaking, “the Last Messiah is not a messiah” because “he saves no living soul and will be erased from human memory” by the actions of the angry crowd. In this context, “a resurrection seems to be the last thing in the Last Messiah’s future” (Ligotti, 2010, p. 80).

However, the Last Messiah *is* a messiah meeting Zapffe’s definition of a tragic genius (Zapffe, 1941, p. 313).[29] Due to his autotelic greatness[30] representative of highly tragic beings,[31] the Last Messiah experiences an autotelic-biological catastrophe, which makes room for his future based on the repeating resurrection. Denying the role of the repetition for the Last Messiah’s destiny would contradict Zapffe’s theory of the future “nightmare of endless repetition” as a breach of life that brings “nameless possibilities” to “the universe’s helpless captive” (Zapffe, 2004).

Consequently, the four fixation mechanisms making the “manifestations of our paradoxical nature less effective…” (Ligotti, 2010, p. 175) point not towards anti-natalism, but emphasize the negligence of the ‘biological’ breaks at the expense of the ‘cultural’ ones in the cultural-pathological paradox. In turn, Zapffe’s statement that, “As the numbers mount and the spiritual atmosphere thickens, the techniques of protection must assume an increasingly brutal character” (Ligotti, 2010, p. 176; Zapffe, 2004), does not imply the decrease of “numbers” but that of the cultural prevalence of a-biological forms over biological ones (see Zapffe, 1941, p. 51).

3.2. The Parable of the Cats

In the monograph *On the Tragic*, Zapffe discusses a ship full of cats, which is abandoned by the crew and shipwrecked on a desert island. The only living beings on this island were some lively but uneatable beetles, which made it look like the fate of the cats was sealed. Then, one of them discovered that the soft clay along the beach contained fat and delicious shells, which opened easily (Serafimova, 2019, p. 107; Zapffe, 1941, p. 158). Zapffe argues that from an autotelic point of view, it is far less tempting for the cats to dig in the clay than to make a tiger jump over the beetles (Serafimova, 2019, p. 107; Zapffe, 1941, p. 159). However, only the latter is the life that is worthy of cats (Serafimova, 2019, p. 107; Zapffe, 1941, p. 159). To choose this is an expression of an idealist life stance which is highly valuable and deadly at once (Serafimova, 2019, p. 107; Zapffe, 1941, p. 159).

Zapffe continues that some individuals, who to the highest extent represent *the cat’s form* in its distinctive life style, would face difficulties in the shell digging. That is why they are considered biologically inferior *under the given circumstances* (Serafimova, 2019, p. 108; Zapffe, 1941, p. 159). Specifically, the hunting cats are described as pessimists, not because of some evil things to which the others attach great importance, such as soaring and being hungry, breathing with difficulties and freezing, but because these cats have realized that they are placed in a world that does not provide conditions for *the sacred formula* in their hearts (Serafimova, 2019, p. 108; Zapffe, 1941, p. 159).

[29] The other two examples of *On the Tragic*, which are described as the “very few points” of “antinatalistic consequences” in this work do not concern “the cessation of the production of all further human beings” (Akerma, 2019). They address the tragic experienced by 1) the “metaphysically tormented person,” who considers life and the urge for it his “tyrant” (Zapffe, 1941, p. 239), and 2) the self-sacrificing interest bearer, who “through the heroical renunciation of posterity as an entirely collapsing way of hope” obtains “a feeling of an autotelic confirmation” (Zapffe, 1941, p. 402). This clarification, which is skipped in the English translation (see Akerma, 2019) shows that the interest bearer, who anticipates a conflict “between the loyalty to experience and the metaphysical need” (Zapffe, 1941, p. 402) has the potential to meet Zapffe’s definition of a moral genius as a deliberate recipient of sacrifice (Zapffe, 1941, pp. 225–226). In turn, the metaphysical sufferer’s behavior displays what is for “a human to be a bearer of suffering of the highest rank” (Zapffe, 1941, p. 239). Such a behavior is not an objective for “all further human beings” (Akerma, 2019), but only for those who, like the Last Messiah, are ‘the most developed’ anticipators of the necessary tragic.

[30] The Last Messiah’s greatness can be defined as meeting the requirements of autotelic greatness (see Zapffe, 1941, p. 352). Adopting such greatness means that the interest bearer devotes their whole lifestyle to the autotelic value (of being a messiah) and has nothing to go back to when the value fails (Zapffe, 1941, p. 352).

[31] The reason is that greatness is always related to the dangerous features obtained by the interest bearer qua human (Zapffe, 1941, p. 349).

Zapffe emphasizes that having gained such knowledge, these cats stopped breeding. However, “soon among them, some prophets appeared and they taught them the art of hope” (Serafimova, 2019, p. 108; Zapffe, 1941, p. 159). The prophets preached: “Now the end awaits the faithful, but when we die, a new ship will come and take away those who persevere. Those who have forsaken the true feline nature shall die and never be fetched away” (Anker, 1997, p. 152; Zapffe, 1941, p. 159).

In this context, Zapffe distinguishes between the following groups of cats: 1) those who betrayed feline nature, “went into the mud and ate their fill” and 2) the cats, who “converted by the words of the prophet, came ashore…preparing for the great journey” (Anker, 1997, p. 153; Zapffe, 1941, pp. 159-160). The third category is that of the prophet cat: having felt that he was dying, he “laid himself down on a tree-stump and simply expired—this is what is known as a *tragic end*”[32] (Anker, 1997, p. 153; Zapffe, 1941, p. 160).

Specifically, the second group of cats entails 2.1) the “proudest banded together, declaring the duty of any decent cat to die sooner rather than sell its soul for the dish of mussels” and 2.2) those, who followed the prophet’s example because they were “unable to accommodate themselves to a dutiful resignation”: such cats still believed in the highest objective determined by the cat’s form, although they “saw through” the prophet’s “empty comforts”, while despair was encompassing their hearts (Anker, 1997, p. 153; Zapffe, 1941, p. 160). Consequently, Zapffe argues that most cats “were enslaved by eternal doubt and divided their time between uneasy nourishment and tortured asceticism. Their relief at being rid of the aristocrats was of course great, but the new ideal of becoming as crabs was, after all, impossible to realize” (Anker, 1997, p. 153; Zapffe, 1941, p. 160).

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Based upon the excerpt above, I argue that Zapffe does not encourage anti-natalism, but some complex multifrontal catastrophes, such as the autotelic-biological catastrophes of the “proudest” pessimists and what I call “provocative” (despairing) pessimists,[33] the biological-autotelic ones of the digging cats, and a metaphysical-biological catastrophe experienced by the prophet.

The prophet cannot be described as a tragic genius because his behavior does not fulfill the requirement of the tragic genius’ prototypical feature of being seen as a threat (see Zapffe, 1941, p. 313) [by the digging cats]. The prophet rather meets Zapffe’s definition of moral genius (see Zapffe, 1941, pp. 225–226), encouraging metaphysical-moral scruples in the search for meaning (see Zapffe, 1941, p. 124). By deliberately choosing to become “a recipient of sacrifice” (Zapffe, 1941, pp. 225–226), he demonstrates what it means to both live and die following the sacred formula of one’s heart. Consequently, I argue that Zapffe’s tragic hero can be exemplified by the “proudest” pessimists’ behavior whose heroic duty to die decently is an exception rather than a rule among the cats.

However, the outcome is not anti-natalism, but rather a particular type of pessimism that meets Zapffe’s definition of surplus pessimism (see Zapffe, 1941, p. 221). Assuming that none of the tasks one can engage with could give one what one innermost strives for (Zapffe, 1941, p. 221), surplus pessimism dominates the majority of the cats’ behavior. This means that they *can* become *as* crabs, although such an “ideal” is unrealizable for their feline nature.

3.3. Examples of Fragments of an Interview

The other two examples, which display two excerpts from an interview with Zapffe for the Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten* (1959), are examined by Ligotti in the light of why “*we must cease reproducing*”[34] (Ligotti, 2010, p. 29). However, contextualizing Zapffe’s views within his rich philosophical heritage shows that none of the excerpts below can be labeled as encouraging antinatalism *per se*, [35] but

[32] Literally, Zapffe writes “…and died [experiencing] what one can call tragic-heroic death” (Zapffe, 1941, p. 160).

[33] For Zapffe’s provocative pessimism, see Serafimova, 2019, p. 127.

[34] Zapffe does not prescribe that humans cease reproduction as a universally valid norm but argues that they should carefully consider the idea of having children first. Yet, in *Fragments of an Interview*, he claims that people spend more time thinking before giving a coin to a beggar than throwing children “into the cosmic brutality without hesitation” (Zapffe, 1967, p. 161). In the 1984 interview, Zapffe explicitly denies the generalized accusations of his stance, saying that such accusations are “totally misleading” (see Eriksen, 1984, p. 30).

[35] Some fragments displaying Zapffe’s anti-natalism can be found in his interviews conducted in 1984 and in 1989/1990. What is common for both interviews is that Zapffe’s idea of procreation addresses the choice of humans within the cultural-pathological paradox (Zapffe, 1941, p. 144) by saying ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to life (see Zapffe, 1992, p. 145). Considering that a-biological forms in

rather reveal some of Zapffe’s stances on fate and destiny.

That is why I argue that instead of supporting anti-natalism, in the first excerpt, Zapffe warns against the profanation of morality to moralization as a matter of vulgarized dutification, while in the second one, he emphasizes the necessity of rethinking human destiny within the recognition of humans as bearers of multifrontal interests. Specifically, in the first excerpt, Zapffe discusses the two-child policy as a *compensation* rather than a reason for ceasing reproduction, while in the second one, he explores concerns about the ontological determinism of human fate rather than that of human destiny.

3.3.1. Harmonizing with the Biological Predicament. Excerpt I

Ligotti discusses the following excerpt of Zapffe’s interview claiming that Zapffe’s thought, as already outlined, “is perhaps the most elementary in the history of philosophical pessimism” (Ligotti, 2010, p. 29):

> The sooner humanity dares to harmonize itself with its biological predicament, the better. And this means to willingly withdraw in contempt for its worldly terms, just as the heat-craving species went extinct when temperatures dropped. To us, it is the moral climate of the cosmos that is intolerable, and a two-child policy could make our discontinuance a pain-free one. Yet instead we are expanding and succeeding everywhere, as necessity has taught us to mutilate the formula in our hearts. Perhaps the most unreasonable effect of such invigorating vulgarization is the doctrine that the individual “has a duty” to suffer nameless agony and a terrible death if this saves or benefits the rest of his group. Anyone who declines is subjected to doom and death, instead of revulsion being directed at the world-order engendering of the situation. To any independent observer, this plainly is to juxtapose incommensurable things; no future triumph or metamorphosis can justify the pitiful blighting of a human being against his will. It is upon a pavement of battered destinies that the survivors storm ahead toward new bland sensations and mass deaths (“Fragments of an Interview,” *Aftenposten*, 1959 in Ligotti, 2010, p. 29).

Calling Zapffe’s provocative pessimism (Serafimova, 2019, pp. 126-127), which displays a particular type of value pessimism (Zapffe, 1941, p. 411) underlain by unoriginal pessimism (see Serafimova, 2019, p. 137), “the most elementary” pessimist thought is a highly controversial statement. Furthermore, agreeing with Ligotti’s interpretation would mean that anti-natalism meets the definition of one of the lowest types of pessimism in Zapffe’s taxonomy, viz., that of so-called deficient pessimism. According to the latter, the task is both clear enough (in this case, stop reproducing) and its solution would bring salvation, although neither the given individuals nor humankind can perform it (see Zapffe, 1941, p. 221). If so, anti-natalism would trigger an elementary catastrophe in Zapffe’s sense, inducing nothing but “*an accusation of the world order*” (see Serafimova, 2019, p. 139; Zapffe, 1941, pp. 411–412).

Going back to the excerpt above, I explore the origin of Zapffe’s statement that “a two-child policy could make our discontinuance a pain-free one” (1959). This reference does not encourage anti-natalism but exemplifies Zapffe’s theory of compensation (Serafimova, 2019, pp. 96–97). The idea behind the mechanism of compensation is that one replaces a “defective ability” with another one so that one can still prove oneself through the unifying result (Zapffe, 1941, p. 166). Specifically, analyzing the origin of the two-child policy points towards the compensation of human “defective ability” to reach “future triumph or metamorphosis” (1959), viz., to have children as a means of disguising human discontinuity as continuity. However, Zapffe never claims that if people *deny* compensation as a fixation mechanism (in this case, encourage anti-natalism), they can harmonize with their biological predicament.

On the contrary, a potential harmonization is possible by questioning the normative validity of dutification at the expense of reviving the necessary tragic of human duty in Zapffe’s sense. The absolutization of the moral duty leading to its utilitarian vulgarization (by justifying the suffering of the few at the expense of the well-being of the many (1959)) within the framework of the socially constructed “moral climate of the cosmos” (1959) can be over-

Zapffe’s sense are always related to the biological ones, the question is whether limiting the procreation by saying ‘no’ to life (by encouraging ‘biological’ breaks *per se*) has a negative impact upon the ‘cultural’ breaks. If so, arguing for Zapffe’s anti-natalism would misleadingly reduce the cultural-pathological paradox to a simple pathology.

come by rehabilitating the role of the human will. The latter grounds the (sacred) "formula in our hearts" (1959), as in the parable of the cats, rather than mutilating it (1959). Thus, it contextualizes the formula within one responsive cosmos that "talks to something in me that answers" (see Zapffe, 1941, p. 103).

3.3.2. Harmonizing with the Biological Predicament. Excerpt II

Going back to Zapffe's view of fate and destiny, I argue that only humans as bearers of multifrontal interests can have a destiny (Serafimova, 2019, p. 63; Zapffe, 1992, pp. 147–148). If fate displays the autotelic implications of the *world's will*, which is indifferent to human choices because it has the objective of its being in itself, *human will* can be defined as the necessary premise of having a destiny.

According to Zapffe, one can still help or oppose the world's will, within certain limits, even though one neither needs help nor does one have anything to fear (Zapffe, 1941, p. 207). Furthermore, he provides a specification that entirely contradicts Ligotti's anti-natalist interpretation. Zapffe argues that the major objective for humans is that we should have an unlimited "reliance on the world's will and life's being, and do not give up, but *continue reproducing* [emphasis is mine] despite everything" (Zapffe, 1941, p. 207).

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Ligotti summarizes the gist of the excerpt below, as follows: "The point that in the absence of birth nobody exists who can be deprived of happiness is terribly conspicuous" (Ligotti, 2010, p. 63):

> So you ask whether I would choose to be unborn? One must be born in order to choose, and the choice involves destruction. But ask my brother in that chair over there. Indeed, it is an empty one; my brother did not get so far. Yet ask him, as he is traveling like the wind below the sky, crashing against the beach, scenting in the grass, reveling in his strength as he pursues his living food. Do you think he is bereaved by his incapacity to fulfill his fate on the waiting list of the Oslo Housing and Savings Society? And have you ever missed him? Look around in a crowded afternoon tram and reflect whether you would allow a lottery to select one of the exhausted toilers as the one whom you put into this world. They pay no attention as one person gets off and two get on. The tram keeps rolling along ("Fragments of an Interview," *Aftenposten*, 1959 in Ligotti, 2010, p. 63).[36]

Ligotti is right that if no one exists, no one can be deprived of happiness, but so it is with pain—there will be no one who can take pain a step further towards sublimation[37] and the necessary tragic in Zapffe's sense. Furthermore, Ligotti's interpretation only partly corresponds to Zapffe's theory of fate and significantly differs from that of destiny, which is a pivotal concept for the Norwegian philosopher. By contrast to Zapffe's view of destiny that can be described as addressing human existence as *a way of becoming*, fate displays the *state of (non)being* that is irrelevant to the constructive potential of the multifrontal tragic to the human condition. This means that non-existence deprives humans of the possibility to experience the necessary tragic, as well as asking the fundamental question, *What does it mean to be a human?*

Based upon the clarifications above, I argue that Ligotti's conception undermines Zapffe's crucial idea of the necessary tragic as the multifrontal tragic that makes humans what they are. Specifically, Zapffe's example of the brother does not imply anti-natalism *per se*, but displays a certain type of *ontological determinism* within his conception of fate. It merely shows the irrelevance of asking a question about a human being when the latter is deprived of

[36] In the 1984 interview, which is not discussed by Ligotti, Zapffe argued that having children as a matter of "*starting a destiny,*" eventually "a *fan* of destinies unlimited in time," is an undertaking that is full of inevitable evils and unclear risks, including physical, psychological, and spiritual ones (Eriksen, 1984, p. 30). That is why the potential parents, with a mature awareness of responsibility, will be disposed towards passivity and restrain from acting. However, Zapffe does not say 'no' to life once and for all, but just insists on "paralyzing our 'yes' to life" "in a time like ours, when extremely frightening aspects fill up the horizon" (Eriksen, 1984, p. 30). The action following from 'no' to life is not the only option suggested to humankind (Viuf, 1989/1990, p. 4). In addition to those "who say generally 'no', draw back to realize it into practice–and live as if there was still 'yes'"–there are also people who say "'yes' to life–very often with the help of religion" (Viuf, 1989/1990, p. 4).

[37] Zapffe argues that it is the metaphysical person who reaps the harvest of death and leads [the unredeemed, suffering, searching people, the known and unknown victims and rebels] forward with his hand and demands a meaning of their lives (Zapffe, 1941, p. 238). The metaphysical person also leads the *unborn embryos*; they are "very close to him because they are all humans" (Zapffe, 1941, p. 238).

the opportunity to be a bearer of multifrontal interests.

In addition, Zapffe's fate, allowing selection in the autotelic world order, is not only a process of life's termination but also enriches life. An illuminative example in this respect is Zapffe's statement that only the few ones who have "*won*" the ability of imagination in *the lottery of reproduction* can make the stream of their lives go towards new knowledge and new being; a happy expansion of the dark and sparkling awareness of what it means to be born as a human on Earth (Zapffe, 1992, p. 168). Consequently, Ligotti's stance on the absence of birth may be interpreted as implying injustice by depriving humans of the possibility to "win" imagination.

4. Conclusion

The main objective of this article is to analyze the reasons behind Ligotti's interpretation of Zapffe's theories as anti-natalist. Specifically, I explore why focusing on *The Last Messiah* alone, Ligotti simplifies the unique philosophical genealogy of Zapffe's ideas.

The first misconception is that by absolutizing the evolutionary implications of Zapffe's biological predicament, Ligotti underestimates the complex role of the biological interest within Zapffe's taxonomy of multifrontal interests. The surplus of consciousness, which in Ligotti's interpretation makes humans hide from themselves what they really are, is not accepted by Zapffe as given. He develops his conception of fixation mechanisms by providing a unique reception of Uexküll's ideas of *Umwelt* and the so-called functional circle, as well as introducing Steiner's theory of the phylogenetic probabilities.

Consequently, Ligotti's analysis of the surplus of consciousness in Zapffe's sense triggers some controversial dichotomies of the type *Ligotti's misinterpretation versus Zapffe's theory,* such as the dichotomy *self-deception versus heterotelic metaphysical activity of phantasy* embodied in that of *illusions versus fixations* and the dichotomy of *tragedy versus necessary tragic*.

Regarding the dichotomy *self-deception versus heterotelic metaphysical activity of phantasy*, I argue that Zapffe does not claim that the only way of minimizing the problem of our consciousness, described by Ligotti as a blunder of blind nature, is to desist from procreating. On the contrary, in his magnum opus *On the Tragic,* Zapffe provides well-grounded suggestions of how to live *with* the necessary tragic as constitutive of the human condition by developing fixation mechanisms irreducible to illusions.

Concerning the dichotomy of *tragedy versus necessary tragic,* I claim that if the human condition is recognized as tragedy, Zapffe's idea of objective tragic as multifrontal tragic would be controversially reduced to that of biological death.

Having outlined some reasons behind Ligotti's misinterpretation of Zapffe's ideas, I compare and contrast four excerpts, including one from *On the Tragic* that is not discussed by Ligotti. In this context, I argue that instead of promoting explicit anti-natalism, Zapffe introduces different types of multifrontal catastrophe. Specifically, the recognition of the Last Messiah as a *tragic genius*, the pessimist cats–including "the proudest" and what I call "provocative" pessimists as *tragic heroes*–,and the cat prophet as a *moral genius* in Zapffe's sense can contribute to outlining three types of multifrontal catastrophes, viz., autotelic-biological catastrophes experienced by the tragic genius and the tragic heroes, a metaphysical-biological catastrophe of the moral genius, and biological-autotelic catastrophes involving the crowd of the pacifier makers, midwives, and the digging cats.

Based on the clarifications above, I conclude that the latter catastrophes are not biological since all the agents succeed in fulfilling their biological interest of achievement (to survive) at the expense of sacrificing their autotelic interest (to preserve their nature). Therefore, one can argue for exceptional anti-natalism related to the autotelic-biological catastrophes that derives from what Zapffe calls the autotelic greatness of a small group of highly developed people.

Consequently, the analysis of the two excerpts of Zapffe's interview discussed by Ligotti shows that instead of supporting anti-natalism *per se*,[38] in the first excerpt, Zapffe argues for the two-child policy as a matter of compensation. He discusses how having children is a *compensation* strategy rather than opposing the idea of having children at all. In the second one, Zapffe clarifies why the speculations of being unborn are valid within the ontological determinism brought about by what he understands by fate. Consequently, Zapffe exemplifies the

[38] Even in the late interviews, Zapffe's anti-natalism is not an objective *per se*. While in the 1984 interview, ceasing procreation is discussed as temporally restricted (addressing the current generations), in the 1989/1990 one, it is agent-restricted (addressing the people who say 'no' to life, although there are those who say 'yes' as well).

autotelic implications of the *world's will*, which is indifferent to human choices, having the objective of its being in itself. However, he does not question *human will*, which can be defined as the necessary premise of having human destiny underlain by multifrontal interests.

In addition, fate in Zapffe's sense can be not only hostile but also favorable to human existence. An argument for fate's constructive role is one of Zapffe's statements, which claims that the major objective for humans under any circumstances is that they should have an unlimited reliance on the world's will and life's continuing *reproduction* (Zapffe, 1941, p. 207).

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Book reviews

Kjetil Rommetveit (ed.), *Post-truth Imaginations. New Starting Points for Critique of Politics and Technoscience*. Abingdon: Routledge. 2022, 238 p.

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The volume edited by K. Rommetveit gathers diverse and deep contributions that go beyond the purely rhetorical uses of "post-truth" as a catchphrase. Specifically, the volume provides an insightful genealogical reconstruction of the performative potential of post-truth as shifting and intensifying "major public imaginations of science and politics" (p. 4). The contributors' commonly shared choice of a normative approach to post-truth is justified by Rommetveit against the background of comparing and contrasting some leading scholarly responses (such as these) displayed by discussions in the fields of philosophy of science and science and technology studies (STS). The discussions are examined as underlain by the challenges to 1) the imaginations of risk as a matter of limiting risk calculus and 2) the dynamics of the technoscientific way of knowing, which questions the prior categories of calculation through some new ""emerging patterns" of big data and machine learning" (p. 7).

Focusing on the necessity of re-articulating the categories, meanings, and boundaries in the post-truth scientific discourse, Rommetveit outlines three major themes in the volume: 1) the reconsidered role of performativity and imaginaries of public meaning, as embedded in the "*weakening*" (p. 4) of particular public and collective meanings; 2) the blurring of some crucial categorical boundaries for post-truth debates, such as those of fact vs. value, nature vs. culture, and one of the most important distinctions from an epistemic point of view—that between knowing and non-knowing triggering the intensification of the major public imaginations; and 3) the "*shifts in the politics of time*" (p. 4), which affect the intensification of the negative value of time within the field of the neoliberal economy supported by future-oriented contemporary technoscience.

By referring to Fuller's distinction between truth and post-truth regimes, Rommetveit recognizes the new starting points of post-truth imaginations as triggered by the establishment of new post-truth epistemics. The latter is underpinned by a changing dynamic of the functional relations between certainty, risk, and uncertainty concerning ignorance. In turn, this dynamic reveals the internal transformation of epistemic labor by demonstrating how the unknown and uncertainties turn into investment resources subjectable to strategic manipulations (see p. 18). Specifically, the post-truth epistemics questions the normative validity of critique, addressing the relations between uncertainty and ignorance at the expense of increasing the role of power.

Based upon the specifications above, Rommetveit divides the volume into two main sections—*Foundations* (from chapter one to chapter three), which encompasses contributions tackling the origin of the debates from both historical and social perspectives, and *Inquiries* (from chapter four to chapter seven).

In chapter one "Truth as What Kind of Functional Myth for Modern Politics? A Historical Case Study," B. Wynne examines how as a result of being "*constituted as authority,*" political Truth deliberately enchants "*political* controversy *involving* "science"" as a matter of "scientific controversy" (p. 43). Consequently, "the myth of "finding the facts"" and "revealing the Truth" (p. 47) are interpreted as typical for the epistemic diagnosis of the late 20th century, when public issues "*involving*" science are considered "only *scientific issues*" at the expense of the social and political factors in building truth (see p. 47). The genealogy of the "pre-post-Truth" (p. 38) diagnosis along with some untruths, recognized as functional myths that support the "prevailing scientific orthodoxy" (p. 58) are exemplified by the THORP-Windscale case.

In this context, Wynne cogently points out the epistemic controversy of the late 20th-century "nuclear "democracy"" (p. 56) imposing "both epistemic and hermeneutic impotence on its imagined publics" (p. 56) as well as displaying an elaborated version of Hegel's theory of the master-slave dialectic. In turn, the impotence in question is determined as a complex phenomenon resulting from the public capacity (the public ""*as-if*" trust in authorities" (p. 58)) to avoid buffering "possible confrontational responses" (p. 56).

Consequently, Wynne analyzes the "erosion" of these "buffering processes" (p. 57) coinciding with post-Truth's growth (p. 59) within the neglected "passive" mode of rationality in Kekes's sense (p. 57). Wynne thoughtfully emphasizes that it is not clear whether post-truth can necessitate the reviving of some crucial qualities, such as accepting ignorance and ambiguity as normal life conditions, as well as identify relationality as grounding the renegotiation of collective meanings. Furthermore, Wynne warns of the risk that the "promissory discourses" (p. 59) in the era of post-truth may also be unable to avoid "the hubristic cul-de-sac of assuming" (p. 59) in which both the innovators and the regulators know not only the consequences of scientific development, but also which of these can trigger social concerns. The origin of this post-truth socio-epistemic diagnosis is determined as having its most illuminative embodiment in the difficulties in recognizing the role of scientific non-knowledge as a lack of sensitivity to "what history shows" (p. 59).

In chapter two "Post-truth or Pre-emptive Truth? STS and the Genealogy of the Present," L. Pellizzoni investigates the normative implications of the STS/post-truth debates by clarifying why instead of addressing post-truth on an epistemological level, one should provide a genealogical revelation of its ontological groundings as a matter of what he calls pre-emptive truth. The rationale of the latter underpins the military and security discourse, as referring to the process of merely anticipated threats for which one incites precautionary measures "acting to create the reality that demonstrates such very action…" (p. 75). An important contribution, showing that the idea of pre-emptive truth is not limited to the fields above, is Pellizzoni's analysis of how pandemic preparedness is framed by the governmental logic of pre-emption.

Specifically, post-truth as pre-emptive truth is defined as blurring the epistemological and ontological perspectives by replacing the "arrow of time" with "a sort of secular eschatology" (p. 75). Pellizzoni cogently argues that thus, truth becomes retroactive, but not in the sense of reinterpreting the past, but in that "of retro*acting* on it, making it become a place where different things have happened" (p. 75). The historical roots of the genealogical revelation above are traced back to how the symmetry principle, "as the *trait d'union* between post-truth and STS" (p. 66), fails to disenchant the gulf between SSK and Actor-Network Theory (ANT), which questions the dichotomic gist of Western modern ontology. As a major methodological challenge for the STS, Pellizzoni outlines the opportunity for critique to contribute to a form of perspectivism that avoids both traditional naturalism and the full contingency of matter and cognition.

By comparing and contrasting the external and internal critiques to STS in terms of the application of the symmetry principle to the post-truth debates, Pellizzoni emphasizes the necessity of revising the shift from SSK's restricted symmetry to ANT's generalized symmetry, as refracted through the lens of what Foucault calls a problematization. In this context, special attention is paid to STS's interest in how governmental machinery builds the regenerative eschatology of technological change against the background of the positive transformative function of the pre-emption. As a future object of investigation, Pellizzoni points out the relations between Nordmann's idea of prototypical truth, "post-truth *á la Oxford Dictionary*," and his own understanding of pre-emption as "building the counters of the problematisation in which we live" (p. 78).

In chapter three "The Moment of Post-truth for Science and Technology Studies," J. Söderberg provides a comparative analysis of the "three camps in the metadebate over STS and post-truth" (p. 88)—1. the so-called minority position in the STS community, as displayed by H. Collins and his followers accepting "partial responsibility" for the right-wing science deniers, 2. that of S. Fuller who welcomes the corroboration of some STS tenets by the deniers, and 3. the most important for the Söderberg camp "to which most STS scholars adhere" (p. 88). The latter camp includes representatives such as Jasanoff and Simmet, Marres and Sismondo, who provide a genealogical analysis of the contextualization of post-truth from the perspective of two major assumptions, viz., Jasanoff and Simmet's assumption that post-truth is "nothing more than "old wine in new bottles"" and Sismondo's assumption that STS is not responsible for equipping the populists with "science-debunking arguments" (p. 89).

Specifically, Söderberg questions Jasanoff and Simmet's argument that the public's ""moral panic over post-truth"" (p. 89) underestimates the change of the political context in years, while remaining restricted to the ontology of truth-making as such. In turn, Sismondo's assumption regarding the role of the constructivist demarcation criterion of science is also criticized due to the fact that it neglects the distinction between work in the scientific-rational discourse and work in the fields of rhetoric and politics as a qualitative difference. Otherwise, one reencounters the pitfalls derived from the STS's principle of equating science and power, which makes post-truth fall into disarray.

By elaborating upon D. Pels's "perceptive critique of the "value-neutral relativism" of the symmetry principle" (p. 97), Söderberg cogently outlines how the latter cannot "guarantee that the epistemologically disadvantaged actors are also the ones who deserve, morally and politically speaking, the help" received by the scholars' symmetrical interventions (p. 98). Söderberg concludes that going back to "STS half-forgotten roots in ideology critique" can make room for "a middle path between the Scylla of scientism and Charybdis of science denialism" (p. 106). Consequently, adopting such an approach requires a reconsideration of the role of the symmetry principle and "the pouvoir= savoir formula," which reverses the positive valuation of knowledge and power. Such a reconsideration is hinted at by the ideology critique approaches that encourage the justification of "asymmetrical judgments on knowledge claims" (p. 106).

In chapter four "Post-truth Dystopia. Huxleyan Distraction or Orwellian Control?," D. Durant argues that "post-truth is a Huxleyan moment in the intensification of alt-fact discourses" (p. 113), which can be interpreted as our "moral compass" to post-truth (p. 120), as well as giving "oxygen to the idea that science and indeed any lasting achievement is dangerous…" (p. 131). This "moment" is initially determined by the role of amusement and the cultivated adoration of oppression in Postman's sense. Moreover, it shows why Orwell/Huxleyan dystopian contrast is underlain by two different visions of control relations as embedded in the frameworks of the surveillance State vs. the promiscuous State (p. 120), viz., those of 1. "externally imposed oppression, information deprivation, and the concealing of truth" (Orwell) vs. 2. "coming to love one's oppression, information overload, and flooding discussion with irrelevancies and trivialities" (Huxley) (p. 113). The different visions above are displayed by two different types of warnings—Huxley's warnings, which Durant defines as encouraging "three forms of entertaining proliferation," and Orwell's warnings, described as triggering "three forms of grim constriction" (p. 118). They are represented by the associated triplets of the immediacy of the moment-entertaining distractions-overindulgence, with sexual promiscuity and diverse personal experiences vs. Newspeak-obfuscating the subjects of thought-repression of individuality, emotions and sexual experience.

In this context, Durant outlines that post-truth dynamics is inspired by a Huxleyan-dystopian way of thinking due to the assumption that 1) "fragmentation obscures incoherence" (p. 113) saturated in the post-truth discourse with "fears about relations of control" (p. 114), viz., post-truth dynamics encouraged by the widespread fragmentation of information in both cultural and historical spaces makes incoherence unnoticeable (see p. 129); and 2) "culture becomes a burlesque," triggering the overlap of post-truth with populism in politics, viz., the burlesque turns into a counter-reaction to Orwellian culture as a prison (see p. 130).

By comparing and contrasting Huxleyan and Orwellian dystopias, Durant draws the conclusion that responding to "Huxleyan post-truth dynamics" (p. 131) requires one to cultivate resistance to three forms of temptation, viz., those of idolizing novelty, reducing democracy to opening up issues, and narrowing authority relations to a process of coercing the surrender of judgment in Orwell's sense.

In chapter five "Public Reasoning in "Post-truth" Times. Technoscientific Imaginaries of "Smart" Futures," I. F. Ballo and N. S. Vaage examine the reasons behind the transformation of some "previously unifying "social imaginaries" …

of progress and modernity" (p. 138) in post-truth times. On a macro-methodological level, they apply the Foucauldian principle of intensification extrapolated by Pellizzoni, which captures the shifts of legitimate knowledge or truth to that of post-truth concerning the development of technologies and the new media of communication (p. 140). Specifically, Ballo and Vaage explore the axiological implications of post-truth reconfigurations, viz., whether the latter can contribute to opening or "closing down" (p. 139) the decision-making process by analyzing who benefits from the disorder of the social order based on modernity's legitimate truths. In this context, Ballo and Vaage investigate the implications of the "ongoing transformation of public reason" (p. 138) through the technoscientific imaginaries of "smart," as embedded in different areas of "smart" technologies.

"The current "post-truth" interregnum" (p. 139) is interpreted as epistemically modifying the profile of governance contexts which are no longer determined by *what is true*, but rather by *which truths*, or *whose reality* is considered a normative or political guiding principle (p. 140). Ballo and Vaage describe the future of "smart" technologies in neoliberal technoscience as implying strategic fuzziness. In turn, this fuzziness points towards the transformation of the governance contexts above into "seemingly "post-political" urban governance" (p. 141).

By exemplifying their critique of "smart" imaginaries in the fields of energy and urban development, Ballo and Vaage analyze how technoscientific logic "becomes an extension of the modern convictions of scientific objectivity" (p. 146), characterized by the mobilization of "smart" truth claims. The mobilization in question, which results from the ambiguity of the technoscientific imaginaries, makes room for the "colonisation of the future" as a matter of post-political (see p. 152). As a major practical outcome with increasing importance, Ballo and Vaage cogently point out the possibility of fostering the diversity of citizens beyond "the narrow framings of imagined ("smart") publics" (p. 153). Thus, one can make technology serve the good of people rather than turn humans into servants of hostile "disembodied technoscientific ends" (p. 153).

In chapter six "Tracing Networked Infrastructures for Post-truth. Public Dissections of and by Techno-political Leviathans," N. van Dijk develops Callon and Latour's metaphor of Leviathan as a macro-actor into techno-political Leviathans (see p. 165). The latter are considered as displaying networks of relations that should be "delegated to all kinds of materials and technologies (black-boxing)" (p. 165) in a manner that avoids their constant renegotiation in time. Providing such a top-down genealogical dissection from a macro-actor to macro-actors (plural) is described by van Dijk as beneficial for unscrewing the mechanisms behind some social networks, which are underlain by digital networking technologies.

In this context, van Dijk examines the post-truth debates in STS as refracted through the lens of the symmetry argument. The argument shows the gradual transformation of the idea of the production of knowledge varying from the positivist vision of such a production to that of fake news and disinformation initiated by the so-called post-truth actors (p. 167). However, van Dijk emphasizes that since the STS researchers have not been explicitly engaged with ""the kinds of work required to sustain post-truth"" (p. 167), one should ask the question of how the principle of symmetry can be extended and applied to post-truth's infrastructures so that one can understand the production and dissemination of fake news.

Regarding the origin of disinformation and election manipulation (such as the Cambridge Analytica controversy) (p. 169), van Dijk outlines two theoretical objectives behind the empirical analysis: 1) the examination of data journalism, by revealing the digital networked infrastructures that make disinformation circulate online as well as tracking user profiles, and 2) the exploration of the investigative journalists "tracing the social network of suspects engaged in information warfare…" (pp. 169-170).

While the first examination represents "a public dissection of the flows of personal information" (p. 170) within the data protection law, the second one is "a broader parliamentary inquiry" (p. 170) whose objective is to shed light upon the control of disinformation's circulation when used to manipulate elections. Specifically, van Dijk argues that the two investigations display how public bodies increase their power in terms of increasing resources and networks, while assuming that such infrastructural tracing activities can contribute to the larger efforts of regaining control over data flows and thus, "reassemble a techno-political Leviathan" (p. 170).

In chapter seven “Governing the Median Estate. Hyper-truth and Post-truth in the Regulation of Digital Innovations,” K. Rommetveit and N. van Dijk examine how the intensification of modernity’s dynamics in post-truth discourses, as embedded in the areas of privacy engineering and personhood for machines, has crucial implications for the regulation and governance of the digital sphere. Special attention is paid to the impact of digital hyper-truths grounding the agenda of the Internet of Things, Smart developments, and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which display a new way of blurring the boundaries between the digital and physical. As one of the most illuminating examples of blurring such boundaries in the post-truth discourse, Rommetveit and van Dijk cogently point out the building of moral agency into robots.

Consequently, what they call “*privacy-by-network*,” viz., “the gradual change” of the institutionalized fact-value distinction “through networked co-regulation and techno-regulatory approaches” (p. 205), concerns privacy engineering as contextualized within the so-called *Median Estate* (p. 205). The latter indicates “a normative change in the nature of the median space,” which makes room for the “the intermediary region “between” institutional or disciplinary “silos”’ (p. 205). It extends the impact of the discourses of informational machines in crucial institutional fields, such as those of morality, legality, and democracy. Following the implications of the methodological extension into the three fields in question is an important step towards disenchanting the diversity of public-private partnerships, considering that *privacy-by-network* “simultaneously” gains legitimacy as a fundamental right, regulatory measure, market-making device, engineering principle, and innovation imperative (p. 208).

Compared to privacy engineering, the second case, viz., that of the personhood of machines, with a special focus on electronic personhood, is determined as providing “a more basic level of collective imagination” (p. 209). Having examined in detail the legal scholarship and the history of the development as displayed by the so-called Green and White Papers, Rommetveit and van Dijk cogently clarify why machine-centrism in the legal discourse necessitates one to take into account that the meaning of right is gradually modified towards obtaining “a more hybrid character” (p. 213). That is why the promise of “more ethics and better rights protection” (p. 213) becomes a more challenging process in the post-truth discourse. This is well demonstrated by the analysis of the AI HLEG project as the stabilization in the Median Estate is no longer a prerogative of law alone due to moral, legal, and regulatory transformations from “boundary work to boundary fusion” (p. 214).

The volume *Post-truth Imaginations. New Starting Points for Critique of Politics and Technoscience* provides an insightful genealogical reconstruction of different aspects of post-truth debates, which goes beyond the well-known introduction of this concept into public science. The implications of this “beyond” mode are not only retrospective in terms of showing the context of diverse STS investigations, as well as making room for the gradual development of the climate of post-truth, but also prospective in the sense of retro*acting*–if I may extrapolate Pellizzoni’s understanding of pre-emptive truth. They demonstrate how post-truth “incites” reality–not as a speculative reality, but as a reality which has provisioned its own ontological groundings.

In this context, Rommetveit’s reference to L. Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass* (1871) in the introductory chapter shows something that is illuminative for post-truth as an epistemological and ontological diagnosis of our time of crises. Making ‘things with words’ is no longer a linear process, but neither is making ‘words with things,’ as is demonstrated by the complexity of the post-truth debates in this volume.

Boris D. Grozdanoff, Zdravko Popov and Silviya Serafimova (eds.), *Rationality and Ethics in Artificial Intelligence*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2023, 221 p.
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The book *Rationality and Ethics in Artificial Intelligence* consists of 10 chapters, approaching from different perspectives the issues raised by contemporary research on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its applications. Earlier versions of these texts have been discussed at AI-related conferences held in Sofia in the period 2018-2019.

In the first chapter, entitled "A Brief History of Computer Ethics and How It Is Connected to Artificial Intelligence Ethics," Mariana Todorova discusses the development of computer ethics and related AI ethics since the middle of the last century to the present day. Following Terrell Bynum, she places at the beginning of the movement for computer ethics the father of cybernetics, Norbert Wiener, who in the late 1940s and early 1950s warned of the negative consequences of creating computers capable of avoiding human control, and pleaded for considering measures that would prevent such an evolution of computer technology. Mariana Todorova draws special attention to two approaches to computer ethics as Terrell Bynum has outlined them. The first approach, represented by Norbert Wiener, Walter Maner and Krystyna Górniyak-Kosikovska, assumes that the development of modern computers and AI systems confronts us with fundamentally new ethical problems, which leads to the establishment of a new section of ethics seeking solutions to these problems. The second, more conservative approach, followed by authors such as Deborah Johnson, assumes that computer ethics does not address fundamentally new problems, but rather ones that can be seen as new exemplifications of the problems considered in classical ethics. Another important topic in the development of computer ethics is the realization of the need to create a code of ethics for AI. Organizations such as the EC of the EU and UNESCO are involved in the creation of global standards that the developers of intelligent systems must comply with. Until those standards become a reality, Mariana Todorova's recommendation to AI researchers is to take ethical concerns related to their discipline as seriously as possible.

In the second chapter, entitled "Ethical Clashes in the Prospects for Autonomous Vehicles," Silviya Serafimova brings back into focus the debate about the need to create a universal code of ethics to govern the behavior of highly autonomous machines. She examines the strengths and weaknesses of two approaches trying to solve this problem. The first approach is that of the contractualist project, whose main representative Derek Leben has created the so-called "Rawlsian collision algorithms." The second approach, presented by Darius-Aurel Frank, Polymeros Chrysochou, Panagiotis Mitkidis, and Dan Ariely, builds on utilitarian and deontological principles. Silviya Serafimova draws special attention to the role of various biases in decision-making in the context of moral dilemmas as well as to the role of experimental ethics in establishing those factors that influence evaluations of moral permissibility in situations in which moral principles conflict with one another. The chapter ends with the conclusion that, at present, it seems more promising to search for a network of mutually complementary codes instead of concentrating efforts on the creation of one universal code. According to the author, the adoption of such an approach would contribute to the creation of conditions for Autonomous Vehicles' "moral self-update by regulating the balance between their autonomy and morality, as much as possible" (p. 32).

The third chapter "Ethical Challenges to Artificial Intelligence in the Context of Pandemic and Afterwards," authored by Iva Georgieva, continues the theme of ethical challenges created by the use of Artificial Intelligence in such sensitive areas of human life as healthcare. Emphasizing that finding a balance between technological progress and humanity has always been an issue, Georgieva focuses on ongoing changes in the application of AI as well as in the perceptions of the benefits and potential risks of these applications - in particular, those that have occurred in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. She notes that the positive reception of AI is mainly related to the accelerated development of telemedicine (and digital health in general) and to the realized possibilities of using AI in the creation of vaccines and in the fight against the "infodemic" (the spread of misinformation). Risks and ethical challenges are associated with the use of AI in various types of tracking systems and more specifically, with the operation of these systems with sensitive personal data. In conclusion, Georgieva notes that it is difficult to foresee which of the changes in the application of AI and in the perception of its applications that have occurred as a result of the pandemic will remain and which will not. Nonetheless, she argues, there is no doubt that considerations of "what is humane and what is ensuring the wellbeing of humankind" (p. 45) will play a leading role in this process.

Most people today associate the possible applications of AI with self-driving cars and autonomous weapons systems. We rarely ask ourselves what the consequences would be for the economy, local or global, if most of the important decisions about its management were made by AI. Anton Gerunov focuses on this very question in Chapter IV, "The AI-Run Economy: Some Ethical Issues," and tries to answer it with the help of a "simulation experiment" in which the behavior of two simple models of economic systems is compared. The human-run economy model assumes that decisions are made in a decentralized fashion by independent agents with bounded rationality who are biased by their habits, irrational beliefs, and inertia. In the AI-run economy model, all decisions are made by a single rational AI entity. The results of the simulation experiment are more than curious. On the one hand, both systems reach a steady state in the end if they have not been subject to unforeseen external shock events. On the other hand, the dynamics of the processes ending in a steady state are essentially different. In the human-run system, it goes through many more deviations that we would define as economic crises, e.g. states of hyperinflation, etc., while the centrally-controlled AI system deviations are fewer and far less dramatic. Gerunov, however, does not rush to a conclusion in favor of an AI-Run economy, but instead, calls for discussion of the question of the ethical price that must be paid for achieving such sustainability. Following Boström & Yudkowski (2014), he evaluates the ethical aspects of the transition to a centralized, AI-driven economy according to six criteria: "responsibility, transparency, auditability, incorruptibility, predictability, avoidance of harm" (p. 64). The conclusion he reaches is that while some of the ethical principles operate in unison with economic imperatives, others (e.g. the requirement of transparency) diverge dramatically from the requirement of economic efficiency. The author's final recommendation is in the direction of 1) finding a balance in the delegation of economic decisions to people and to AI systems, and 2) making it mandatory that "large-scale and high-risk AI algorithms [go] through a formal assessment and approval procedure" (p. 67).

In Chapter V "Scratch My Back and I Will Scratch Yours: Putting Game Theory and Artificial Intelligence on a Converging Path Beyond Computational Abilities," Boris Gurov asks how the entry of AI into the field of game theory can lead to a deepening of our understanding of the relationship between individual human rational behavior and group rationality. Noting at the outset that game theory is the only analytical tool for studying the relationship between individual strategies and their group effects, Gurov briefly recalls key moments in the development of this tool: the displacement of Emile Borel's psychological empiricist approach by John von Neumann's normative expected-utility theory, the use of the prisoner's dilemma as a test of various theories of human rationality, the influence of David Lewis' theory of social conventions, the emergence of evolutionary game theory, and the concept of bounded rationality. The empirical evidence in support of the latter brings back to the scene the interest in the psychological empiricist project, but at a new level, where empirical research on how people actually make decisions in different situations is done not only by conducting behavioral experiments, but also through computer simulations. Gurov argues that the current focus of decision-making simulation research is on how multiple agents are trained through reinforcement techniques (the so-called "Multi-Agent Reinforcement

Learning" or MARL). He believes that a "shift of optics" is needed from algorithms aimed at optimizing individual behavior to the creation of "smart networks" in which individual algorithms cooperate.

At the beginning of Chapter VI "Artificial Intelligence in Defence," Todor Dimitrov compares the arms race during the Cold War with the arms race today. He stresses that while during the Cold War the race was mainly in the field of nuclear weapons, with the goal being the creation of more powerful and deadly nuclear weapons, today it is in the field of military applications of AI, and not so much in the creation of more *lethal* AI weapons as the creation of those that improve handling, precision, operational speed, etc.–i.e., AI is seen less as a new weapon technology than as a tool that improves the speed and quality of tactical and strategic decision-making. Dimitrov briefly traces the main areas in military affairs in which AI is used: "battle platforming," "threat monitoring and situational awareness," "data processing," "force management," "logistics," "targeting," "combat simulations and training," "electronic warfare," "decoys and camouflages," and "cybersecurity." In conclusion, the author of this chapter points out that as AI applications lead to the acceleration of decision-making processes, human control over these processes will become increasingly difficult. This also poses ethical challenges, which are further complicated by the fact that such systems can fall into unscrupulous hands. Changes in international law as well as ethical regulation are needed to ensure human control in AI assisted decision-making and in the use of autonomous AI weapons in order to minimize the misuse of such weapons.

In Chapter VII "Process Mining with Machine Learning" Nikola Sotirov compares the predictive accuracy of different Machine Learning (ML) techniques in two prediction tasks: the first aimed at predicting the type of event that is expected to occur in the next moment, and the second aimed at predicting the time of occurrence of the next event. The source dataset used is BPI Challenge 2012. "Random forest classifier" and "a neural network classifier" have been used to predict the type of the next event. The obtained results show an indisputable advantage of the neural network (NN): 83% calculated accuracy against 77.6% calculated accuracy of the "random forest classifier" predictions. To predict the time of occurrence of the next event, the NN regression model has been used, which correctly predicts the time of occurrence of the next event in more than 60% of cases. The author's conclusion is that although the three tested models demonstrate satisfactory prediction accuracy, certain technical improvements (e.g. adding at least one LSTM layer in the neural network classifier and additional layers in the neural network predicting the time of the next event) could lead to an increase in this accuracy.

In Chapter VIII "Approaching the Advanced Artificial Intelligence" Alexander Lazarov formulates seven questions on which, according to him, the philosophical discussion about how to communicate with objects possessing autonomous Advanced Artificial Intelligence (AAI) should be focused. He defines AAI as the next level in the evolution of the currently existing "narrow AI," which will be characterized by the networking of multiple specialized AI agents. According to the author, this is not yet an Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), whose form of existence is currently difficult to predict. The main questions that, according to Lazarov, require an answer to enable successful communication with future AAI are the following: "What do *intelligence, understanding*, and *autonomy* mean? What is the difference between *data* and *information*? What is the philosophical essence of any *intelligent procedure*? What is *real* and what is *virtual* in a data exchange process? What are the differences between AI and robots? What is AAI, and where does it fall within the framework of narrow (specialized) AI and general artificial intelligence (AGI)? Which issues should be considered in cases of human to AAI and AAI to AAI communication?" (p. 131). A separate paragraph is devoted to each of these questions in the chapter, and one of the author's most important conclusions is that avoiding future conflicts in human interactions with AAI systems requires the combined efforts of philosophers of different schools to focus on the development of a new concept for human-AI communication.

In chapter IX "The Structure of Artificial Rationality" Boris Grozdanoff offers a description of the RAISON model, which he defines as a human-like AGI model based on a DRL architecture that possesses "abilities for syntax recognition, semantic interpretation, logical reasoning and rationality" (p. 191). The description of the model is preceded by detailed explanations of why precisely the abilities listed above are perceived as key characteristics of human and human-like intelligence. The roots of this notion of intelligence, according to Grozdanoff, can be found in the history of the analytic tradition in philosophy, some prominent representatives of which have stated that "human intelligence is generally grasped as the integrated set of necessary conditions of human rational abilities: NL mastery, NL understanding, both in syntax and semantics (that operate successfully in real life scenarios, including problem solving and NL communication with other human agents), NL based reasoning …" (p. 166). The RAISON model is intended to be trained on the available NLP datasets such as "UCI's Spambase, Enron dataset, Recommender Systems dataset, Dictionaries for Movies and Finance, Sentiment 140, Multi-Domain Sentiment dataset, Legal Case Reports Dataset, but mostly on the Wiki QA Corpus and the Jeopardy datasets" (p. 194).

In the last chapter, Chapter X "Discrimination of Well-formed Formulae as a Component of Artificial Human Rationality," Dimitar Popov presents his model of AGI, which, like the RAISON model presented in the previous chapter, is of a hybrid, "neuro-symbolic" type. The central component of the model is the so-called "logical inference engine," which is powered by syntactically correct expressions presented in symbolic form, extracted from a text written in natural language. The part of the model called "syntactical classifier" (p. 212), whose function is to recognize and filter syntactically correct expressions, is developed on the basis of RNN (Recurrent Neural Network). The conducted tests of this part show a high accuracy of recognition of syntactically correct expressions: 99.13%. Popov has stated his ambition to build and test the entire model.

Although the content of the 10 chapters of the presented collection varies widely, from proposals for specific models of AI to discussions of the challenges posed by the entry of AI into various spheres of human life, several leading themes unite this content. These are the themes of artificial rationality and its similarities and differences with human rationality, the interaction and communication between natural and artificial intelligence, the social effects of using AI systems in various spheres of human activity, and the perceived need for regulation and control with the aim of minimizing the possible negative effects and extracting the maximum benefit from the positive ones. These are topics that have been intensively debated in recent years, and the presented collection is a modest contribution to the ongoing discussions.

Dimitar Tsatsov, ***Dimitar Mihalchev – "Filosofski studii. Prinos kum kritikata na moderniia psikhologizum. – 1909 g." Vuvedenie*** **[*Dimitar Mihalchev – "Philosophical Studies. A Contribution to the Critique of Modern Psychologism. – 1909." Introduction*], Sofia: Avangard Prima. 2023, 133 p.**

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The book under review is the third in a series of works by the same author on the Bulgarian philosopher Dimitar Mihalchev (1880–1967), the first two of which were *Dimitar Mihalchev – Formiraneto na filosofa (1903–1904 g.) [Dimitar Mihalchev – The Formation of the Philosopher (1903–1904)]* and *Dimitar Mihalchev – Po putia na osnovnonauchnata filosofiia (1905–1908 g.) [Dimitar Mihalchev – On the Path Towards Fundamental Scientific Philosophy (1905–1908)]*, both published in 2019. As their titles suggest, the first bears upon Mihalchev's earliest philosophical development in Bulgaria in 1903 and 1904, and the second pertains to his intellectual development from 1905 to 1908 leading to his project of philosophy as a fundamental science. The third, *Dimitar Mihalchev – "Filosofski studii. Prinos kum kritikata na moderniia psikhologizum. – 1909 g." Vuvedenie* (*Dimitar Mihalchev – "Philosophical Studies. A Contribution to the Critique of Modern Psychologism. – 1909." Introduction*) deals principally with Mihalchev's first monograph, which appeared in German in 1909 under the title *Philosophische Studien: Beiträge zur Kritik des modernen Psychologismus* (*Philosophical Studies: A Contribution to the Critique of Modern Psychologism*), wherein Mihalchev defended the philosophy of Johannes Rehmke, with whom he studied in Greifswald. Mihalchev's *Philosophische Studien* has never been translated into Bulgarian in its entirety. This book thus serves as an introduction and as a work of popularization for the Bulgarian readership unacquainted with the German language. The book is divided into the following chapters: "Introduction"; "Anti-Psychologism"; "Why Does Dimitar Mihalchev Dedicate His First Monograph to Piotr Struve?"; "The Theoretical Premises in the Early Works"; "Criticism of Modern Psychologism"; "The Specific Psychologism of Wilhelm Schuppe and Richard Avenarius (Ernst Mach)"; "Theory of Judgment"; "What is Reality?"; "The Strong Tradition in Bulgarian Philosophical History — Presentationism!"; and "Conclusion."

In the chapter "Anti-Psychologism," the author explains that psychologism has different manifestations, but that its "most striking manifestation […] is in logic and the theory of knowledge" (p. 13). In the latter domain, psychologism is arrived at in the following way: "1. The touchstone of logical truth is the sense of self-evidence. 2. The sense of self-evidence is a human mental experience. Therefore, logic is about human mental experience — and, therefore, part of psychology" (p. 15). Ultimately, according to Mihalchev, all psychologisms are species of anthropocentric relativism (p. 17). Psychologism was defended by John Stuart Mill, Theodor Lipps, Wilhelm Wundt, Christoph Sigwart, and others. The first to oppose it was Gottlob Frege, who argued that "mathematics is the most precise of all sciences, while psychology is imprecise and vague. It is therefore implausible to suppose that mathematics could be based on or be part of psychology" (p. 16). The second to oppose psychologism was Edmund Husserl, but "this does not mean that there are no psychologizing premises in Husserl's critique of psychologism" (p. 44). As Paul Natorp said, "if one wants, one can find psychologism in Husserl's ideas" (p. 44). The author returns to the theme of psychologism in the chapter "Criticism of Modern Psychologism," wherein he writes in bold lettering that the "critique of modern psychologism that D. Mihalchev carries out in *Philosophische Studien* […] is the only comprehensive attempt in European philosophy to thematize this problem" (p. 34). The latter critique, according to the author, leads to ontologism.

Mihalchev's *Philosophische Studien* is somewhat enigmatically dedicated to the Russian philosopher, economist, and politician Piotr Struve. In the chapter "Why Does Dimitar Mihalchev Dedicate His First Monograph to Piotr Struve?" the author explains that, as a student, Mihalchev had read Struve's article "Svoboda i istoricheskaia neobkhodimost" ("Freedom and Historical Necessity") that appeared in the journal *Voprosy filosofi i psikhologii* (*Questions of Philosophy and Psychology*) in 1897. This article would have given "him fundamental theoretical orientations and thereby determined his philosophical development" (p. 19). It was through reading this article, according to the author, that Mihalchev came into contact with "the unpopular works of W. Schuppe" (p. 19). What attracted the young Mihalchev to Struve would have been his "attempt to combine the social teaching of Marx with the immanent philosophy of Schuppe" (p. 23). This is consequential because Mihalchev went to Greifswald with the intention of studying with Wilhelm Schuppe. It was only after his arrival in Greifswald in 1905, and after meeting with both Schuppe and Rehmke, that he became critical towards Schuppe and that he decided to study with Rehmke instead (p. 51). Thus, the answer to the question in the chapter heading is that Struve was among those who exerted a significant influence on the development of Mihalchev's philosophical views (p. 25).

The chapter "The Specific Psychologism of Wilhelm Schuppe and Richard Avenarius (Ernst Mach)" is concerned with Mihalchev's treatment of these three philosophers. According to him, the philosophies of Schuppe, Avenarius, and Mach "could not provide a satisfactory solution to the problem of reality, because they proved powerless to break the iron rings of subjective idealism" (p. 61). This line of reasoning is pursued further in the chapter "What is Reality?" ("Shto e deistvitelnost?"), where we learn that, for Mihalchev, the "real is independent of individual consciousness" (p. 80). Reality (*Wirklichkeit*, *deistvitelnost*) "is given to individual consciousness, but is independent of that consciousness" (p. 82). Mihalchev thus opposes subjective idealism and gives the impression of solving the epistemological problem in a realist fashion. However, he also claims, in 1909, that reality "is dependent on 'consciousness in general'" (p. 80), that "the real is in relation to consciousness in general" (*Bewußtsein überhaupt*) (p. 82). More specifically, his stance in 1909 is that "in order to be able to understand reality as something independent of us, there is nothing else left but to accept, that there is one consciousness to which all reality is given: in religious language this consciousness is called God" (pp. 82–83). In other words, in order for something to be real it must be "had" by a supra-individual or divine consciousness. Mihalchev specifies that, "even if individual consciousnesses were to disappear, this world would continue to exist as a world of one consciousness, which is objective and independent of individual consciousnesses" (p. 84). It is true that Mihalchev opposes subjective idealism, but, if, for him, everything that exists is "possessed by" some divine consciousness, then is not his philosophy—at least in 1909—a sort of absolute idealism akin to that of Hegel? Yet Mihalchev's philosophy has time and again been characterized as a realism, an objectivism, and an ontologism. How are we to reconcile these seemingly inconsistent facts? Did Mihalchev change his mind over time? In "Moeto filosofsko razvitie" ("My Philosophical Development"), Mihalchev wrote that he held the thesis of a supra-individual consciousness during the 1906–1909 period under the influence of Schuppe, but that he had entirely abandoned this hypothesis by the time of writing *Forma i otnoshenie* (*Form and Relation*), which appeared in 1914. However, in spite of Mihalchev's own claim to the contrary, the author believes that Mihalchev secretly continued to uphold the thesis of an absolute supra-individual consciousness, but that he kept silent about it, and the author provides reasons for this belief (pp. 86–89). But these reasons are hardly compelling given that they contradict Mihalchev's own explicit statement on this issue in "Moeto filosofsko razvitie."

In the chapter "The Strong Tradition in Bulgarian Philosophical History — Presentationism!" the author is concerned with the debate between the epistemological stances that Bulgarians call "presentationism" and "representationism." "Presentationism" is the view that the thing known is *present* in the act of knowledge, whereas representationism is the view that the object known is copied, duplicated, or *re-presented* in the act of knowledge. According to the author, presentationism has different variants, and he likens Mihalchev's variant to "the intuitivism of Nikolai Lossky, the ontologism of Semyon Frank, the critical ontology of Nicolai Hartmann, the Marxism of Todor Pavlov, and others" (p. 94). But, although Mihalchev's philosophy resembles that of Hartmann in its general lines, the former was critical of the theory of images that the latter developed in *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis* (*Foundations of a Metaphysics of Knowledge*) (pp. 95–96). In this regard, Mihalchev is closer to Lossky, who "developed the so-called intuitivism—a teaching according to which we directly perceive objects. We are given things as they are, in themselves" (p. 97). By "intuition," Lossky understands "the immediate grasping of objects, awareness of them as they are in themselves" (p. 97). Therefore, for Lossky we do not perceive an image or copy or duplicate of the object, but the object itself (p. 98). On this issue, the author also considers the stance of the Bulgarian philosopher Todor Pavlov, whose "theory of reflection," according to him, continued the line of development sketched in the works of Lossky, Hartmann, Frank, and others, and which was the most well-argued theory of the cognitive image in Bulgarian philosophical history (p. 100). But there are nevertheless significant differences between Mihalchev and Pavlov. For instance, whereas for the Mihalchev of the 1906–1909 period everything that exists is given, for Pavlov only a part of what exists is given (p. 103). A number of other Bulgarian philosophers who took part in this debate are also discussed, such as Spiridon Kazandzhiev, Asen Kiselinchev, Sava Petrov, Aristotle Gavrilov, and Dobrin Spasov.

In the conclusion, the author decries the fact that, despite Mihalchev's significance both for European and Bulgarian philosophical history, a complete translation of his 1909 book into Bulgarian is unfortunately still wanting today (p. 124). As "strange as it may seem," he says, "the Faculty ofPhilosophy at Sofia University, where Dimitar Mihalchev taught for decades, has not yet sponsored its translation and publication" (p. 124). Still missing also is an edition of his complete works. "What prevents the 'Complete Collected Works' of the academician, professor Dimitar Mihalchev — the most prolific philosophical writer in the entire Bulgarian philosophical history — to be published today!?" (pp. 124–125). According to the author, the neglect of this work is indicative of the nihilistic attitude of the Bulgarian intelligentsia towards their own cultural legacy (p. 124). In this regard, he cites the Bulgarian philologist Boyan Penev, who wrote in 1924: "Politically we have freed ourselves, but the end of spiritual slavery is not yet in sight. The second slavery is much more terrible than the political one. No external force will free us from it — we must free ourselves […]. But where are the efforts?" (p. 125). The author notes that today this "traditional 'spirit of negation' is being revived, the nihilistic attitude to heuristics born in our philosophical history is being revived" (p. 126). In closing, he cites another Bulgarian philosopher, Dobrin Spasov, who wrote that Bulgaria's "socio-historical backwardness has been and is being answered by a philosophical 'market' in which imports many times exceed domestic production" (p. 126). Spasov recalls how, in the Soviet era, Bulgarian philosophers adopted a servile attitude towards their "Soviet comrades" and observes how his "present-day democratic colleagues build their high self-esteem on reckless borrowing, clumsy retelling, and over-the-top commentary of sensational and tumultuous Western European and American authors" (p. 126). The moral of the story is that sometimes originality simply consists in recovering one's own native cultural heritage and that, therefore, Bulgarian intellectuals would benefit from exercising more diligence in the preservation, the transmission to posterity, and the exportation of their own national philosophical tradition, from its Thracian origins to Mihalchev and beyond. The maxim *γνῶθι σεαυτόν* (know thyself) applies to nations just as much as to individuals.