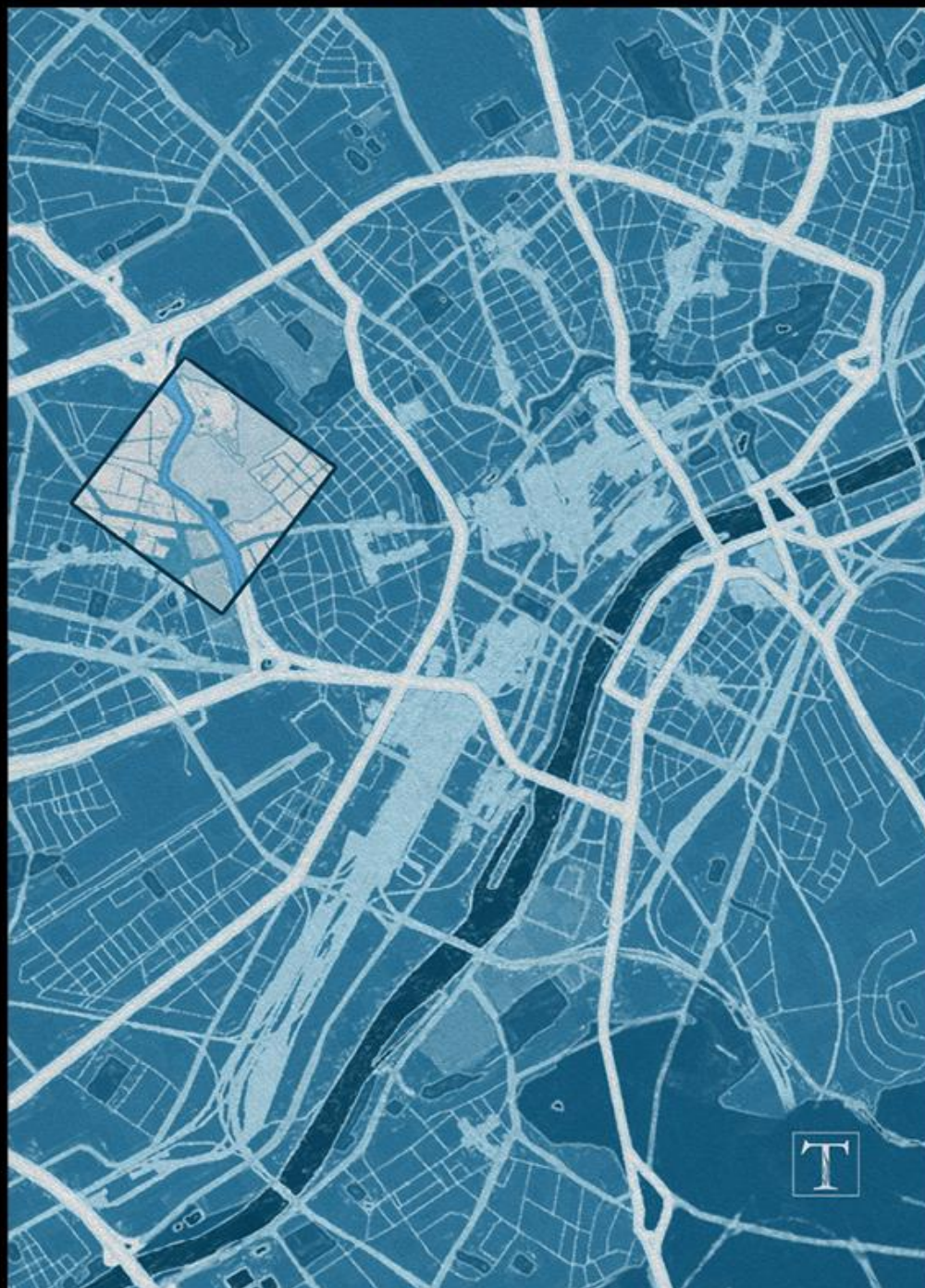


# TALISIK

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# TALISIK

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## ABOUT THE COVER

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The cover illustrates the place of origin of Frankfurt School style Critical Theory, that is, the *Institut für Sozialforschung* under the Johan Wolfgang Goethe-Universität in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. A school of thought that emphasizes an interdisciplinary approach to the material struggles of human existence. More specifically, the grid lines of the map penetrating inside the square symbolizes the critical role of reason: philosophy as self-reflexive and receptive to new ways of thinking. It shows that, despite the chaos and disorder, there lies an opportunity for territorialization and becoming. In a sense, the cover then signifies the emancipatory potential of philosophical critique that is not enclosed in its theoretical borders, but, instead, embraces praxis as its actualization towards social transformation and justice.

*TALISIK: An Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy*, 12:1 (August 2025)

Cover design by Ms. Alexandra Phoebe C. Barasi

# ABOUT THE JOURNAL

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**TALISIK: An Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy** is the laboratory undergraduate journal of Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy ([www.kritike.org](http://www.kritike.org)), the official journal of the Department of Philosophy, University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Philippines. As a laboratory journal, TALISIK is the publication and research arm of the AB Philosophy Program of the UST Faculty of Arts and Letters. It is designed as an innovative pedagogical tool that aims to cultivate skills related to editorial management, research, and publication practices. Ultimately, through TALISIK, the Department of Philosophy fosters its research culture among the undergraduate students of philosophy of UST, as well as other academic institutions. The journal seeks to publish articles across the whole range of philosophical topics, but with special emphasis on the following subject strands:

**Anglo-American Philosophy**

**Aristotelian-Thomistic Philosophy and Scholasticism**

**Continental European Philosophy**

**Contemporary philosophical issues and trends**

**Feminism and Postcolonial Theory**

**Filipino Philosophy**

**Oriental Thought and East-West Comparative Philosophy**

**TALISIK** is a Filipino word. It is a contraction of “Talas” [Keenness] and “Saliksik” [Search]. **TALISIK** then means “Katalasan ng isip na umunawa ng anuman” [Keenness of the mind to understand anything] and “Malaliman at matalinong pagdalumat sa kahulugan ng anuman” [In-depth and intelligent search for the meaning of anything]. Based on the definition of TALISIK, the Editorial Board intends to demonstrate the acumen of undergraduate students of philosophy through their research undertakings. The journal primarily caters to the works of the UST undergraduate students of philosophy and welcomes contributions from other fields and institutions. Today, the organization also envisions expanding its academic channels not only through publication but also with discursive spaces that will allow curiosity and polemical research to develop.

**TALISIK** publishes issues annually.

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITORIAL BOARD

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The intellectual terrain of contemporary society can be defined by its high regard on technology and the natural sciences. Meanwhile, the disciplines under the humanities struggle to prove its worth to society, oftentimes deemed as inferior when compared to more “practical disciplines.” This kind of thinking disregards the critical function of the humanities, such as philosophy, that, ultimately, leads to the stultification of human flourishing and development. The distaste towards the humanities in the country leads to the dehumanization and objectification of human capacities and potentialities. More importantly, the value of university education is being reconfigured into the lenses of market-centered authorities that sees its purpose as merely for employment preparations and positivistic ends. For this reason, philosophy is instrumental in confronting the prevalence of suppression and censorship that have become ingrained in the system and general consciousness. Therefore, TALISIK continues to be a cornerstone and avenue for critical discourse amidst these pressing challenges that threatens the humanities.

As a form of resistance, TALISIK encourages polemic research that addresses diverse socio-political issues, cultivating a critical and ethical consciousness. Hence, the editorial board is pleased to announce that this year’s volume consists of seven journal articles. The papers consist of varied philosophical topics such as Sartre’s existentialism, Kantian business ethics, Marx and environmental ethics, Feminism, Fanon and Rancière’s philosophy, and lastly, two articles on Filipino philosophy. First, Jan Clarizz Accad’s article seeks to examine Sartre’s notion of anguish in contemporary technological and media contexts. Second, Sean Ethan Capisanan’s work closely analyzes the Filipino concept of *pakikipagkapwa* in relation to Wojtyła’s philosophy of participation. Third, Bowee Escuro Collante’s paper criticizes Corporate Social Responsibility in the Philippines through the lens of Kant’s deontological ethics. Meanwhile, Dominic Bautista Gonzales’ paper aims to reconstruct a decolonized Filipino subjectivity through the Filipino ontological constructs of *kapwa*, *pakikipagkapwa*, and *loob*. Moreover, Sean Marcus Ingalla’s article critically explores the ideas of Marx and extends it to environmental ethics. Furthermore, Mary Joy Obrero engages on Nussbaum’s Capabilities Approach in investigating the marginalization of women in informal economy. Lastly, James KJ Tolentino theorizes the affective-aesthetic regime of exclusion from the convergences in the ideas of Fanon and Rancière.

We, the Editorial Board of TALISIK 2025-2026, present this current volume in the continued effort of cultivating a research culture among philosophy students. This endeavor would not be possible without the support and guidance of our mentors. More specifically, we express our deepest gratitude to Inst. Paula Nicole C. Eugenio, M.A. and Asst. Prof. Anton Heinrich L. Rennesland, Ph.D., for their relentless encouragement and patience to the current and previous editorial board. They have provided us invaluable ideas and opportunities to the growth of the journal through their knowledge and expertise. Additionally, we are infinitely grateful to Prof. Raniel S. Reyes, Ph.D., for extending his knowledge to the editorial board in navigating the journal. Likewise, we are beyond thankful to Prof. Marella Ada Mancenido-Bolaños, Ph.D., the Chair of the Department of Philosophy, for her boundless generosity to the editorial board. Her dedication in maintaining

excellence within the philosophical community in UST has inspired us in various ways. Furthermore, the Managing-Editor would like to personally thank Ms. Alexandra Phoebe C. Barasi for her creativity and effort in designing the cover page of the issue, despite her duties in the UST Concilium Philosophiae as Committee Director on Arts. We are also sincerely thankful to the authors who contributed to this issue, and for their patience and diligence in the review process to the improvement of their craft. Of course, this would not be possible without the reviewers who meticulously and carefully reviewed each manuscript to make it publishable in the journal. Most importantly, the Managing-Editor also wishes to express his utmost appreciation to the editorial team, namely, Mr. Francis Emmanuel N. Amiga, Mr. Sean Ethan M. Capisanan, Ms. Christine Julianne Genovea, Mr. Roy Lexter S. Hembra, Ms. Mary Francine Denisse O. Lumantao, and Ms. Ysalenn B. Saguban, for their hard work and perseverance throughout the publication of this issue. The culmination of this issue is a result of our shared struggles, ideas and collective effort.

Ultimately, as TALISIK provides an avenue for philosophical research, it aims to put philosophy at the forefront of social critique. In other words, philosophy should not be disconnected from social reality, especially in addressing contemporary ethical issues. The critical function of philosophy advances an ethical consciousness against the increasing fragmentation, individualism, and atomization in society. The university serves as a space for collaborative dialogue grounded on rational, responsible and well-thought reflection. There can only be genuine and fruitful discourse when it is anchored on shared normative values, without sacrificing individuality and integrity. Through the humanities and the university, students are able to transform their souls and become well-rounded individuals. Challenging the status quo and established epistemic structures necessitates the realization of the essential role of the humanities—which is integral to the formation of character as seekers of truth. With this, TALISIK accentuates the importance of communality, intersubjectivity and, most of all, the marriage of philosophy to social reality.

## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR

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**JAN CLARIZZ G. ACCAD** is an undergraduate student of Philosophy at the University of Santo Tomas—Manila. Currently, her research interests consist of (but not limited to): Video Game Studies, Archival Studies, Ludonarrative Studies, and Narrative Hermeneutics. And at the moment, she is exploring research possibilities that entail how video games serve as modern expositions of philosophical dilemmas, in particular, how interactive mediums recontextualize classic problems of authentic experience, artificial identity, and the continuity of the self. Or maybe café hopping in search of unique drinks, and third places.

**SEAN ETHAN MONTOYA-CAPISANAN** is currently an undergraduate student at the University of Santo Tomas, pursuing a degree in Philosophy under the Faculty of Arts and Letters. Aside from his curricular studies, he is an associate editor of TALISIK: An Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy, and a proud member of Pax Romana - AB Unit. Participating in academic fora became an avenue for him to study and explore his primary research interests which include (but are not limited to): Karol Wojtyła, Max Scheler, Thomistic Personalism, and the Frankfurt School Critical Theory, with a particular emphasis on Max Horkheimer's critical theory. Recently, Capisanan was awarded the St. Albertus Magnus Award (University-level) for his contributions to research.

**BOWEE ESCURO COLLANTES** earned his Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy from the University of Santo Tomas in 2025. His research interests include corporate social responsibility, business ethics, accounting, applied philosophy, and Immanuel Kant, particularly their intersections with contemporary business practice. With a philosophical approach to business, he focuses on problem-solving, strategic planning, and ethical leadership. He seeks to contribute to the evolving landscape of CSR through principled and strategic decision-making and to extend his impact beyond business through philanthropy.

**DOMINIC BAUTISTA GONZALES** is currently the Administrative Head at Mary the Queen School of Malolos, a philosophy enthusiast, and educator whose work bridges the gap between classical formation and contemporary technology. He is currently pursuing his Master's in Philosophy at Divine Word Mission Seminary (Christ the King). He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy (Minor in Education) from Adamson University—St. Vincent School of Theology, where he served as Vice President (2022–2023) and President (2023–2024) of the *Students of Philosophy Association*. With a background in seminary formation, his research explores the intersections of classical philosophy, linguistic theory, and digital culture. His work has appeared in journals such as the *Mabini Review*, *Talisik*, and *Aletheia*.

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**MARY JOY OBRERO** is a Senior Research Assistant for the UP Gender Audit Project at University of the Philippines Baguio, where she also completed her Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences, major in Anthropology and minor in Philosophy. Her academic and research interests include ancient philosophy, metaphysics, philosophy of gender and feminist thought, critical theory, and social anthropology.

**JAMES KJ B. TOLENTINO** recently finished his Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy as Cum Laude at the St. Peter's College Seminary, San Pablo City, Laguna. He also obtained the Best Thesis award for his thesis "From *Pathos* to *Logos*: Rancière, Poverty Porn, and the Redistribution of the Sensible in the Philippine 'Digital Theater'." Beyond philosophy, James also takes great interest in sports and music.

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## The Burden of Self-Creation: On Sartre's Notion of Anguish in Contemporary Technological Life

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Jan Clarizz G. Accad

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**Abstract:** The existentialist thought of Jean-Paul Sartre contends that the human individual is free to carve the path they so desire, rather than be born with meaning. However, authentic freedom is accompanied with a haunting responsibility, one of which consists of anguish, abandonment, and despair. This paper examines Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of *angoisse*, or anguish, as one of the emotional conditions of existentialism primarily through his *Being and Nothingness* and *Existentialism is a Humanism*, with supplementing through scholarly existential works, and briefly other Sartrean works. Exploring his various literature would aid in conceptually discussing anguish as an inevitable, existential thought, and contextualize anguish in the contemporary technological and media spaces. The paper is mainly divided into three sections. The first section situates Jean-Paul Sartre as an influential thinker whose works popularized existentialist concepts, and raises the underexplored notion of anguish, despite its significance in the existential framework. The second section will cover the genealogy of anguish, primarily tracing its conceptualization from Kierkegaard and Heidegger, to expounding upon it through Sartre's works, and lastly briefly covering post-Sartrean conceptions of anguish up until the contemporary philosophical space in technological and media contexts. Finally, the third section will examine anguish as the structural and inescapable role in human existence. Sartre claims that in pursuing authentic freedom, the self must be capable of satisfying the demands it brings. The Sartrean notion of anguish represents the inescapable confrontation with human freedom and responsibility, and remains a persistent, structuring aspect of the human condition that requires the self to confront it as a necessary tension in the burden of self-authorship even in contemporary settings.

**Keywords:** *angoisse, anguish, contemporary, existentialism, Jean-Paul Sartre*

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### Introduction

To exist is to stand trial before the self, and await self-imposed decisions, judgement, and verdicts. The self being forced to confront the human condition and the dread that comes with death, freedom, and meaninglessness is a key framework in existentialist thought. Its early precursors, Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, laid the foundations for philosophical discussions. Yet the most popular luminaries of existentialism reached the masses by means of literary works—plays, short stories, and novels. Jean-Paul Sartre was one of the most influential existentialist thinkers by ways of dramatizing the lived experience of freedom and responsibility against tragic contexts. This section will establish Sartre's existentialism as the central philosophical framework used in the paper and Sartre's concept of anguish as its specific focus. Moreover, it will

act as a precursory discussion on anguish from classical existential thought being redefined in contemporary discussions. At the end, it will provide the discussion flow of the paper.

Despite being born into relative affluence, Sartre lived his childhood amidst World War I, and his young adulthood amidst the Great Depression. Sartre delved into his childhood memories and the profound impact of his literary awakening in his work, *The Words*.<sup>1</sup> Oftentimes he was immersed in books, in which he grappled with his dreams of posterity, immortality, and his existence. Come the onset of World War II, he had developed his phenomenological thought with those of existentialism in theme; freedom, authenticity, responsibility, and anguish. The latter of which was translated from the French *angoisse* into English by renowned academic philosophers, Hazel Barnes and Sarah Richmond.<sup>23</sup> After being drafted into the French army in 1939, wrote about using his downtime amidst the war to accomplish his novel<sup>4</sup> which is implied to be his magnum opus, *L'Être et le néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*, or more widely recognized as *Being and Nothingness*, as to be subsequently referred to. In 1940, Sartre spent nine months as a prisoner of war. He had passed the hours through reading other philosophical works, namely Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*, or *Being and Time* and became a prolific writer. Among the works he had written and subsequently published are his *Being and Nothingness* (1943), then lecturing *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, to be translated and published under the English title, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1946). Once World War II ended, Sartre had continued to live as an independent writer.

Many of these early encounters shaped Sartre's preoccupation with groundlessness and the absence of predetermined essence. Moreover, it would be these encounters that would contribute to his concept of anguish as the self's confrontation with its own freedom, despite external circumstances. Although this paper does not go into detail of Sartre's phenomenological thought prior to developing his existential phenomenology, and more so his existentialism as a whole, it does not seek to disregard the significance of his thought progress. The collapse of Europe, the disintegration of meaning during wartime, and his time as a prisoner of war all heightened his awareness of radical freedom under constraint. During this period, Sartre was exposed to phenomenology, particularly through Husserl's concept of intentionality. His engagement with Husserl allowed him to conceptualize consciousness and intentionality in a manner that underpinned his developing existentialism and focus on freedom, responsibility, and anguish. Sartre expressed said engagement in literary form in his work, *La Nausée*, or *Nausea* in proceeding mentions. Through literature, Sartre showcased his early metaphysical understanding of phenomenology.<sup>5</sup> The feeling of nausea that Roquentin, the main character of the novel, experienced in a public garden whilst obsessively watching a chestnut tree, explicitly shows Sartre's understanding of such a radical absence of necessity as the expression of the fundamental contingency of being. In short,

<sup>1</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Jack Reynolds and Pierre-Jean Renaudie, "Jean-Paul Sartre," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified March 26, 2022, <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/sartre/>>.

<sup>3</sup> Adrian van den Hoven, "Sarah Richmond's Translation of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*," in *Sartre Studies International* 26:1 (2020): 1-2, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/48745474>>.

<sup>4</sup> Emily Temple, "How Jean-Paul Sartre managed to spend his military service working on his novel," *Literary Hub*, last modified 2022, <<https://lithub.com/how-jean-paul-sartre-managed-to-spend-his-military-service-working-on-his-novel/>>.

<sup>5</sup> Jack Reynolds and Pierre-Jean Renaudie, "Jean-Paul Sartre."

phenomenology provided the foundation for Sartre to develop his metaphysical knowledge, and systematize in the early, dense portions of *Being and Nothingness*.

Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, and subsequently his *Existentialism is a Humanism*, exemplifies his preliminary notions of both phenomenology and existentialism. For the purposes of brevity in this exposition, he essentially posits that the subjective existence of reality precedes and defines its nature. "Existence precedes essence," is what Sartre expounds in *Being and Nothingness* and directly states repeatedly in *Existentialism is a Humanism*.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, he proposes the notion that individuals are "condemned to be free," and ought to construct their own meaning in an impersonal world. Sartre does not mean that the individual is free to do anything, more so under the pretense of the self is capable of anything at all. Rather, he asserts that one's freedom exists within real-life circumstances, and that the self is always present within a particular context or circumstance, which he calls facticity—the self being there in the world.<sup>8</sup>

It is also important to note that Sartre's existentialism is atheistic in nature.<sup>9</sup> This kind of existentialism maintains the foundation that the self is not born with a predefined existence; there is no Providence, divine plan, or universal "essence" prescribed at birth. Hence, there is a greater emphasis of the humanistic aspect in Sartre's existentialism as well as the fundamental idea that the human individual has the capacity to make their choices of living and is responsible for what they are. Existentialism "puts every man in possession of himself as he is, and places the entire responsibility for his existence squarely upon his own shoulders," as Sartre puts it.<sup>10</sup> Among other features and concepts in his works, Sartre's ontology emphasizes groundlessness, radical freedom, "bad faith," and three emotional conditions of existentialism. According to Sartre, anguish, abandonment, and despair characterize human existence. With existential anguish, hereby referred simply as *anguish* in proceeding mentions within this paper, he posits that it is an escapable cost of autonomy, and often draws on it as direct evidence of phenomenological and existential experience.

Despite the immense popularity of existentialism, and in Sartre's case for his themes of radical freedom, bad faith, and authenticity, the notion of anguish remains an underexplored concept, or conflated with other concepts such as anxiety or angst. Hatzimoysis pointed out that contemporary discussions at times blur the distinction between psychological anxiety and Sartre's anguish.<sup>11</sup> In a similar vein, Vieira and Lotufo Neto showed that empirical studies highlighted the complexity of anguish, as it is experienced beyond the theoretical domains, carrying significance in the lived experiences as well.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, trans. by Hazel Barnes (New York: Pocket Books, 1977).

<sup>7</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism," in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, trans. by Philip Mairet (New York: Meridian Books, 1989), <<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/sartre/works/exist/sartre.htm>>.

<sup>8</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 83.

<sup>9</sup> Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Anthony Hatzimoysis, "Anguish and Anxiety," in *Sartre and Analytic Philosophy*, (New York: Routledge, 2023), <10.4324/9780429455919-10>.

<sup>12</sup> Fernando Vieira and Francisco Lotufo Neto, "An Exploratory Study on Anguish in Patients with Psychiatric Diagnoses." *Revista de Psicologia* 42:2 (2024), <<https://revistas.ucsp.edu.pe/index.php/psicologia/article/view/1693>>.

In the age of the Internet, wherein many video-commentaries are widely published and circulated, a contemporary conversation on existential anguish comes in the form of “the desire to not exist.” Videos from Ben Thomas,<sup>13</sup> Mike McEwen,<sup>14</sup> and Clark Elieson<sup>15</sup> are among the philosophy-oriented content aiming to conceptualize this desire, either on its own or with the aid of other media, such as *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, in the case of Elieson’s video. While the phenomenon is particularly visible in online spaces, it is unclear whether this desire is truly restricted to the digital era, or if it simply finds new expression and visibility through Internet culture. At the time of writing this paper, there are few if any scholarly studies about this desire, or whether or not it arises from anguish, despair, or both. As such, only the aforementioned videos are the currently existing discussions of the desire, as they are of an abstract nature and the present way to understand it is to contextualize it upon personal experiences. Despite the lack of a proper, more scholarly, term for the contemporary struggles with despair and meaninglessness, the desire echoes Sartre’s reflections on the confrontation with nothingness. In other words, this desire could be perceived as a new expression of the same existential structure that Sartre dramatizes through Roquentin’s experiences in *Nausea*; anguish still persists within contemporary technological and media contexts. In this sense, Sartre’s insights into anguish are not confined to the mid-20th century philosophies. It could become a new perspective attempting to make sense of the human condition in current times, especially with the rise of digital culture that could amplify anguish.

This paper clarifies what Sartre means by anguish namely through his *Nausea*, *Being and Nothingness*, and *Existentialism is a Humanism* works. By concisely comparing it with Kierkegaard’s anxiety and Heidegger’s angst, and showing some of its resonance in contemporary technological and media contexts, this paper seeks to discuss anguish and its distinctive role in Sartre’s existentialism as primarily showcased through the aforementioned works. Moreover, it shows how it can serve as a foundation for understanding responsibility, freedom, and authenticity, and potentially serve as a perspective for understanding the human condition today.

After this introductory section, the next section will cover the genealogy of anguish, primarily tracing its conceptualization from Kierkegaard and Heidegger, to expounding upon it through Sartre’s *Nausea*, *Being and Nothingness* and *Existentialism is a Humanism*, and lastly briefly covering post-Sartrean conceptions of anguish in the contemporary technological and media contexts. The third section will then examine anguish as the warden of freedom, with an emphasis on its structural and inescapable role in human existence. Meanwhile, the last section will end with the conclusion of the exposition.

## The Genealogy of Anguish

Anguish is not an original concept of Sartre, but it also did not emerge in a vacuum. It was articulated by thinkers predating and following Sartre in an effort to grapple with the awareness of human finitude, responsibility, and possibility. In situating anguish within its wider existential

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<sup>13</sup> Ben Thomas, “the desire to simply not exist,” *YouTube* last modified November 10, 2021, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3mb3A3uCWjk>>.

<sup>14</sup> Mike McEwen, “The Desire to Not Exist,” *YouTube* last modified October 22, 2023, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dTknWgoZk>>.

<sup>15</sup> Clark Elieson, “The Desire to Not Exist,” *YouTube* last modified May 4, 2022, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8msOPSbJUKo>>.

genealogy, from Sartre's time to the contemporary space, this section aims to discuss the indispensable and distinctive lens of Sartre's anguish for thinking about the human condition. It will briefly discuss Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's contributions, then expounds on anguish as contextualized in Sartre's works, and afterward, touch upon the other contributions made by Sartre's interlocutors up until thinkers in the contemporary-technological space.

Before Sartre, the term has been articulated in analogous experiences under *anxiety*, as first described by Kierkegaard in *The Concept of Anxiety*,<sup>16</sup> then later as *angst* in Heidegger in *Being and Time*.<sup>17</sup> The understanding of the concept remains largely the same within the existentialist tradition. It signifies, to an extent, a life-changing experience that compels the individual to acknowledge the undeniable reality of their own way of being. But in the case of the different terms being utilized to describe this phenomenon, it is possible that linguistic and semantic nuances caused this particular rift between the usage and acceptance of anguish, angst, and anxiety.<sup>18</sup> Such a circumstance would explain the particular appeal of choosing one term over the other. During the early 1940s, the German word "Angst" had found its way into the French philosophical vocabulary, which gave credence to Sartre's usage of *angoisse*, rather than *anxiété*.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, anguish and anxiety hold different connotations, more so nuances that keep them distinct in the existential tradition.

Sartre's notion of anguish has its earliest sightings in his pre-philosophical works; *Nausea* in particular. Although it was written at a time when Sartre had more often delved into the creative writing sphere, it introduced the existential themes he would later develop more systematically in *Being and Nothingness*. In *Nausea*, Sartre had written the emotional structure of anguish; it consists of the perception of things simply existing with no purpose or essence innately present, an emotional clarity over nothingness in the presence of meaning. Sartre also implies the weight of such a radical freedom over the self: "Every existing thing is born without reason, prolongs itself out of weakness and dies by chance."<sup>20</sup> At this point, the self is but a series of moments, perceptions, and choices; all of which involve an inward and anxious confrontation with the realization that the self ought to either create themselves, or become nothing.

In its more formal and philosophical elaboration, the notion of anguish has been given significant emphasis on Part I, Section IV, "The Phenomenological Concept of Nothingness," and Section V, "The Origin of Nothingness" from Chapter One of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. Sartre, through Heidegger, had shown his approach of *Nothingness*, establishing it as not a mere philosophical concept, but rather as a lived experience. The self lives nothingness in regret, hatred, moral decisions, and above all, in anguish. Sartre furthermore described anguish as the moment in which an individual confronts their radical freedom, and the possibility of non-being such as in the

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<sup>16</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, trans. by Reidar Thomte and Albert Anderson, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), <10.2307/j.ctt24hrfg>.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1962).

<sup>18</sup> Hatzimoyis, "Anguish and Anxiety."

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea* ed. by Hayden Carruth, trans. Lloyd Alexander (New York: New Directions Books, 1985).

cases of death, failure, and meaninglessness.<sup>21</sup> This line of thought in Part I is also echoed in Sartre's subsequent lecture of *Existentialism is a Humanism*: "Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism."<sup>22</sup> Hence, one could say Sartre contends the primary understanding that anguish is the feeling that comes from being aware of one's freedom and responsibility in a world wherein the individual defines meaning.

In Section IV, Sartre elaborates that *Nothingness* is an activity where a negating process takes place; it is not an experience that could be discovered on a whim. "Nothing is not; it nihilates itself."<sup>23</sup> He adds that *Nothingness* occurs when the individual surpasses or withdraws from the world, often through emotional states such as anguish. It is through this elaboration on *Nothingness*, and to an extent borrowing and reworking Heidegger's *Dasein* from *Being and Time*,<sup>24</sup> that Sartre develops the concept of anguish and how it arises in the phenomenological sense of human experience.<sup>25</sup> Withdrawing from the world leads to *Nothingness*, and as a result, anguish occurs as the discovery of a double, perpetual nihilation.<sup>26</sup> It is the realization that the human being, or *Dasein* as Sartre uses, is not wholly confined to their present state, as they are continually surpassing themselves through acts of choice. Likewise, it is in this thought that the world itself is not necessary and could as easily not have existed. This double realization then leads to the existential question. The felt experience of a radical freedom and the absence of any ultimate ground; the feeling of anguish.

In Section V, Sartre moves towards a more philosophical, and existential understanding of *Nothingness* and anguish, applying his concepts in an abundance of examples and scenarios. He first establishes that "Nothing" acts as the structural absence of which separates the present consciousness from the past consciousness.<sup>27</sup> The separation is the internal discontinuity of how consciousness relates to itself, and what makes negation possible. Sartre explains that the ability to negate arises from an internal nothingness; it is a constitutive distance within consciousness where the self steps back from what is. Since consciousness is never identical with its facticity, it can introduce absence into the word through the recognition of what is *not* the case. This capacity for negation is also what grounds "freedom,"<sup>28</sup> as it is a constant condition wherein the self is capable of change, choice, and moral responsibility. He writes:

...it is in anguish that man gets the consciousness of his freedom, or if you prefer, anguish is the mode of being of freedom as consciousness of being; it is in anguish that freedom is, in its being, in question for itself.<sup>29</sup>

This is where Sartre establishes anguish as a fundamental existential experience. It is in anguish, he writes, where the human self becomes aware of their freedom; the realization that nothing prevents

<sup>21</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 16-17.

<sup>22</sup> Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism."

<sup>23</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 17.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>28</sup> Sartre's notion of freedom is ontological. It refers to the structural condition of consciousness that allows it to negate and distance itself from its facticity. It is not the ability to "do whatever one wants," but it is the unavoidable condition of having to choose and define oneself.

<sup>29</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 29.

human choice. Yet it is within this nothingness that there is no excuse for inaction, and that the self holds full responsibility. Hence, as Sartre notes, anguish is the consciousness of freedom. The emotional experience in realizing the self as the sole responsibility in choice.

In the succeeding paragraphs of Section V, Sartre synthesizes Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's descriptions on anguish.<sup>30</sup> Kierkegaard describes anguish as the fear of possibility, choosing, and the infinite scope of freedom; whilst Heidegger describes it as the encounter of nothingness as the world loses meaning and falls away. Sartre notes that these two descriptions are two sides of the same coin; experiencing nothingness is experiencing the terrifying freedom of defining oneself.

Moreover, in the latter end of Chapter One, Sartre establishes the difference between fear and anguish, more so in relation to freedom, responsibility, and self-awareness, and the various expressions of anguish. Not only to catalogue emotional states, but as well as to clarify what is unique about anguish as an existential structure.<sup>31</sup> Fear, he argued, always directs outward to a determinate threat which is one that is beyond the self. Anguish, in contrast, directs inward and arises when consciousness confronts its own capacity for freedom. Sartre gives credence to Kierkegaard's description that fear is of something in the world, whilst anguish is of oneself which arises from contemplations on personal freedom, responsibility, or the potential of failure. Although on paper both are synonymous, Sartre establishes the distinguishing characteristics of anguish through lived experiences; the vertigo in the choice, the terrifying sense of failure or wrong choices, the exclamation of uncertainty. "He is 'afraid of being afraid'; that is, he is filled with anguish before himself," as Sartre concludes.<sup>32</sup>

This inwardness also explains why fear and anguish cannot occur simultaneously. Fear is experienced when one's attention is shifted to external threats and anguish turns back to the self and its freedom. However, Sartre notes that individuals often move back and forth between fear and anguish, with fear responding to the outside world and anguish stemming from the internal reflection on personal responsibility. Fear and anguish are mutually exclusive; anguish can exist without fear.<sup>33</sup> Sartre had also described an "anguish of the future" and "anguish of the past,"<sup>34</sup> respectively referring to the uncertainty being experienced when the self contemplates future possibilities, and the struggle with past choices, emotional turmoil, and previous choices. Both show how freedom permeates one's temporal existence; the future evokes anxiety over unrealized possibilities, while the past confronts the self with choices they must now own. Together, these distinctions showcase how anguish reveals the self to itself throughout time as a structural feature of freedom, rather than being merely a passing emotion.

The aforementioned paragraphs delved into the substantial and conceptually dense discussion regarding Sartre's concept of anguish in *Being and Nothingness*, albeit focusing on the primary notions provided and unable to capture the full extent of Sartre's discussions in the book. To complement this analysis, the following paragraphs will consider Sartre's treatment of anguish in his subsequent lecture *Existentialism is a Humanism* which offers a more accessible perspective. Yet, it

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30; 32-45.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-45.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

is important to note that the lecture was met with considerable critique despite its recognition as an entry point into Sartre's existentialist thought. Many philosophers and thinkers considered the lecture disappointing, and even factually incorrect at times. In a 2003 edition of *Being and Nothingness*, Mary Warnock wrote in the introduction:

It has sometimes been suggested that Sartre's positive approach to moral philosophy was outlined in the essay "Existentialism is a Humanism," first published in 1946. This essay has been translated several times into English, and it became, for a time, a popular starting-point in discussions of existentialist thought... However, I mention this essay here only to dismiss it, as Sartre himself has dismissed it. He not only regretted its publication, but also actually denied some of its doctrines in later works.<sup>35</sup>

Some philosophers found that Sartre's discussion of metaphysical concepts such as "existence precedes essence" and "the problem of relation between individuals" are notably weaker and even at odds with his magnum opus, *Being and Nothingness*. One of the reasons of the popularity of the lecture and Sartre's discomfort is the content dissonance between the profound discussions and writings Sartre developed in *Being and Nothingness*, and the clarity of the core ideas of his existentialism in the lecture. Sartre showcases his efforts in expanding his ideas into the social and political sphere; partly as a response to his Communist and Catholic critics. In other words, the lecture is speculated to have muddled Sartre's true thoughts on the matter of existentialism. Through "weakening" or simplifying his profound philosophical language in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre's lecture may cause a widespread misinterpretation of his existentialist thought in efforts of being understood by the general readership.

Despite the lecture's simplification of Sartre's thought and the critiques it had received, *Existentialism is a Humanism* remains a valuable lecture for understanding his evolving thoughts on anguish. Significantly, it presents key existential ideas such as freedom, responsibility, and authenticity in a more accessible form. Moreover, it offered insights into the practical implications of anguish for the individual. Through examining this lecture alongside *Being and Nothingness*, this paper can trace both the foundational and the developing aspects of Sartre's philosophy of anguish.

In *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre first notes that alongside abandonment and despair, anguish is one of the emotional conditions of existentialism.<sup>36</sup> Anguish is described as the deep feeling of responsibility that comes alongside freedom, and to an extent, overwhelms the self. Sartre also emphasizes that anguish is not about the feeling of terror, uncertainty, or an excuse to do nothing, but rather the deep awareness of responsibility in having no guaranteed guidance that confirms the righteousness of actions, especially in the absence of external justification. Even in moments of supposed righteousness, the self alone interprets and takes full responsibility; no outside authority can absolve the self of the burden of freedom. In the case that individuals may pretend that they are not responsible, or act carelessly, Sartre remarks that such acts are fleeing from anguish and a form of "bad faith." Evading responsibility may even be akin to a hidden anguish. Sartre borrows from Kierkegaard's "the anguish of Abraham" to show this deeper layer to anguish. In sum,

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<sup>35</sup> Mary Warnock, "Introduction," in *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (London: Routledge Classics, 2003), xi–xxi.

<sup>36</sup> William Penne, "Anguish, Abandonment, Despair: Existentialism's Promise of Hope in a Time of Crisis," in *The Diana McDonald Writer's Challenge* (2021), <[https://spark.parkland.edu/mcdonald\\_award/12](https://spark.parkland.edu/mcdonald_award/12)>.

Sartre puts an emphasis on the self as the sole authority, with their anguish keeping them accountable of their personal responsibility.

After 1946, Sartre wrote and published *Critique of Dialectical Reason* wherein he shifts from only the individual existential experience to the sociopolitical aspect of freedom.<sup>37</sup> Anguish, in this work, is described to go beyond the isolated personal mood, and has underlying connections to historical responsibilities, collective struggles, and oppressions. It pushes people to commit to choices that are bound with others in society, and not only the self. Aside from the *Critique*, the play *Dirty Hands* was produced; Sartre in that work dramatizes anguish in concrete interpersonal and political situations, tying in themes from his previous writings and his play, *No Exit*.

Aside from Sartre, to contextualize the philosophical underpinnings of anguish prior to current times, there are other notable existential thinkers who interpreted anguish. Simone de Beauvoir extended Sartre's existentialism into the field of ethics in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* where she treated anguish as the recognition of freedom of the self and of others: a double responsibility.<sup>38</sup> Anguish for her is the anxiety of limiting or harming the freedom of others, and the awareness of its ethical register in radical freedom. Albert Camus, albeit resisting being labelled as an "existentialist," reframed anguish as the experience of absurdity. The confrontation between human longing for meaning and the universe's silence is central in his works *The Myth of Sisyphus*<sup>39</sup> and *The Plague*.<sup>40</sup> For Camus, anguish is the tension between revolt and resignation, as opposed to responsibility under freedom. Gabriel Marcel, a Christian existentialist, interpreted anguish through hope, transcendence, and fidelity, contrasting against Sartre's atheistic despair.<sup>41</sup> Lastly, Paul Tillich, a theologian, wrote about anguish in *The Courage to Be* as the "anxiety of non-being" and utilizes a religious framework in showing anguish as a universal condition that only faith could ground.<sup>42</sup>

Anguish, in the 21st century, is still a prominent discussion, but has been reframed and applied in contemporary contexts. Hatzimoysis explicitly addresses how Sartre's anguish relates to what has become commonly associated with fear and anxiety,<sup>43</sup> and Saadeh uses Heidegger's framework of fundamental disposition to describe anguish as crucial in the structure to existence.<sup>44</sup> There is also the growing influence of non-Western perspectives in contextualizing anguish, signifying that anguish goes beyond Western existentialism.<sup>45</sup> But anguish in contemporary discussions are often in reference to its clinical, psychological, and medical contexts. In "Circumstance anguish: an iatrophilosophical model for depresalgia," anguish is treated as the link to

<sup>37</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason, Volume 1: Theory of Practical Ensembles*, trans. by Alan Sheridan-Smith (London: Verso, 2004).

<sup>38</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. by Bernard Frechtman (New York: Citadel Press, 1948), <<https://antilogicalism.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/ethics-of-ambiguity.pdf>>.

<sup>39</sup> Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1955).

<sup>40</sup> Albert Camus, *The Plague*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (London: Penguin Books, 1948).

<sup>41</sup> Cheng-Ling Yu, "Hope and Despair: A Discussion on the Atheistic Existentialist, Evolutionary Biologicistic and Intersubjective Accounts of Hope," in *Marvel Studies* 5:1 (2020): 1–20.

<sup>42</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952).

<sup>43</sup> Hatzimoysis, "Anguish and Anxiety."

<sup>44</sup> Manuela Saadeh, "The question of anguish as a form of a proper self-existence in Martin Heidegger," in *ARGUMENTOS - Revista de Filosofia* 16 (2024):214-225, <10.36517/argumentos.32.92147>.

<sup>45</sup> Correya, Stalin. "Giving the Imaginary Interlocutor Her Due: Existential Anguish in the Madhyamaka," in *SOPHIA* 62 (2024): 133–157, <10.1007/s11841-022-00925-0>.

chronic pain, depression, and stress; it is embedded in medical and personal suffering.<sup>46</sup> Bueno-Gómez coincides with this in “Conceptualizing suffering and pain,” saying that anguish also involves the senses of meaning, identity, and agency.

With the rise of technology, virtual platforms, and cyber-conditions, existential conditions shifted towards artificial intelligence (AI), cyberlandscapes, and the tension between physical existence and virtual existence.<sup>47</sup> In these spaces, Sartre’s idea of anguish exemplifies philosophical pessimism and meaninglessness in a fast-paced society. To some extent, it has also contributed to the phenomena, for the lack of a better descriptor, involving the capacities of understanding complex emotions, desires, and moods. Such examples are in regard to the “desire to not exist,” otherwise described as the “desire to not be born,” and “desire to not actively think.” Video-commentaries<sup>48</sup> attempt to discuss such desires but they lean towards reflection and making sense of the phenomena rather than aiming to provide a definitive, scholarly, explanation for the contemporary struggles with despair and meaninglessness. Yet, they do acknowledge how the desire echoes reflections on the confrontation with nothingness.

This paper posits that, given the commentary videos and the writings of Sartre, the “desire to not exist” could be contextualized as a form of anguish wherein the yearning to disappear, preferably in a manner that does not require sadness, violence, or death. Sartre’s writings could be interpreted in such a way that his writings are a reflection on the nature of human existence and how, as human beings, we interpret the existence of others. Perhaps Sartre even wrote his works with the idea that nobody truly escaped the torture of daily pains and disappointments. Although it would be right to compare these to a degree of pessimism when we think of the desire to not exist, we imagine something akin to the idea of life is meaningless and insufferable. Like anguish, at least in the Sartrean sense, the desire itself is not a logical set of beliefs about the characteristics of life but rather a complex psychological wish where the human being longs for nothingness; however, it should be noted that the desire is comparable to cognitive dissonance, as it embodies contradictory beliefs of hope and yearning for nothingness. This is unlike anguish, which is more consistent in its nature.

In sum, Sartre’s anguish in these times is perceived as the notion of exhausted existence. Discourses around nihilism or works in philosophical pessimism explore this yearning to escape or the notion of non-existence becoming preferable in certain contemporary circumstances. However, there has yet to be any explicit scholarly work that explores anguish in the contemporary-technological space.

In observing Sartre’s anguish across its genealogy, it consistently emerges as a confrontation with human finitude and freedom. Anguish follows a continuity and transformation connected to its time period. Additionally, anguish remains a relevant concept to the emerging existential thought of Kierkegaard and Heidegger, the socio-political space of Sartre, and the contemporary debates in

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<sup>46</sup> Martin Vargas-Aragón, “Circumstance anguish: an iatrophilosophical model for depresalgia,” in *Estudios de Filosofía*, 70 (2024): 201-224, <110.17533/udea.ef.355349>.

<sup>47</sup> Boris Aberšek, “From Chaos to the Absurd: Existentialism for the 21st Century,” in *Philosophies* 9 (2024): 168. <10.3390/philosophies9060168>.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas, “The Desire to Simply Not Exist,” see also Elieson, “The Desire to Not Exist,” as well as McEwen, “The Desire to Not Exist.”

philosophy, medicine, and technology. Moreover, persistently adapting to the new contexts of human existence, constantly reminding the self of responsibility, and demanding the pursuit of meaning in the world. As anguish endures through time, disciplines, and cultures, the question is no longer whether it is a passing mood or concept, but rather if it is inescapably bound to existence itself. The next section discusses the inevitability of anguish; its genealogy is evident that anguish is far from being an occasional intrusion, but it is important to see as well if its genealogy shows how anguish is woven into the structure of freedom, responsibility, and the human condition.

### Anguish as the Warden of Freedom

The genealogy of anguish highlights how anguish has never been confined to any single thinker or tradition; all explanations put forward all point towards its enduring significance in philosophical-existential discussions, and contribute to broadening its discourse. What unites these varied perspectives is the structural role of anguish, as the condition that safeguards and disciplines freedom. The following section discusses how anguish is ultimately inescapable; neither a fleeting mood nor an accidental and occasional occurrence. Anguish is what gives structure, and the reach of freedom and responsibility.

Building upon the established genealogy, Sartre develops his notion of anguish beyond Kierkegaard's "anxiety of possibility" and Heidegger's "angst before nothingness," and into a radicalized, inescapable aspect of human existence. Sartre draws from anxiety's dizziness of possibility, and angst's nothingness at the ground of being, but makes anguish the explicit consciousness of freedom. Anguish is the recognition that nothing predetermines action, and responsibility is not deferred or delegated to anyone that is not the self. In his lecture, he notes, "Clearly, the anguish with which we are concerned here is not one that could lead to quietism or inaction."<sup>49</sup> Anguish is not paralyzing, but is the accountability in taking freedom and responsibility seriously. Rather than indicating despair or passivity, anguish is a necessary condition for real action. Real responsibility can only occur if the self confronts and accepts their anguish. Action assumes freedom to choose, and with said freedom comes anguish, as without it, authentic action would not be possible.

As anguish is an exclusive emotional state, Sartre notes that, to a degree, it is a rare phenomenon.<sup>50</sup> Anguish arises when consciousness perceives itself as cut off from its essence or future possibilities, as such, becoming an exceptional experience. The rarity is due to most situations not evoking it, as the self actively realizes possibilities without recognizing nothingness or freedom. Moreover, it arises from the avoidance of confronting freedom, and attributing actions to determinism. Sartre also speaks of a "freedom to be anguished,"<sup>51</sup> or the capacity to confront anguish, acknowledge responsibility, and the absence of external justifications. In this sense, he gives significance to the integral presence of anguish to the human condition, arising from awareness of choices and uncertainties. Sartre illustrates, through his own experiences in writing *Being and Nothingness*, that embracing anguish is essential for authentic self-awareness and realizing one's

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<sup>49</sup> Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism,"

<sup>50</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 35.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

freedom. This is even evident in his *No Exit* play, as suffering—anguish—is not inflicted upon them, but is rather the accumulation of their own choices, actions, and self-deceptions.<sup>52</sup>

Moreover, Sartre notes that the self experiences either “fleeing anguish” and “being in anguish.”<sup>53</sup> The former denotes the avoidance or escape of discomfort and awareness of anguish, often through denial or distraction, while the latter means fully acknowledging and embodying anguish as integral to human experience. The latter in particular gives credence to Sartre’s belief that human beings live in constant anguish. “To be free is to be condemned to be free,” he writes.<sup>54</sup> The lack of a pre-defined purpose along with an “absurd” existence that presents infinite possibilities and choices, is what Sartre attributes to the “anguish of freedom.”

Sartre’s peers, and succeeding thinkers, also posit their own explanations as to how anguish is inescapably tied and disciplines freedom, ensuring that it is never exercised without responsibility. In his lecture, Sartre further adds that every deliberate choice and action carries with it a universal weight. Most would not feel anguish directly in their being, but Sartre asserts that “they are merely disguising their anguish or are in flight from it.”<sup>55</sup> For Beauvoir, anguish extends to any and all actions concerning ethics, as one’s responsibility is doubled by the responsibility to respect the freedom of others;<sup>56</sup> For Camus, anguish provokes revolt or resignation, translating into the absurd confrontation between human longing for meaning, and the world’s silence; Marcel emphasizes the fidelity and potential for transcendence that embodies anguish; and Tillich provides the theological framework that faith, primarily of the self to the self, is the answer to the universal anguish of non-being.

These main perspectives all contribute to underscoring Sartre’s central claim that anguish is the permanent shadow of freedom, and that it is constantly in operation even if freedom was to be evaded or disguised. Furthermore, anguish has long endured across centuries due to its capability to adapt to the ever-changing contexts of human existence, a constant reminder of responsibility and authenticity. This persistence still remains even as contemporary debates redefine anguish with different connotations and moods, as through anguish, Sartre’s insistence that the confrontation between freedom and nothingness continues to define existential struggles.

Anguish endures as a necessary reminder of finitude, responsibility, and freedom; a silent weight in accompanying authenticity. It signals an existential necessity as it is confronted as a condition of existence. Although its meaning varies in the contexts of different time periods, societal settings, and especially the perspective of the philosopher imparting their thoughts to the masses, what remains consistent in its conception is that anguish remains wherever human beings grapple with their freedom.

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<sup>52</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit*, in *No Exit and Three Other Plays*, trans. by Stuart Gilbert (London: Vintage International, 1989).

<sup>53</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 44.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>55</sup> Sartre, “Existentialism is a Humanism.”

<sup>56</sup> Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.

## Conclusion

In the genealogy of existentialism, anguish is a central concept, representing the emotional experience of confronting radical freedom and full responsibility. Building upon Kierkegaard and Heidegger's notions, Sartre reexamines anguish as the self's awareness of Nothingness and the burden of creating meaning within the world without inherent purpose. The lived consciousness that nothing is predetermined and there is no external forces that can relieve the weight of responsibility. In his literary and philosophical works, anguish is not paralyzing, but rather a condition for authentic action; but it must be noted that, despite Sartre's extensive discussions of anguish as a natural existential condition amongst individuals, the presence of a conventional method of management or overcoming anguish is absent. However, this does not mean that the emergence of approaches to overcome anguish is impossible, as evident with contemporary discourses discussing and reflection on the lived experiences of anguish. Furthermore, in the process of dialogue on anguish thinkers return to Sartre's emphasis on the need for anguish to be confronted, embraced, and lived through as an integral part of the self's existence. Anguish is the exact moment wherein the self is stripped of their deceptions and forced to confront their own freedom. Freedom and its consequences are inescapable. Hence, Sartre had posited that the self is "condemned to be free," although anguish does not go away, it is what pushes the self to act meaningfully. As otherwise, it leads to perpetual suffering and self-imprisonment.

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## ***Pakikipagkapwa* as an Expression of Participation: Musings from Karol Wojtyła†**

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**Abstract:** In this paper, I hinge upon the Filipino value and concept of *pakikipagkapwa* and explicate how it becomes an analogical expression of participation through Karol Wojtyła's philosophy. I expose that in the Filipino society, which, according to Fr. Leonardo Mercado, possesses a hierarchical authoritarian behavior, there must be an investigation as to whether Filipinos can continue exhibiting and practicing the value of *pakikipagkapwa*. *Pakikipagkapwa* plays a vital role in the socialization process of Filipino people since it pivots one towards an altruistic attitude. Although existing literature on *pakikipagkapwa* is primarily explored through linguistics and psychology, I adhere to the fact that other disciplines can elucidate a philosophical foundation in understanding how Filipinos are able to unite themselves towards the other. In this regard, I argue that the concept of *pakikipagkapwa* must also be examined to assess its utility and presence in the Filipino culture. Hereinafter, I turn towards Karol Wojtyła's theory of participation wherein he introduces the authentic attitudes of solidarity and opposition, attitudes which contribute to the societal efforts of communal action centered on truth and goodness. To further understand the foundations of Wojtyła's theory, I revisit other of his key works with the hopes of finding a premise in considering *pakikipagkapwa* as a cultural expression of participation.

**Keywords:** *Filipino society, Karol Wojtyła, pakikipagkapwa, participation*

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### **Introduction**

The Philippines has always been considered a collectivist society. Despite our geographic formation of a community separated by waters, our peninsular nation remains united in many values and identities of what a Filipino *is*. One of the many Filipino values that persist today is the value and concept of *pakikipagkapwa*. A common explanation in finding the deeper meaning of *pakikipagkapwa* is by dissecting it; in doing so, we find the root word *kapwa* (*ka* + *puwang*), which literally translates to "shared space" in English. However, in Virgilio Enriquez's *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*, the word *kapwa* is defined as both "fellow being" and "others."<sup>1</sup> Later studies would

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† An earlier version of this paper was presented in two conferences, namely: at the 4<sup>th</sup> Union of Societies and Associations of Philosophy in the Philippines (USAPP) Summit held last June 6-8, 2025, Bohol, Philippines, and at the International Ethics Conference held last September 5-6, 2025, at Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan. This paper was likewise awarded as best paper during the 4<sup>th</sup> USAPP Summit.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Clemen C. Aquino, "Mula Sa Kinaroroonan: 'Kapwa, Kapatiran' and 'Bayan' in Philippine Social Science," in *Asian Journal of Social Science* 32:1 (2004): 108.

consider *kapwa* as a “shared identity,” which becomes the foundation of social interactions among Filipinos.<sup>2</sup> Filipinos are able to experience himself/herself and *others* in this world and treat his/her *kapwa* as an integral part of creation. This is mainly due to the fact that Filipinos have a different grasp of the “person,” or, dare I say, they have a unique understanding of *kapwa*.<sup>3</sup> This peculiar understanding of *kapwa* is worthy of exploration, considering that it is one of the many Filipino values that enable the Filipino people to continue thriving.

The manifestations of *pakikipagkapwa* can be associated with Karol Wojtyła’s personalist philosophy, particularly that of his Theory of Participation. For Wojtyła, the definition of participation is not to be taken in the literal sense; instead, participation is “acting together-with-others” in a community through experience. Participation, therefore, is a manifold ability for persons to relate with one another. This Wojtylan notion of participation can also be found in the Filipino psyche. Further, I will also expound as to why it is inaccurate to relate the Filipino term *pakikisama* to Wojtyła’s participation. Through a thorough analysis, we will be able to see the inadequacies and deficiencies in the words *pakikisama* and that *pakikipagkapwa* is the most appropriate term for correlation.

In light of the aforementioned, I now lay down the key points that would steer the discussion of this paper. First, I will analyze the word *pakikipagkapwa* and how it is viewed through the social sciences. Additionally, I will also consult studies from other disciplines to further illuminate this notion. Here, I specifically discuss the role of socialization and the altruistic nature of Filipino society. This leads me to the semantic and linguistic comparison of *pakikipagkapwa* and *pakikisama*, and how the former is considered the core of Filipino values. Further, I will briefly discuss the Filipino’s attitudes with respect to *pakikipagkapwa*. In doing so, I first consult Fr. Leonardo Mercado’s hierarchical sketch of his value ranking (of Filipino Values) and then turn to Jaime Guevara’s phenomenological analysis of *pakikipagkapwa*. Third, I proceed with Karol Wojtyła’s *Theory of Participation* and deploy an exposition as to how he understands the person, community, and participation. What is interesting to note here is how the immediate complementarity and intersections between *pakikipagkapwa* and Wojtyła’s participation can already be observed. Thereafter, I dedicate a portion of the discussion to the inauthentic attitudes of participation—*conformism* and *avoidance*—and how they impede the community in achieving authentic participation. I also briefly mention here the hierarchal authority as posited by Fr. Leonardo Mercado, and how such authority is often, if not most of the time, instrumentalized for their own needs. Finally, I conclude this paper by bridging the Filipino notion of *pakikipagkapwa* and Wojtyła’s *Theory of Participation* as a step towards reassessing and realizing the dynamics at play in our contemporary society.

Moreover, the integration of Wojtyła’s notion of participation and the Filipino value of *pakikipagkapwa* shall be done through an analogical-personalist analysis instead of utilizing an

<sup>2</sup> Vladimir Kobayashi, Maria Margarita Lavidas, Cristabel Tiangco, Purisima Panlilio, Remi De Leon, and Angela Carreon, *Understanding Pakikipagkapwa Through Analytics: Exploring Filipino Relational Communication in Online Spaces* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Developmental Studies, 2024), 6.

<sup>3</sup> Jove Jim Aguas, “The Filipino Value of Pakikipagkapwa-Tao Vis-À-Vis Gabriel Marcel’s Notion of Creative Fidelity and Disponibilité,” in *SCIENTIA: The International Journal on the Liberal Arts* 5:2 (2016): 17-39.

empirical, historical, or theological frameworks. Thus, the analysis that I will undertake later on mimics Wojtyła's method, such that I treat both participation and *pakikipagkapwa* on the metaphysical-personalistic plane.<sup>4</sup> This, therefore, entails an anthropological point of view. The analysis shall not be an appropriation of Wojtyła's participation unto *pakikipagkapwa* or vice versa; instead, it shall be an analogous discussion wherein both notions corroborate with each other to bring out their own richness in the context of communal acting. In mimicking Wojtyła's method, I also ought to take into consideration how to better understand the human person.<sup>5</sup>

As a caveat, although this paper aims to contribute to the philosophical understanding of *pakikipagkapwa*, it also aims to expound more on Karol Wojtyła's social philosophy, particularly that of his *Theory of Participation*. While previous studies have examined *pakikipagkapwa* from psychological or sociological perspectives, this paper contributes to the philosophical discourse by situating it within Wojtyła's personalist framework of participation. Thus, the intent of this paper is not to undermine the richness and importance of the Filipino value, rather, it is a way for us to understand *pakikipagkapwa* analogously with Wojtyła's participation through the ontological and ethical foundations concerning communal action. Cultural purists may argue that this Polish-Filipino philosophical juxtaposition obfuscates and disassociates the real meaning and essence of *pakikipagkapwa* from a "pure" Filipino comprehension. However, I remain grounded that one culture can learn from another and that the appropriation of one value, regardless of its cultural origin, is taken as a complement rather than a contradiction. This paper argues that *pakikipagkapwa* functions as a culturally embodied, analogical expression of Karol Wojtyła's theory of participation, particularly through the authentic attitudes of solidarity and opposition. As such, the overarching question of this paper is: How does *pakikipagkapwa* become an analogical expression of participation in Filipino Society?

## Understanding *Pakikipagkapwa*

To briefly preface our juxtaposition, we must first have an adequate understanding of *pakikipagkapwa* through existing literature, regardless of discipline. This segment does not intend to reassess or revise the present definition of the word. Rather, it is to supplement the readers' understanding of *pakikipagkapwa*.

In *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* by Virgilio Enriquez, the word *pakikipagkapwa* is founded on its root word, *kapwa*, which means three things: "both," "fellow being," or "other."<sup>6</sup> In Enriquez's *Kapwa Psychology*, it must be understood that self (*ako*) and other (*ibang-tao*) are the same, but not synonymous. *Pakikipagkapwa* is manifold, and no singular gesture or action can ever encompass what *pakikipagkapwa* is. To support *pakikipagkapwa*'s manifoldness, in Kobayashi et al.'s analytic research, *pakikipagkapwa* is manifested through several acts. They narrate that the use of *po* and *opo* (a way of

<sup>4</sup> An analogical analysis is a thorough examination of locating similarities between two or more subjects; this is neither an assimilation nor a derivation of one towards the other. In this paper, although various Wojtyła scholars classify Wojtyła's method as [1] fundamentally Thomist, [2] descriptive-phenomenologist, and [3] realist phenomenologist, Acosta and Reimers write that the general conclusion of Wojtyła's method is "metaphysical-personalist," which was asserted by Rodrigo Guerra Lopez. See Miguel Acosta and Adrian Reimers, *Understanding Person and Act* (Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 35-37.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>6</sup> Aquino, "Mula Sa Kinaroroonan," 108.

saying “yes” in Filipino culture), *pagmamahal* (acts of loving), *pagtitiis* (enduring), *pagsasakripisyo* (sacrificing), and *pagpugpugay* (salute), to name but a few, are values that were manifested because of *pakikipagkapwa*.<sup>7</sup>

In this sense, it is evident that *pakikipagkapwa* plays a significant role in the socialization of Filipinos. Practicing *pakikipagkapwa* then considers the *other* as an equal in humanity and dignity.<sup>8</sup> Enriquez argues that *pakikipagkapwa* (relating with others) is a step towards *pagpapakatao* (aspiring for humanness).<sup>9</sup> Further, although *pakikipagkapwa* is not the only Filipino value concerning the *other*, it *is* the core and foundation of all other interpersonal values. Hence, Aguas, albeit through the lens of Gabriel Marcel, is correct in arguing that *pakikipagkapwa* is the core of the interpersonalist Filipino psyche.<sup>10</sup> Filipinos have a shared identity with their own *loob* (interiority) and *labas* (exteriority), yet they remain connected with others, that is to say, other human persons. It is ingrained in the minds of every Filipino that *pakikipagkapwa* or *pakikipagkapwa-tao* would directly implicate sustaining, or even reinforcing, the dignity and respect his/her *kapwa* is entitled to.<sup>11</sup> Expanding on this point, I will analyze *pakikipagkapwa*, albeit in a non-extensive manner, from the standpoint of Leonardo Mercado and Jaime Guevara.

In his book *The Filipino Mind: Philippine Philosophical Studies II*, Leonardo Mercado opines that Filipino ethics is by no means identified with revisionist ethics.<sup>12</sup> Rather, it is quite similar to revisionist ethics, taking into consideration the value ranking of either subjects or objects.<sup>13</sup> Following this, Mercado depicts a hierarchy of Filipino value ranking. Listed subsequently are the value rankings, in order: (1) life, (2) values related to *sakop*, (3) values concerning *relationships*, and (4) all the other values. *Pakikipagkapwa* is located within the third rank (*i.e.*, values concerning relationships) since it concerns the recognition of the *other*—the *kapwa*.<sup>14</sup> Life is placed as the highest rank insofar as Mercado argues “survival counts first...other values become secondary.”<sup>15</sup> Although Mercado places *pakikipagkapwa* within the third rank because values concerning relationships are concerned with “smallgroup” values (*e.g.*, economic security, family honor, prestige), I posit that *pakikipagkapwa* can still permeate all other values within the value-ranking despite its placement.

Thereafter, Guevara opines that one of the definitions of *pakikipagkapwa* is having a “shared identity.” Guevara further explains that Filipinos have an inherent understanding that, in all aspects, whether socially, culturally, or psychologically, he/she is invariably in relation towards other persons. The value of *pakikipagkapwa* neither relinquishes one’s own *self* by taking into consideration his/her

<sup>7</sup> Kobayashi, et al., *Understanding Pakikipagkapwa Through Analytics*, 34.

<sup>8</sup> Aquino, “Mula Sa Kinaroroonan,” 109.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Aguas, “The Filipino Value of Pakikipagkapwa-Tao,” 22-23.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>12</sup> Revisionist ethics is defined by Leonardo Mercado as: “It is focused not on individual acts, but on the totality of one’s fundamental option. It honors the conscience of the people which one must follow in honesty and truth.” See Leonardo Mercado, *The Filipino Mind: Philippine Philosophical Studies II* (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1994), 125.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 32; 125-126.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 126. *Nota Bene:* Mercado has given a very short discussion apropos of *pakikipagkapwa*’s role in his value-ranking. Even so, this segment only explores various Filipino scholars’ studies on the said value; arguing for *pakikipagkapwa*’s role in the value-ranking already extends beyond the scope of the paper.

*kapwa* nor does he/she eradicate his/her *kapwa*'s otherness.<sup>16</sup> This value puts premium on the welfare and dignity of others; it puts premium on caring for others as well, rather than the self alone.<sup>17</sup>

Another value, however, seems identical, if not synonymous, with *pakikipagkapwa*—the value of *pakikisama*. Despite the ostensible similarity, the latter is more concerned with everyone's *sameness* (*pagkakapareho*). To clarify, *pakikisama* is not a value *per se*, but it becomes an inherent component for collectivist societies. On one hand, *pakikisama* aims to proclaim uniformity; meanwhile, on the other, *pakikipagkapwa* orients a person towards equality.<sup>18</sup> *Pakikisama* has positive and negative effects. On the negative side, *pakikisama* is linked to the common (colloquial) phrase *makisama ka naman* (try to get along); this exhorts a person to yield to a dominant person or group in a certain setting.<sup>19</sup> On the positive side, yielding to the intention to get along (*makisama*) is done to mitigate and resolve tensions. However, if a person consistently yields against his or her own will, it creates a barrier between the two parties. I therefore coin this phenomenon as *negative pakikisama*. To wit:

*Pakikisama* is also the 'ability' to get along with others in such a way as to avoid outside signs of conflict. (It) also refers to giving in or yielding to the wish of the leader or the majority, even when at times it contradicts one's ideas or the common good.<sup>20</sup>

The lack of inclusivity in *negative pakikisama* manifests itself in the actions of those who are in control.<sup>21</sup> It is focused on the exclusive *kami* instead of the inclusive *tayo*. Although both words have the exact translation as "us" in English, *tayo* imparts a feeling of inclusivity; it may pertain to me *and* all of you. Meanwhile, *kami* also means "us," albeit with the intention of excluding someone; e.g., "*kami lang, hindi ka[yo] kasama*" (only us, excluding you).<sup>22</sup> This, therefore, reveals that *pakikisama* can be leveraged by people in power or by a majority group. Hence, it is right to proclaim that *pakikipagkapwa* is not synonymous or interchangeable with *pakikisama*. The former evokes equality while preserving the uniqueness and dignity of each individual, abandoning multiple forms of egoism.<sup>23</sup>

Considering the broader context of Guevara's work, *pakikipagkapwa*, therefore, reveals its true essence and meaning: being-with-others, equality, and shared-identity. It is, thus, a plurisignification, whilst affirming the claims of Enriquez and Aguas that *pakikipagkapwa* is the core of Filipino interpersonalist values. With the linguistic and phenomenological foundations and

<sup>16</sup> Jaime Guevara, "Pakikipagkapwa," in *Filipino Cultural Traits: Claro R. Ceniza Lectures Philosophical Studies III*, ed. by Rolando M. Gripaldo (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2005), 12.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-17.

<sup>19</sup> Dante Luis P. Leoncini, "A Conceptual Analysis of Pakikisama," in *Filipino Cultural Traits: Claro R. Ceniza Lectures Philosophical Studies III*, ed. by Rolando M. Gripaldo (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2005), 118.

<sup>20</sup> Tomas Andres Quintin Donato, *Understanding the positiveness of Filipino Values* (Manila: Rex Bookstore, 1996), as quoted in Leoncini, "A Conceptual Analysis of Pakikisama," 118.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>22</sup> This brief linguistic explanation sets the tone for non-Filipino readers to better understand the meaning of the words "kami" and "tayo." *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>23</sup> Guevara, "Pakikipagkapwa," 17.

definitions of *pakikipagkapwa* laid down, I now turn towards Karol Wojtyła's philosophy, particularly that of his *theory of participation*.

## Karol Wojtyła's Theory of Participation

To briefly preface, we must first understand the disposition of Wojtyła with regard to his thoughts about the community and society. Grzegorz Holub notes that Wojtyła's personalism is hinged on ethics and anthropology.<sup>24</sup> The human person is not to be taken or perceived as an "object" in society. Instead, the person is considered to be the initiator of relationships in a uniquely human way.<sup>25</sup> The theory of participation is neither just an anthropological study nor an ethical theory. Wojtyła's theory of participation is a personalist convergence of a metaphysical, anthropological, and ethical study of society.

### *Personalistic Value of Action*

To fully grasp his theory, we must first understand his personalistic value of action, which is also foundational knowledge for his general personalist philosophy. The personal value of action is not sourced by a person from external parties. Suazo explains, "this value of the action *per se* is rooted in the value of the person, inasmuch as the person's actions are personal and so the value that inheres is also personal."<sup>26</sup> This inherently personal value is what makes a person—and his actions—personal. Consequently, it also allows a person to attain self-determination, self-possession, self-governance, and self-fulfillment.<sup>27</sup> Every action, therefore, is essentially assisted by this value, which also reveals the person.

Through the Thomistic adage, *operari sequitur esse* (action follows being), Wojtyła wishes to express that the true profile of a person is revealed through his/her actions. However, it should also be noted that the personal value should not be interchanged or synonymized with moral values. For an action—one that is bound by morals—to occur or be performed, a person must first exist. In Wojtyła's ontological plane of discussion, the personal value affirms the existence of a person through acting (action); whereas the moral values unclothe a person's true character. To pose an example, we may use the sentence: a student diligently writes their term paper. Here, an ontological structure exists—and so does the person him/herself—as a consequence of the personal value of action. The student exists through their action, *i.e.*, writing the term paper. Further, the indicator "diligently" is proof that the student performs their scholarly duties extraordinarily well. Thus, revealing to us their moral character not just as a diligent student, but as a person as well.

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<sup>24</sup> Grzegorz Holub, et al. (Eds.), "The Personalistic Concept of Community and Society in the Thought of Karol Wojtyła," in *Karol Wojtyła* (Krakow: Ignatium University Press, 2019), 73. Accessed through <<https://biesaga.info/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Wojtyla-EN.pdf>>. Hereafter cited as "The Personalistic Concept of Community and Society."

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>26</sup> Christian Zeus Suazo, "Between the Wojtylan Theory of Participation and the Confucian Ren 仁: An Anthropological Dialogue," in *TALISIK: An Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy*, 7:3 (2020): 30.

<sup>27</sup> Jove Jim Aguas, *Person, Action and Love: The Philosophical Thoughts of Karol Wojtyła (John Paul II)* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2014), 117-118. See also Suazo, *Between the Wojtylan Theory of Participation and Confucian Ren*, 30.

Hence, the personal value of action speaks to the fact that every action should always be done in consideration of the person and their own dignity; but even if the personal and moral values are not one and the same, they must not be separated. Acosta and Reimers wit:

They [the personal and moral values] *cannot* be radically separate, though, since every personalistic value points to the self-realization of the person, which in essence means acting morally and avoiding the evil that prevents one's non-realization.<sup>28</sup>

This follows that actions are a vital aspect in understanding the human person since it reveals the truth about a person.<sup>29</sup> Karol Wojtyła notes that there is a dynamic co-relation of the human person and his/her actions, which also affirms the fundamental reality for a person's interpersonal character within his/her community. Further, Wojtyła asserts that the rationale of including a discussion on participation is necessary and indispensable, simply because man always acts together-with-others.<sup>30</sup> The acting of a person in a communal setting does not, in any way, disparage their personal value. Due to the personalistic value of action, the actions of members in a community are manifested in a way that does not make themselves superior or inferior to each other. The meaning of communal acting is "not simply a trait of man's acting together with others; [but] equally important is the fact that it is an experience by which the very structure of the person engaged in the acting with others is revealed."<sup>31</sup> Participation, therefore, can be considered as: 1.) acting-with-others and 2.) an action that reveals a person's structure. It also entails that participation is indispensable for a person's self-realization and self-fulfillment, that is, doing the good and avoiding evil.<sup>32</sup>

### *Authentic Participation*

In participation, Wojtyła notes two attitudes: *authentic* and *inauthentic*. The authentic attitudes of participation refer to the attitudes of *solidarity* and *opposition*. Solidarity pertains to the "constant readiness to accept and realize the share that falls to each due to the fact that he is a member of a given community."<sup>33</sup> It ascertains that every member of the community would have a share in every part to reach the goal, that is, the common good of the community. Although solidarity ensures that everyone has a role to play, Wojtyła warns that an excess or a lack of duty for other members would contradict the dynamic structure of the community and participation. To wit:

Appropriating the part of the obligation that *does not belong to oneself is fundamentally contradictory to community and participation*... In such cases, keeping only to one's part would be proof of a lack of solidarity. This indirectly demonstrates that in the attitude of solidarity the relation to the common good must be constantly kept alive...<sup>34</sup>

Alongside solidarity, we have the attitude of *opposition*. Despite the negative connotation of the word "opposition," we must refrain from understanding the word in its dictionary definition. Opposition, as used by Wojtyła, is a fundamental aspect for the development of a community. A person's

<sup>28</sup> Acosta and Reimers, *Understanding Person and Act*, 226. Emphasis supplied.

<sup>29</sup> Dean Edward Mejos, "Against Alienation: Karol Wojtyła's Theory of Participation," in *Kritike* 1:1 (2007), 73.

<sup>30</sup> Wojtyła, *The Theory of Participation*, 377-378.

<sup>31</sup> Aguas, *Person, Action and Love*, 164.

<sup>32</sup> Acosta and Reimers, *Understanding Person and Act*, 226.

<sup>33</sup> Wojtyła, *The Theory of Participation*, 401.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* Emphasis supplied.

opinion does not become a hindrance to the development of the community when they express dissent. It is a fundamental aspect for the development of a community. It becomes a “way of understanding and, above all, of realizing the common good, especially regarding the possibility of participation.”<sup>35</sup> Should a person merely conform to what is asked or demanded of them, then it contradicts the *esse* of participation. The attitude of opposition allows persons to find their place in the community and find a way to participate in it wholly and effectively.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, it is necessary to have an opposition in a community, provided that the persons involved are concerned for the common good. The absence of opposition does not guarantee a smooth and developing society; instead, the absence of such would further deprive the community of its development. For example, if a non-philosophy faculty member—perhaps a Fine Arts major—was contracted by the dean of the college to teach a comprehensive course on the history of philosophy despite having no background knowledge about the course, the faculty member then has the right to *oppose* and even decline the contract. In the provided scenario, the faculty member rightfully invoked the attitude of opposition. Their dissent (or “opposition”) also indirectly paves the way for solidarity. Thus, it follows that the attitudes of *solidarity* and *opposition* corroborate with each other and even unite the persons in a community to achieve authentic participation.

### *Inauthentic Participation*

Abstaining from such attitudes would give way for the *inauthentic attitudes* of participation to permeate, namely, *conformism* and *avoidance*. Conformism is the devolution of solidarity and opposition. The integrity and dignity of the persons in a community are diminished merely to submit and be carried out by the will of the collective majority.<sup>37</sup> In this attitude, there exists a deficiency of a personalist approach towards the *other*. To recall, participation is acting “together-with-others” with each person’s uniqueness and subjectiveness—participation is acting in unity. What is highlighted and propagated with the attitude of conformism is *uniformity*. Wojtyła condemns this form of uniformity through conformism since people inauthentically participate in society by merely going with the flow of the majority even when it goes against their will.

The second inauthentic attitude of participation is *avoidance* or *non-participation*. Although avoidance is more authentic or genuine than conformism, it also poses a threat to the community. The attitude of avoidance, according to Wojtyła, “is merely a withdrawal, perhaps as a sign of protest, though without an attempt at taking up. Hence, avoidance is a lack of participation; it is an *absence in the community*.”<sup>38</sup> At times, it may be understandable when persons settle with the attitude of avoidance. Yet, if that is the case, then it implies that the community itself already has a lack of a common good. Such deficiency has forced its members to choose avoidance as the sole option—or “lesser evil” so to speak—for coping with whatever they are facing.<sup>39</sup> Simply put, both *conformism* and *avoidance* are manifested when a person yields his/her ability to participate together-with-others genuinely.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 402.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 405.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 406. Emphasis supplied.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 406-407.

## Integrating Participation into Filipino Social Philosophy

In lieu of what has been presented, I restate the main question: *how does pakikipagkapwa become an analogical expression of participation?* At face value, it is easily noticeable that both *pakikipagkapwa* and participation observe a positive attitude in communal acting. Then again, Wojtyła alone cannot provide us with an answer to the question posed above. The Filipino psyche is unique in itself, and only Filipinos can provide us with answers. I contend that *pakikipagkapwa* becomes the inner drive of Filipinos to participate with his/her *kapwa*. To avoid miscomprehension, this “inner drive” is not an obscure impulse, but a habitual orientation—a *habitus communionalis*—of the will towards the value of the other.<sup>40</sup> *Pakikipagkapwa* manifests the truth-oriented fulfillment of the moral norms in a communal horizon; just as freedom to participate grounds the possibility of communal action, *pakikipagkapwa* expresses the participative structure in a culturally embodied form. In this case, it is the fulfillment of all Filipino values as seen through other values such as *paggapakatao* (aspiring for humanness), *paggalang* (respect), or *pagtititiis* (sacrificing), to name but a few.

I must note that, for Wojtyła, the theory of participation and its authentic attitudes are pre-ethical notions. It is “pre-ethical” in a sense that it forms the ontological foundation of the ethical capacity of human action (*actus humanus in fieri*), rather than an implication of a moral indifference.<sup>41</sup> It is important as well to distinguish *actus humanus in fieri* and *actus humanus in facto esse*. The former denotes human actions that are in the process of *becoming*, whereas the latter refers to an act that is done or already completed.<sup>42</sup> While the person’s action remains to be *in fieri*, it should be noted that the person does not stand as a neutral or indifferent being to what he or she is facing. As far as

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<sup>40</sup> Although this is already an interjection of Karol Wojtyła’s notion of *self-determination*, it is worth noting how *self-determination* plays an integral role with *participation*. Wojtyła defines participation as a structure of the person’s acting in community, rooted in the person’s self-determination (*autodeterminatio*), freedom, and transcendence. For this reason, Wojtyła’s theory of participation as used in this paper is a moral disposition or readiness (*habitus communionalis*)—a habitual openness towards the value of the other rather than a mere metaphysical principle. To save time and space, however, such a discussion necessitates a paper dedicated to the topics mentioned. For a more thorough understanding of the aforementioned, see Karol Wojtyła, “Personal Structure of Self-Determination,” in *Person and Act and Related Essays* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 207–209; 393. See also Jove Jim Aguas, “The Perfection of Powers and Integration of the Person: St. Thomas Aquinas and Karol Wojtyła on Virtue,” in *Wojtyła Studies* 2:2 (2025): 63–64.

<sup>41</sup> Wojtyła, *Theory of Participation*, 400. To access a more in-depth and phenomenological view of Wojtyła’s discussion on the value of lived-experiences, See also Karol Wojtyła, “Ethical Act and Lived-Experience,” in *The Lublin Lectures and Works on Max Scheler* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2021).

<sup>42</sup> It is pertinent to note that Wojtyła utilized the “*fieri*” as a way to highlight the dynamism of a person’s actions and, concurrently, distinguish *pre-ethical* from *ethical*, as well as *passivity* and *activity*. Wojtyła’s notion of *becoming (in fieri)* can be located in his discussion on the notions of *efficacy* and *actualization*. “The concept of *actus*—this is what we can call it for short, knowing what sort of correlativity it entails—has above all an existential sense. The two terms essential for this conception (potency and act) do not merely indicate two different states of being to which correspond two different kinds of existence (*existentia*). For the transition from potency to act, that is, the so-called actualization, is also a transition in the order of existence; it indicates a certain *fieri*, that is, a becoming—not in the absolute sense, for such belongs only to the *fieri*-becoming out of nothing, but in the relative sense, namely, that of the *fieri* relying on a being that already exists, the *fieri* within a being’s own internal structure. A being’s dynamism is joined with its very existence and at the same time constitutes the basis and source of all structures that we can find in this being.” See Karol Wojtyła, “The Analysis of Efficacy in Relation to the Dynamism of Man,” in *Person and Act and Related Essays* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 166. For a side-by-side companion to *Person and Act*, see also Aguas, *Person, Action and Love*, 69–120.

Wojtyła is concerned, “[clearly], this entire reflection can easily be changed into an ethical analysis by assuming that the very performance of the act, in light of its immanent value, is a good that obligates. This, in fact, is beyond doubt. The *very performance of the act is a good that obligates* both the one who performs this act as well as others.”<sup>43</sup>

In light of this, *pakikipagkapwa*, thus, functions as the anthropological substratum from which moral action emerges when integrated by truth and freedom. We recall that *pakikipagkapwa* is the inner drive and core of the interpersonalist Filipino psyche. Similarly, Wojtyła’s method in his philosophical anthropology is centered upon an analysis of the human person “from the inside,” rather than just “from the outside.”<sup>44</sup> The analysis below seeks to flesh out the parallelisms between the intrinsic value of *pakikipagkapwa* and the ontic value of Wojtyła’s framework of participation. Further, instead of relying on historical and theological sources, the integration of both notions remains on the ontological plane in order to bring forth the arguments imbedded in the succeeding segments.

### *Pakikipagkapwa and the Filipino Social Behavior*

What is unique about *pakikipagkapwa* is that despite the person having their own individual *loob* (inner self) or *sarili*, the person is able to have a shared-identity with others. Thus, we can act according to this shared-identity without jeopardizing our own *self* or *loob*. In every activity, a Filipino is never alone because he or she prefers to have a companion (*kasama*). This is, again, caused by the Filipinos’ group-oriented psyche, as Fr. Leonardo Mercado would put it.<sup>45</sup> However, Fr. Mercado would also postulate that Filipinos, most especially Filipino children or those with an “inferior position” in political or corporate settings, are often expected to behave in a conformist way. Otherwise, he or she would be considered a “non-conformist” or “anti-social” and is later on branded as a *pilosopo* (philosopher).<sup>46</sup>

The family behavior, Mercado opines, is the source of the Filipino’s social behavior. This is because of the immanent hierarchical authority of the Filipino society. Hence, as far as Mercado is concerned, it is absolutely normal for a child (inferior) to keep his or her silence when reprimanded by their parents or guardian (superior) as part of the so-called “Filipino etiquette.”<sup>47</sup> Further, Mercado’s exposition of the Filipino’s hierarchical authority corroborates with Prospero Covar’s historical approach in studying hierarchy and authority. Covar specifically identifies regions or

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<sup>43</sup> Here, Wojtyła is trying to explain to his readers why the Authentic Attitudes in his Theory of Participation is pre-ethical; he differentiates the respective qualifications between performance of the act (*actus humanus in fieri*) and performed act (*actus humanus in facto esse*): “For our point is to sketch the very structures of human action and, consequently, to emphasize the value of the very performance of the act and not the value of the performed act, which results from its relation to an ethical norm.” See Wojtyła, *Theory of Participation*, 400. Further, Wojtyła also justifies why a person’s disposition, prior to the completion of the act (*i.e.*, *actus humanus in facto esse*), is chained towards “a good that obligates.” See also Wojtyła, *Theory of Participation*, 400.

<sup>44</sup> Tadeusz Styczeń, “The Philosophical Anthropology Method in Cardinal Karol Wojtyła’s *Person and Act*,” trans. by Sydney Sadowski, in *Wojtyła Studies* 2 (2025): 7.

<sup>45</sup> Leonardo Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy* (Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1976), 96.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

groups that are highly organized by a common denominator: hierarchy. To condense Covar's long list:

[1] The *Tasaday* is found in Northern Cotabato. It consists of individuals that are grouped into families ... I consider the social structure of the *Tasaday* as a family band ... [2] The *Kalinga* of the Cordilleras and the [3] *Maranao* of Lanao typify chiefdom. The authority of the chief extends beyond kindred. It is territorially-based. Authority is centralized. Communal rites and rituals intensify community integration ... The [4] *Tausug* and [5] *Maguindanao* have a hierarchy of organization, *i.e.*, the sultanate. On top of the hierarchy is the sultan. Below him are a number of datus. Under each datu are several *panglima*...<sup>48</sup>

This highlights, therefore, that Mercado was not the only one who has shed light on the Filipinos' seemingly intrinsic value for hierarchy and authority. Even so, how does this behavior and etiquette of submitting to this authoritarian system (*i.e.*, hierarchical authority) manifest *pakikipagkapwa*? Merely submitting to the hierarchical authoritarianism for the sake of unity and harmony with the group majority does not create an "inauthentic *pakikipagkapwa*." Rather, what occurs here is that *pakikipagkapwa* devolves to *negative pakikisama*.<sup>49</sup> In Fr. Mercado's words, *pakikisama* is defined as "sacrificing one's interest for the sake of the group (such as attending a party)..."<sup>50</sup> but we may take Donato's definition of *pakikisama* as well, as discussed above.

This behavior, the submission to hierarchical authority for the sake of harmony, often disrupts or disorients the true essence of *pakikipagkapwa* in action. *Pakikipagkapwa* must disregard all variables when acting with and towards the other. Variables such as sex, gender, social stature, and most especially age must be put aside momentarily so as to breach the layer of *negative pakikisama* and reach the core of all Filipino values, that is, *pakikipagkapwa*.

### *Overcoming Hierarchical Authority Through Authentic Participation*

As a rebuttal to the argument that Wojtyla's writings are disconnected from the Filipino context,<sup>51</sup> I posit that Wojtyla's theory of participation remains to be relevant to all cultures, especially for nations with collectivist attitudes like the Philippines. Again, Wojtyla notes that

<sup>48</sup> As much as I wish to abstain from making too much historical and anthropological justifications, it is worth noting that F.Landa Jocano asserts that pre-Philippine society is grounded upon a "base culture." For more information about Covar and Jocano, see Prospero R. Covar, *Larangan: Seminal Essays on Philippine Culture* (Manila: National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 1998), 75-76. Original italics retained.

<sup>49</sup> The reader should take into mind that *negative pakikisama* is also an inauthentic mode of participation—specifically that of *conformism*—and not just a moral failure. Further, aside from conformism, *negative pakikisama* can also be analogically understood with Wojtyla's system of *totalism* (or often written as *anti-individualism*). Totalism, Wojtyla defines, "...is the need for protection against the individual, who is basically considered an enemy of the community and of the common good. Because it is presupposed that in the individual there is only the striving for his own good and no disposition to fulfill himself in acting and existing 'together with others'—no property of participation—the common good can be achieved only by limiting the individual." For a more thorough reading, see Wojtyla, *Theory of Participation*, 391-395. See also, Karol Wojtyla, "The Person: Subject and Community," in *Person and Act and Related Essays* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 467-513.

<sup>50</sup> Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*, 97.

<sup>51</sup> I acknowledge that some readers may raise their eyebrows on some points of this paper, especially when I seem to impose a Polish philosopher's views on a Filipino value. Then again, as I have stated earlier, one culture may learn from another, and this discussion is directed towards a complementarity of two cultures rather than a "benevolent assimilation" or contradiction.

solidarity becomes a reflexive attitude to a person.<sup>52</sup> There is no need for debate when a community with a collectivist attitude has the willingness to share and be conscious of the goals that will benefit their common good. Besides, a community that wills itself to share the tasks with its members adopts an attitude that is “in conformity with the principle of participation, for participation taken objectively and ‘materially’ indicates certain parts in the communal structure of human action and existence.”<sup>53</sup> Hence, for Wojtyła, recognizing one’s obligation towards the other becomes solidarity, and therefore, participates with one another. Further, the attitude of opposition must be understood in the way Wojtyła meant it to be— opposition does not contradict solidarity. Since opposition requires a sense of receptivity from others, then such is indeed essential and fundamental for other members to find their place in the community. It also follows that opposition must be rooted in right conscience and adherence to the truth.<sup>54</sup> Hence, in this paper’s context, opposition should reject conformity not out of resentment but out of fidelity to the truth.

In most contexts, if Filipinos continue to disregard the opinion, humanness, or dignity of another, then we can claim that *pakikipagkapwa* no longer has a place in the Filipino society.<sup>55</sup> Historically observable facts show that what governs the social attitude of the Filipinos is a rigid hierarchical authority that masquerades itself as a unifying symbol that controls others to agree with the “big men” on top for the sake of harmony. That is why, in most, if not all, societies, *pakikipagkapwa* will follow through when we take into mind the authentic attitudes of participation, especially when embarking on actions that requires consideration for the irreducible dignity of the human person.

### *Wojtyła Beyond Western Contexts*

The Filipino value of *pakikipagkapwa* enriches Wojtyła’s framework of participation inasmuch as both compliments each other. It must be taken into consideration that the latter is not restricted to the confines of a European perspective. Wojtyła crafted his theory without placing prejudice on non-European or non-Polish societies. Moreover, the personalist framework attributed to his theory of participation assures that a line for dialogue or complementarity remains open with other philosophies or theories, regardless of their origin.<sup>56</sup> Wojtyła’s main concern in his philosophy in general is to better understand the human person *per se*, hence, a “personalist” philosophical anthropology.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Wojtyła claims, “[The] attitude of *solidarity* is a ‘natural’ consequence of the fact that man exists and acts together with others.” See Wojtyła, *The Theory of Participation*, 401.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Blaise Ringor, “The Attitude of Opposition as a Service to the Truth in Karol Wojtyła’s Philosophy of Community,” in *Education in an Age of Lies and Fake News: Regaining a Love of Truth*, ed. by Jānis Tāivaldis Ozoliņš (New York: Routledge, 2022), 163.

<sup>55</sup> I recognize the fact that the Philippines is an archipelagic country and that there would be a huge dissimilarity in qualifications and standards when the so-called hierarchical authority becomes just or unjust across regions, generations, and even institutions. Even so, an in-depth analysis between regions or institutions on hierarchy merits further studies.

<sup>56</sup> Or cultural value(s) as in the case of this paper.

<sup>57</sup> Acosta and Reimers, *Understanding Person and Act*, 111.

Due to the lack of studies on *pakikipagkapwa* anchored from a strictly philosophical perspective, I cannot comment extensively on its metaphysical foundation vis-à-vis participation. However, there is a positive ethical implication. In the Filipino context, at least, *pakikipagkapwa* contributes to the enrichment of how a person does not objectify others in society. To reiterate Holub's averment, Wojtyła focuses on how a person reveals himself through action and what his action implies in the practical and ethical order.<sup>58</sup> At this point, we can take Wojtyła's I-Thou attitude as a point of juxtaposition when integrated in the Filipino context. Just as *pakikipagkapwa* entails altruism and responsibility towards the other (*kapwa*), participation also necessitates that the "I" consider the "thou" as "another I."<sup>59</sup> Eventually, this I-Thou attitude transcends into what Wojtyła calls the "We"-community. The word "We" in this context would also denote multiple "I"s, and thus, many subjects as well.<sup>60</sup>

This *We*-community can be analogously understood with the Filipino concept of *tayo* as attributed with *pakikipagkapwa*. The inclusive (*tayo*) versus exclusive (*kami*) pronouns best demonstrate an understanding of Wojtyła's *We*-community. The former evokes an intrinsic openness to equality that underwrites solidarity and justifies opposition. Clearly, in this juxtaposition, *pakikipagkapwa* does not jeopardize the framework of participation, and instead compliments—and even augments—it further for a richer understanding of Wojtyła's thoughts through the Filipino mind. Such is also a way of how Wojtyła's philosophy can be understood beyond the Western understanding or perspective.

### Concluding Remark

The juxtaposition between *pakikipagkapwa* and participation demonstrates that they both analogically express the personal structure of participation as articulated by Wojtyła, thus, revealing a culturally embodied way of being-with-others ordered to the common good. His brand of personalism and philosophical anthropology best complements the *other*-orientedness of Filipinos as elucidated through the value of *pakikipagkapwa*. I reiterate that *pakikipagkapwa* is not reserved for one action alone, it is manifold—the foundation and a plurisignification of all the other interpersonalist Filipino values. *Pakikipagkapwa* must not be confused with *pakikisama* despite its affinity; the former evokes equality, while the latter mandates uniformity. However, through the Filipino behavior and acknowledgement of a hierarchical authority, *negative pakikisama* often prevails while *pakikipagkapwa* becomes distorted. To overcome this distortion, Wojtyła's theory of participation, particularly through his attitudes of solidarity and opposition, may be utilized to preserve the integrity and beauty of *pakikipagkapwa*. Through the attitude of solidarity, *pakikipagkapwa* becomes richer and more felt among the community since everyone is working towards the common good. Moreover, opposition openly invites diverse ideas and opinions that would benefit the community since it encourages receptivity among those who are in a higher position. It allows every person to speak

<sup>58</sup> Holub, *The Personalistic Concept of Community and Society*, 73.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>60</sup> Wojtyła puts it in this way: "When we say that the 'we' denotes many human 'I's, we grasp this plurality and try to understand it through action, similar to our attempt to understand the 'I.' The 'we' means many people, many subjects, who in some way exist and act together." See Karol Wojtyła, "The Person: Subject and Community," 501. To save time and space, I will refrain from expounding more on the interplay between the *I-Thou* and *We*-relations since it merits further discussion. To gain a thorough understanding of Wojtyła's *I-Thou* and *We*-relations, see also Grzegorz Holub, *Understanding the Person: Essays on the Personalism of Karol Wojtyła* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021).

and act on the same level without fear of premature judgment or dismissal despite the hierarchical authority that lingers within. Filipino society can thrive by adopting these authentic attitudes that highlight the irreducibility of the human person.

However, despite the rigor of research done in this article, there are limitations that require further research. First, Wojtyła's attitude of opposition may be challenged insofar as Filipino society is highly hierarchic. Such hierarchic attitude could become a hindrance to achieving authentic participation; thus, further study about the interplay of opposition and Filipino hierarchy must be pursued. Second, studies on *pakikipagkapwa* as discussed from a strictly philosophical standpoint remain at a deficit; further exploration of the same through a metaphysical, ontological, or epistemological point of view should be considered by future researchers. Other than that, scholars may consider exploring *pakikipagkapwa* in dialogue with other phenomenologists or communitarian thinkers such as Max Scheler, Emmanuel Levinas or Martin Buber. Finally, what is written in this paper is only a small effort in bringing forth a philosophical discourse about Filipino philosophy through the lenses of Wojtyła. This also shows how Wojtyła's brand of personalism may perhaps be considered "universal," regardless of philosophical school or culture. Conversely, a revitalized contribution could be a philosophical-cultural comparative study. For instance, Leonardo Mercado argues, albeit briefly and substantially underdeveloped, that Filipino social behavior is similar to that of Chinese philosophy. Thus, a comparative study between Filipino and Chinese societies and philosophical thoughts would be a great contribution to *pakikipagkapwa* studies and Filipino philosophy in general.

In parting, the Filipino value of *pakikipagkapwa* can be considered as a cultural expression of Karol Wojtyła's theory of participation. Such a demonstration becomes an analogical correspondence instead of an ontological derivation. Taking up the salient points of the theory of participation, the authentic attitudes' pre-ethicality does not connote neutrality or indifference. Wojtyła remains grounded in the fact that persons are disposed towards what is good. Hence, it follows that a society that does not immediately dismiss the *kapwa* on the basis of secondary criteria or by invoking hierarchy will surely be a society that manifests *pakikipagkapwa* and participates for the common good.

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## The Renaissance of Corporate Social Responsibility: A Kantian Guide to Business Practice

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**Abstract:** Corporate Social Responsibility—the *abracadabra* of the business sphere; is it the golden standard of business ethics or merely a well-disguised calculated and strategic ploy? This article examines CSR through the lens of Immanuel Kant's deontological ethics, arguing that many CSR initiatives fail to embody genuine moral duty and instead serve as sophisticated tools for reputation management and profit. Anchored in Kant's concept of Good Will, Duty, and the Categorical Imperative, this study interrogates the ethical legitimacy of CSR practices, with a particular focus on the Philippine context. Case examples include San Miguel Corporation, Jollibee Group Foundation, and Philip Morris Fortune Tobacco Corporation reveal tensions between public image and consistent moral conduct. Building on the work of Norman Bowie, a key figure in Kantian business ethics, this article clarifies and extends his framework by applying a Kantian critique to CSR's performative tendencies in emerging markets. It also engages common criticisms of Kantian ethics, especially its alleged rigidity, offering a defense of moral consistency over utilitarian convenience. Moreover, this article investigates the Fraud Triangle, a forensic auditing model that identifies pressure, opportunity, and rationalization as key drivers of unethical behavior. Reframed through a Kantian lens, the triangle becomes a diagnostic tool for moral failure, exposing how the absence of duty enables ethical collapse and erosion. Through a philosophical-normative analysis, this article exposes CSR's paradoxes that ultimately advocate for the Renaissance of CSR. A Kantian reconstruction determines CSR as not a corporate strategy, but an intrinsic, non-negotiable moral duty.

**Keywords:** *Business Ethics, Duty, Corporate Social Responsibility, Categorical Imperative, Immanuel Kant*

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### Introduction: Opt To ≠ Ought To

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has emerged as a prevailing narrative in the global business landscape. From glossy sustainability reports to philanthropic press releases, companies increasingly position themselves as agents of social good. Yet, beneath this appearance of ethical consciousness lies a troubling ambiguity: is CSR genuinely grounded in moral obligation, or has it become a sophisticated smokescreen, an instrument for strategic branding under the guise of altruism?<sup>1</sup> This article interrogates that ambiguity through the ethical lens of Immanuel Kant, whose deontological philosophy offers an uncompromising account of moral duty. In contrast

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<sup>1</sup> David Crowther and Güler Aras, *Corporate Social Responsibility: Part 1 Principles, Stakeholders & Sustainability* (David Crowther, Güler Aras & Ventus publishing, 2008), 10-12.

to utilitarian and stakeholder-based approaches that dominate CSR discourse, Kant's ethics demand that actions be evaluated not by their outcomes, but by their intentions. In principle, it determines whether they arise from Good Will and conform to the Categorical Imperative.<sup>2</sup> A corporation, in this view, ought not to “opt” into CSR merely for reputational gain; it must “ought” to practice CSR because it is the right thing to do.

This Kantian perspective is not novel in business ethics. Norman Bowie has famously pioneered the application of Kantian principles to corporate practices.<sup>3</sup> However, this article clarifies and builds upon Bowie's position by applying his framework to Philippine corporations, drawing attention to the ethical inconsistencies of major CSR players such as San Miguel Corporation, Jollibee Group Foundation, and Philip Morris Fortune Tobacco Corporation. Their programs, while outwardly benevolent, often portray a deeper misalignment with Kantian duty and moral universality. The goal of this article is twofold: first, to expose the performativity embedded in contemporary CSR efforts; second, to propose a Kantian reconstruction of CSR that reframes corporate morality as a non-negotiable ethical duty owed to humanity—a Renaissance of CSR that reframes corporate morality not as strategic generosity, but as a non-negotiable ethical duty owed to humanity itself.

### CSR's Strategic Facade and Its Ethical Shortcomings

Corporate Social Responsibility, in its popular conception, has become a near-universal feature of modern business operations. Companies routinely publicize their environmental initiatives, community outreach programs, and social investments to signal their ethical commitment. However, critics such as David Crowther and Güler Aras, argue that CSR is often used as a “smokescreen,” a tactic to divert public scrutiny while core business operations remain profit-maximizing and ethically questionable.<sup>4</sup> The formalization of CSR as a management framework was largely shaped by Archie B. Carroll, whose Pyramid of CSR presents a four-tiered model: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities.<sup>5</sup> While influential, Carroll's model places profitability as the foundation of social responsibility, implying that moral obligations follow only after economic ones are fulfilled. This hierarchy is incompatible with a Kantian moral theory, which holds duty as supreme regardless of economic calculus.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, Wayne Visser later critiques Carroll's model in the African context, noting that its Western assumptions often collapse in emerging markets where ethical structures are weaker and CSR is more easily co-opted.<sup>7</sup> Visser's critique underscores the contextual fragility of CSR frameworks that lack a strong philosophical backbone—something Kantian ethics can restore. In the Philippine context, for example, San Miguel Corporation (SMC) promotes itself as a socially responsible enterprise, highlighting infrastructure projects and disaster response efforts, it has

<sup>2</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 9–11.

<sup>3</sup> Norman E. Bowie, *Business Ethics: A Kantian Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 62–65.

<sup>4</sup> Crowther and Aras, “Corporate Social Responsibility,” 10–12.

<sup>5</sup> Archie B. Carroll, “The Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility: Toward the Moral Management of Organizational Stakeholders,” in *Business Horizons* 34:4 (1991): 39–48, <[https://doi.org/10.1016/0007-6813\(91\)90005-G](https://doi.org/10.1016/0007-6813(91)90005-G)>.

<sup>6</sup> Kant, *Groundwork*, 9–11.

<sup>7</sup> Wayne Visser, “Revisiting Carroll's CSR Pyramid: An African Perspective,” in *Journal of Business Ethics* 56:2 (2005): 174–76, <[https://www.waynevisser.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/article\\_africa\\_pyramid\\_wvisser.pdf](https://www.waynevisser.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/article_africa_pyramid_wvisser.pdf)>.

simultaneously been criticized for the displacement of fisherfolk communities. This is a pretext to make way for its airport megaproject in Bulacan.<sup>8</sup> These contradictions cast doubt on whether SMC's CSR initiatives reflect genuine ethical concern or merely function as a reputational buffer.

Similarly, the Jollibee Group Foundation, despite its widespread branding as a champion of education and livelihood development, faced a 2018 Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) ruling identifying the company's involvement in unlawful labor contracting.<sup>9</sup> Ethical inconsistency of this nature violates Kant's Formula of Humanity, which demands that we treat every individual as an end in themselves, not merely as a means.<sup>10</sup> A corporation that publicizes charity while exploiting its labor force undermines the very dignity it claims to uphold. Perhaps the most paradoxical example is that of Philip Morris Fortune Tobacco Corporation (PMFTC). PMFTC runs community-building and sustainability programs while profiting from tobacco, an industry intrinsically linked to public health harms.<sup>11</sup> From a Kantian perspective, this is ethically incoherent: no action, however philanthropic, can be deemed moral if its underlying maxim. Here, the commodification of addiction is incompatible with universal moral law.<sup>12</sup>

For Kant, no amount of consequence-driven justification can transform such contradictions into moral acts. CSR, as practiced by these corporations, lacks ethical substance unless rooted in Good Will and a duty-based maxim, not in reputational or economic utility. Without a moral compass rooted in duty, CSR becomes vulnerable to ethical performativity, a theatrical display of goodness masking self-interest. Thus, a downstream philanthropy cannot offset a maxim grounded in commodifying addiction.

To concretize the discussion of CSR's performative tendencies in the Philippine context, consider these flagship initiatives often spotlighted by the firms themselves and in independent reporting:

1. **San Miguel Corporation (SMC)** – river rehabilitation. From 2020–2022, SMC's cleanup of the Tullahan–Tinajeros River extracted roughly 1.1–1.2 million metric tons of silt/solid waste along an 11 km stretch, in partnership with government agencies; efforts have since expanded via a new MOA with Quezon City to deepen/widen portions of the San Juan River and extend the Tullahan campaign up to La Mesa Dam.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Kristine Sabillo, "Fishermen Displaced by Bulacan Airport Project Return to Sea," *Inquirer.net*, August 16, 2021, <<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1474016/fishermen-displaced-by-bulacan-airport-project-return-to-sea>>.

<sup>9</sup> William Depasupil, "Jollibee, DOLE Top Violators," *The Manila Times*, May 29, 2018, <<https://www.manilatimes.net/2018/05/29/news/headlines/jollibee-dole-top-violators/401987>>.

<sup>10</sup> Kant, *Groundwork*, 37.

<sup>11</sup> Czeriza Valencia, "PMFTC Gives Back to Tobacco Farmers," *The Philippine Star*, January 9, 2016, <<https://www.philstar.com/business/agriculture/2016/01/09/1540891/embedding-csr-core-turning-table-pmftc-gives-back-tobacco-farmers>>.

<sup>12</sup> Kant, *Groundwork*, 36–38.

<sup>13</sup> San Miguel Corporation, "Reviving Our Ailing Rivers," *SMC Sustainability*, accessed September 17, 2025, <<https://www.sanmiguel.com.ph/sustainability/kalikasan/resource-management/reviving-our-ailing-rivers/>>; Quezon City Government, "Quezon City, San Miguel sign MOA to scale up flood solutions," in *quezoncity.gov.ph*, August 27, 2025, <<https://quezoncity.gov.ph/quezon-city-san-miguel-sign-moa-to-scale-up-flood-solutions/>>.

2. **Jollibee Group Foundation (JGF)** – Farmer Entrepreneurship Program (FEP). A long-running supply-chain inclusion model that organizes smallholder farmers into groups capable of meeting QSR standards; university monographs and a peer-reviewed article analyze the program’s structure, interlinked finance, and inclusion outcomes.<sup>14</sup>
3. **PMFTC (Philip Morris Fortune Tobacco Corp.)** – “Embrace” CSR and farmer programs.<sup>15</sup> Corporate materials describe social projects and farmer-training initiatives delivered through PMFTC/PMI networks and partners; public-health treaty guidance, however, classifies publicity for tobacco-industry “socially responsible” activities as advertising/promotion, normatively relevant when evaluating such CSR.<sup>16</sup>

The overarching question is: why are these three CSR flagships performative? As read together, the initiatives foreground visible. These initiatives show beneficence while leaving core practices substantially unchanged. San Miguel Corporation’s river-dredging is advertised with large capacity outputs and a fresh MOA to deepen/widen adjacent waterways,<sup>17</sup> which produces strong optics. Yet, the project developer’s own NMIA (New Manila International Airport) impact documents and independent investigations flag unresolved displacement and coastal-hazard exposure in the same bay system. The “public good” functions as a reputational offset unless matched by upstream risk minimization in the marquee project.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, Jollibee Group Foundation’s Farmer Entrepreneurship Program is an inclusion model celebrated in academic work. However, DOLE’s 2018 order naming Jollibee for labor-only contracting expose a decoupling between uplift downstream and precarity in the core workforce,<sup>19</sup> a classic case of symbolic compliance rather than duty-based respect for stakeholders.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, PMFTC’s “Embrace”<sup>21</sup> sponsorships are archetypally performative as the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) Article 13 classify publicity for tobacco “CSR” as advertising/promotion, and ASEAN monitoring shows such “charity” operating as image, and access-building rather than duty-driven reform. On a Kantian

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<sup>14</sup> Jane Lynn D. Capacio, *Going Against the Grain: A Case Study of Jollibee Group Foundation’s Farmer Entrepreneurship Program* (Quezon City: UP CIDS Public Policy Monograph Series 2021-02); Jane Lynn D. Capacio, Emmanuel S. de Dios, and Rob van Tulder, “Bridging the Agriculture Credit Gap: A Case Study of the Farmer Entrepreneurship Program of Jollibee Group Foundation,” in *Philippine Journal of Public Policy: Interdisciplinary Development Perspectives* (2021), <<https://doi.org/10.54096/AZCZ1645>>.

<sup>15</sup> Philip Morris International (Philippines), “Overview,” listing PMFTC’s Embrace CSR program, accessed September 14, 2025, <<https://www.pmi.com/markets/philippines/en/about-us/overview>>.

<sup>16</sup> Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA), *Lifting the Veil of Tobacco Industry’s Corporate Charity in ASEAN* (Bangkok: SEATCA, 2024/2023 report update).

<sup>17</sup> Quezon City Government, “Quezon City, San Miguel sign MOA to scale up flood solutions,” August 27, 2025, accessed September 14, 2025, <<https://quezoncity.gov.ph/quezon-city-san-miguel-sign-moa-to-scale-up-flood-solutions/>>.

<sup>18</sup> Sandra G. Catane and John Romel R. Flora, “Development in an Environmentally Critical Coastal Area: The Risk Perception on Natural Hazards and the New Manila International Airport by Fishing Communities in Talitip, Philippines,” in *Ocean & Coastal Management* 253 (2024), <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ocecoaman.2024.107127>>.

<sup>19</sup> Capacio, *Going Against the Grain*.

<sup>20</sup> Capacio et al., “Bridging the Agriculture Credit Gap.”

<sup>21</sup> Philip Morris International (PMFTC), “Overview — Embrace CSR,” accessed September 16, 2025.

account, actions done to manage legitimacy while tolerating foreseeable harms or rights deficits lack moral worth, however effective the outcomes may appear.<sup>22</sup>

By *performative*, this article refers to practices that are enacted primarily for their appearance rather than their moral substance, as a form of reputation management. Performative CSR mimics ethical behavior whether through philanthropy, sustainability reporting, or public commitments, while leaving the underlying profit-driven maxims of corporate action unchanged. Such performances aim to secure legitimacy, consumer trust, or regulatory favor, instead of fulfilling a genuine moral obligation.<sup>23</sup>

CSR becomes predominantly institutionalized and practiced within contemporary corporate systems. It targets a dominant trend in contemporary corporate practice wherein ethical language is employed instrumentally, detached from any sense of duty or morality. Contemporary CSR, as a dominant corporate paradigm, is structurally prone to being performative because it is grounded in inclination and strategic self-interest rather than duty.

The call for a Renaissance of CSR signals the need for a fundamental rebirth rather than incremental reform. Just as the historical Renaissance marked a return to foundational principles after intellectual stagnation, this article argues that Corporate Social Responsibility must return to its ethical roots. A Kantian renaissance rejects CSR as optional corporate benevolence and reconstructs it as a duty grounded in reason, moral universality, and respect for human dignity.<sup>24</sup>

### Ethical Approaches to CSR: A Comparative Framework

The comparative matrix below functions as an interpretive map rather than a scorecard. It sets side-by-side the principal ethical lenses used in business (utilitarianism, stakeholder theory, virtue ethics) and the Kantian view central to this article. The purpose is twofold: first, to make explicit the criterion of moral appraisal each lens privileges (outcomes, balancing interests, character, or duty); and second, to clarify why, in Kant's approach, motivation, acting from duty in accordance with universalizable maxims, stands as the non-negotiable basis of corporate moral worth.<sup>25</sup> Thus, arguing that many CSR programs with positive outcome or stakeholder response fail morality when businesses prioritize strategic calculation.

| Ethical Framework  | Key Principle                         | CSR Justification                                | Business Application                                       | Kantian Critique                                  |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Utilitarianism     | Maximize overall happiness            | CSR is good if it leads to net positive outcomes | Donation to schools if it leads to higher customer loyalty | Reduces ethics to consequences; ignores duty      |
| Stakeholder Theory | Balance interests of all stakeholders | CSR is ethical if all stakeholder needs are      | Consultation with communities before                       | Allows trade-offs; lacks absolute moral standards |

<sup>22</sup> World Health Organization, WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control: Guidelines for Implementation of Article 13 (Tobacco Advertising, Promotion and Sponsorship), para. 26, "Publicity given to 'socially responsible' business practices ... constitutes advertising and promotion."

<sup>23</sup> David Crowther and Güler Aras, *Corporate Social Responsibility* (London: Ventus Publishing ApS, 2008), 10–13.

<sup>24</sup> Kant, *Groundwork*, 36–38.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

| Ethical Framework     | Key Principle                        | CSR Justification                                            | Business Application                                   | Kantian Critique                                            |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
|                       |                                      | considered                                                   | opening new sites                                      |                                                             |
| <b>Virtue Ethics</b>  | Cultivate moral character            | CSR reflects corporate character (e.g., honesty, generosity) | Leadership programs that promote moral leadership      | Focuses on internal traits, not universal moral obligations |
| <b>Kantian Ethics</b> | Act from duty according to moral law | CSR is moral only when done out of respect for the moral law | Offering fair wages because it's right, not profitable | Demands motivation rooted in duty, not advantage            |

It is no accident that businesses often lean toward utilitarian or stakeholder reasoning. It is flexible, easily quantifiable, and publicly digestible. However, Kant asks: What if we must act rightly even when it costs us? While utilitarianism, stakeholder theory, and virtue ethics each offer valuable insights into corporate conduct, they ultimately permit moral compromise when outcomes, interests, or character appear favorable. What they lack is an absolute criterion for moral obligation. This limitation necessitates a turn to Kantian ethics, where duty serves as the foundation of moral evaluation. The following section therefore develops the Kantian framework in detail and explains why it provides the most rigorous standard for assessing the ethical legitimacy of CSR.<sup>26</sup>

It must be acknowledged that stakeholder theory does not entirely abandon moral considerations. By recognizing the legitimate interests of multiple affected parties, it introduces a broader ethical sensitivity absent in purely shareholder-driven models.<sup>27</sup> However, stakeholder theory ultimately remains normatively indeterminate: it lacks a principled account of why certain interests ought to be respected beyond strategic balance or negotiated consensus. Without a universal moral criterion governing motivation and obligation, stakeholder inclusion risks devolving into managerial discretion rather than genuine moral duty.<sup>28</sup>

While this article critiques stakeholder theory for its normative indeterminacy, it is important to distinguish this position from a “Kantian Stakeholder Theory,” most notably advanced by Evan and Freeman. They seek to ground stakeholder obligations in respect for persons rather than mere interest-balancing.<sup>29</sup>

Even through the lens of Kant, however, stakeholder theory ultimately remains structurally pluralistic:<sup>30</sup> it still permits trade-offs among competing stakeholder claims without an absolute criterion governing motivation. The present Kantian reconstruction departs from this model by

<sup>26</sup> Bowie, *Business Ethics*, 5–9.

<sup>27</sup> R. Edward Freeman, *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* (Boston: Pitman, 1984), 46–52.

<sup>28</sup> Bowie, *Business Ethics*, 38–41.

<sup>29</sup> William M. Evan and R. Edward Freeman, “A Stakeholder Theory of the Modern Corporation: Kantian Capitalism,” in *Ethical Theory and Business*, 3rd ed., ed. by Tom L. Beauchamp and Norman E. Bowie (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1988), 97–106.

<sup>30</sup> A framework recognizing multiple valid interests without a single overriding moral rule, thus allowing strategic trade-offs between stakeholders instead of an absolute duty. In the context of this article, pluralistic refers to a framework that recognizes multiple, often conflicting, stakeholder interests (e.g., employees vs. shareholders) as valid without subordinate them to a single, supreme moral principle.

insisting that moral permissibility is determined not by stakeholder accommodation but through adopting corporate maxims that is duty-based, which universalized without contradiction. This distinction is crucial when addressing concerns of feasibility in competitive markets. A Kantian firm does not forfeit competitiveness by prioritizing ethics; rather, it redefines competition within moral constraints. As Norman Bowie argues, firms that internalize Kantian duties operate under “moral side constraints” that prohibit exploitation, deception, and coercion, thereby preventing short-term gains that undermine long-term legitimacy, trust, and institutional stability.<sup>31</sup>

### **Kantian Moral Theory in Norman Bowie’s Framework**

Immanuel Kant’s moral philosophy evaluates ethical action not by its consequences, but by the motive of duty, holding that only actions performed from respect for the moral law possess genuine moral worth.<sup>32</sup> An action is justified as moral when it respects the moral law, to be moral, must be done not in the pursuit of personal gain or external approval but from respect for the moral law. This law is articulated through the Categorical Imperative, which Kant formulates in several ways. Two are especially relevant to Corporate Social Responsibility: (1) The Formula of Universal Law and (2) The Formula of Humanity.

Kant articulates the Categorical Imperative through several formulations, three of which are central to moral reasoning: first, the Formula of Universal Law, which requires that one act only on maxims that can be willed as universal laws; second, the Formula of Humanity, which commands that humanity be treated always as an end and never merely as a means; third, the Formula of the Kingdom of Ends, which envisions rational agents as both authors and subjects of universal moral law. This article focuses primarily on the first two, as they offer the most direct tools for evaluating the ethical coherence and moral strength of Corporate Social Responsibility practices.<sup>33</sup>

These principles sharply contrast with modern CSR practices that calculate social good in terms of marketing potential, risk mitigation, or stakeholder satisfaction. From a Kantian standpoint, the intention behind an act matters more than its result. A company that donates to a typhoon relief program primarily to boost its brand image does not act ethically, even if the outcome is beneficial. As Kant insists, “A good will is good not because of what it effects or accomplishes, but because of its volition.”<sup>34</sup>

Norman Bowie, a leading figure in applying Kantian ethics to business, reinforces this interpretation. In his seminal work, *Business Ethics: A Kantian Perspective*, Bowie argues that corporations have a moral duty to treat stakeholders (employees, consumers, suppliers, and communities) not as instruments of profit, but as moral agents deserving respect.<sup>35</sup> This position directly challenges the economic instrumentalism advocated by Milton Friedman, who notoriously claimed that the sole responsibility of business is to increase profits.<sup>36</sup> However, Bowie’s application

<sup>31</sup> Bowie, *Business Ethics*, 45–48.

<sup>32</sup> Kant, *Groundwork*, 30–45.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>35</sup> Bowie, *Business Ethics*, 62–75.

<sup>36</sup> Milton Friedman, “The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase Its Profits,” *The New York Times Magazine*, September 13, 1970, <<https://www.nytimes.com/1970/09/13/archives/a-friedman-doctrine-the-social-responsibility-of-business-is-to.html>>.

of Kant is not without its limitations. While he urges firms to respect moral constraints, he sometimes accommodates the realities of market pressures. Thus, this article builds upon and sharpens Bowie's stance by pressing a more uncompromising reading of Kant: if profit motives undercut the motive of profit undermines duty, then it must be morally rejected. Since, for Kant, morality is non-negotiable, it follows that duty must be prioritized even if it means rejecting profitable forms of CSR. Even if that means rejecting profitable forms of CSR. For Kant, morality is non-negotiable.

Moreover, this article emphasizes that ethical consistency is not optional. A company cannot promote human rights in its CSR programs while violating labor laws or environmental protections elsewhere. Such contradictions undermine the moral universality required by Kant's theory. As Bowie notes, CSR must "reside in the structure of the corporation's character" and not merely in its public image.<sup>37</sup> Finally, a robust Kantian approach must respond to criticisms of rigidity—the idea that Kantian ethics cannot accommodate the complexities of real-world business. While Kant does not permit moral compromise for convenience, his framework does allow for rational deliberation in the face of competing duties.<sup>38</sup> The answer is not flexibility through relativism, but clarity through principle. In business ethics, this means formulating maxims that treat all stakeholders with equal moral weight, whether profitable or not.

In addition to the *Groundwork*, this analysis draws on the second *Critique* for Kant's account of the fact of reason and the primacy of duty over advantage;<sup>39</sup> on the *Metaphysics of Morals* for concrete duties to others, including the imperfect duty of beneficence and the requirement to avoid misleading advantage in transactions;<sup>40</sup> on "On a Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropy" for the absolute duty of truthfulness, relevant where CSR is deployed as image-management;<sup>41</sup> and on "Perpetual Peace" for the publicity principle, i.e., the idea that maxims fail when they cannot be publicly avowed without self-defeat.<sup>42</sup> For institutional settings, the Doctrine of Right clarifies obligations about external freedom, rights, and coercion, which is useful when corporate projects implicate communities and the environment;<sup>43</sup> and the Religion essay sharpens Kant's diagnosis of self-deception/rationalization, aligning with how moral agents cloak inclination as duty.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, Kant's Lectures on Ethics and Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View provide an account of moral psychology that clarifies why CSR is vulnerable to ethical distortion. Kant distinguishes duty, which arises from respect for the moral law, from inclination, which refers

<sup>37</sup> Bowie, *Business Ethics*, 138.

<sup>38</sup> Allen W. Wood, *Kantian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 189.

<sup>39</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. and ed. by Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), esp. 5:31–5:42 (the "fact of reason" and primacy of the moral law).

<sup>40</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Doctrine of Right (6:230–6:313) and Doctrine of Virtue (6:379–6:494), on external rights, duties to others, and beneficence.

<sup>41</sup> Immanuel Kant, "On a Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropy," in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. by Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 8:426–8:430.

<sup>42</sup> Immanuel Kant, "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch," in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. by Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), esp. Appendix II on the publicity of maxims (8:381–8:386).

<sup>43</sup> Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, *Doctrine of Right* (6:230–6:313) and *Doctrine of Virtue* (6:379–6:494), on external rights, duties to others, and beneficence.

<sup>44</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, trans. and ed. by Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Book I on propensity to self-deception (6:18–6:30).

to actions motivated by self-interest, emotion, inclination, or advantage.<sup>45</sup> CSR becomes ethically compromised when corporations present actions driven by inclination; such as profit, image, or competitive positioning, as if they were acts of duty.

This confusion enables what Kant calls heteronomy, a condition in which the will is guided by external incentives rather than self-legislated moral law. Since heteronomous action is motivated by contingent interests rather than universalizable principles, it cannot possess genuine moral worth within Kantian ethics.<sup>46</sup> Consequently, when CSR initiatives are shaped by market pressure, reputational incentives, or strategic advantage rather than duty, they fail the Kantian test of moral autonomy and collapse into ethical inconsistency, regardless of their apparent social benefits.<sup>47</sup>

### A Kantian Evaluation of Philippine CSR Practices

Applying Kantian ethics to the CSR practices of major Philippine corporations reveals not only inconsistencies but outright moral failures. According to Kant, an action has moral worth only if it is done from duty, not inclination or strategic benefit. When corporations engage in CSR primarily to enhance public relations or gain regulatory favor, they violate the core Kantian principle of moral intention.<sup>48</sup>

One example is San Miguel Corporation (SMC), whose CSR projects include disaster relief, livelihood programs, and environmental campaigns.<sup>49</sup> While these initiatives appear socially beneficial, their ethical authenticity is undermined by the corporation's involvement in the controversial Bulacan International Airport project, which has displaced communities and disrupted ecosystems.<sup>50</sup> Kant's Formula of Universal Law would ask: can we will a maxim that allows the simultaneous advancement of social good and displacement of vulnerable communities? Clearly not as this. The contradiction collapses under Kant's standard for moral universality.

The Jollibee Group Foundation presents a similarly conflicted case. On the surface, it fosters educational scholarships and agricultural development. Yet, its parent company has faced legal censure for illegal labor contracting practices that violate workers' rights.<sup>51</sup> Kant's Formula of Humanity is clear here: to treat employees as disposable labor rather than as ends in themselves strips them of their moral dignity; it cannot be justified under any categorical imperative. Most striking is the case of Philip Morris Fortune Tobacco Corporation (PMFTC). Its CSR campaigns support education and sustainable farming, yet these efforts are inextricably linked to a product; tobacco, that endangers public health and contributes to addiction.<sup>52</sup> According to Kant, one cannot justify moral wrongdoing by pointing to downstream acts of charity. In other words, no moral "offsetting" can excuse a corporation whose business model is rooted in the exploitation of human weakness.

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<sup>45</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. by Peter Heath, ed. by Peter Heath and J. B. Schneewind (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), on respect, inclination, and practical moral psychology.

<sup>46</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. and ed. Robert B. Louden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), on self-love, prudence, and maxims in ordinary agency.

<sup>47</sup> Bowie, *Business Ethics*, 62–75

<sup>48</sup> Kant, *Groundwork*, 9–10.

<sup>49</sup> Catane and Flora, "Development in an Environmentally Critical Coastal Area."

<sup>50</sup> Sabillo, "Fishermen Displaced."

<sup>51</sup> Depasupil, "Jollibee, Dole Top Violators."

<sup>52</sup> Valencia, "PMFTC Gives Back to Tobacco Farmers."

In the Philippines, CSR is often interpreted as a strategic tool for securing licenses, lobbying political support, or gaining consumer trust. Gabriela Georgescu's 2016 study shows that 70% of Filipino firms engage in CSR primarily to enhance their corporate image, while 60% cite capital growth as a motivation.<sup>53</sup> From a Kantian point of view, this data reflects a disturbing trend: CSR is no longer an act of duty, but an instrument of self-interest. Such instrumentalization erodes any claim to moral legitimacy. As Franz Giuseppe F. Cortez expressed, "Business Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility have become tools for corporate branding and corporate image as more money is poured into the promotion of good acts than into the good acts themselves."<sup>54</sup> If CSR is to have ethical value, it must not be conditional. Companies must not "opt to" behave responsibly; they must recognize that they "ought to," and that this obligation persists even when no one is watching, and no profit is promised.

As shown, each corporate example is backed by documentary evidence (project filings, treaty guidance, laws) plus independent studies (journal articles/technical papers), claims are triangulated and framed as evidence-based ethical analysis—not allegations.

As read through the second Critique, the Metaphysics of Morals, the publicity principle of "Perpetual Peace," and the duty of truthfulness, the cases show maxims that cannot be publicly justified or universalized without contradiction. Therefore, in Kantian terms, such CSR practices are heteronomous: they are guided by external motivations such as profit, public approval, or regulatory advantage rather than by self-imposed moral law. Kantian ethics demands autonomy, acting from duty determined by reason. Heteronomous CSR, even when socially beneficial in outcome, runs contrary to genuine moral responsibility.<sup>55</sup>

### **The Renaissance of CSR: Toward a Kantian Reconstruction**

If CSR is to evolve from public relations strategy to an ethical doctrine, a radical philosophical shift must take place—a Renaissance of CSR grounded in duty, dignity, and moral law. This reconstruction begins by discarding the utilitarian calculus that dominates most corporate decision-making and replacing it with a Kantian ethic that regards people as ends in themselves and moral laws as categorical. For Kant, moral law is not bound by outcome, utility, or convenience. It is a universal demand of reason. In the business context, this means CSR must cease to be an optional goodwill, but it must instead be recognized as a moral necessity, as binding as any law of nature.<sup>56</sup> The reconstruction of CSR considers what companies must do to be morally coherent.

This approach calls for internal transformation at the level of corporate will. Firms must cultivate a disposition aligned with Kant's concept of Good Will; a will that acts from duty, not from consequence.<sup>57</sup> CSR initiatives should emerge not from external pressure or market incentives but

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<sup>53</sup> Gabriela Georgescu, *Patterns of Corporate Social Responsibility in the Philippines: A Case Study of Japanese Companies Operating in the Philippines* (Osaka: Osaka Jogakuin University Graduate School of International Collaboration and Coexistence, 2016), 67–68.

<sup>54</sup> Franz Giuseppe F. Cortez, "Critical Business Ethics: Contributions and Challenges," in *Kritike* 9:2 (2015): 98–117, <[https://www.kritike.org/journal/issue\\_17/cortez\\_december2015.pdf](https://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_17/cortez_december2015.pdf)>.

<sup>55</sup> Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, esp. 5:31–5:42 (the "fact of reason" and primacy of the moral law).

<sup>56</sup> Kant, *Groundwork*, 30.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 9–10.

from an internal recognition of universal moral obligations to workers, communities, and the environment.<sup>58</sup>

Robert A. Montaña writes that CSR must move beyond economic survival and corporate continuance to reflect a genuine love for humankind.<sup>59</sup> He argues that true corporate responsibility is not simply about ensuring businesses remain operationally sustainable but about aligning corporate actions with fundamental moral principles. Integrating Montaña's perspective into this article reinforces the argument that CSR must undergo a paradigm shift. It should depart from performative compliance toward a deeply rooted moral philosophy.

The corporate duty to uphold human dignity must also be unfragmented. A firm cannot claim moral standing if it selectively applies ethics. Caring for the environment while exploiting labor, promoting education while selling addiction. Ethical action, under Kant, must be consistent, universalizable, and principled.<sup>60</sup> Critics may argue that Kant's ethics are too rigid for the dynamic and competitive world of business. However, this critique is a misunderstanding of Kantian ethics. His framework allows for complex deliberation. It simply does not allow for compromise on moral absolutes. As Allen Wood clarifies, Kant does not require inaction in morally ambiguous contexts; he requires that any action taken must be capable of being willed as universal law.<sup>61</sup> In other words, moral flexibility must never excuse moral hypocrisy. Similarly, Bowie insists that a Kantian business must not merely respect the law or obey market logic—it must embody an ethical character. CSR is not a checklist, but a corporate virtue, cultivated over time through principled action and rational deliberation.<sup>62</sup> This article clarifies and extends Bowie's work by emphasizing that such a transformation requires moral universality, not just stakeholder inclusion.

To set this Renaissance in motion, businesses must ask Kantian questions which are simple, yet demanding: 1) *Can this policy be applied consistently to all without contradiction?* 2) *Does it respect the dignity of every person affected?* 3) *Is it pursued because it is morally right, or merely because it is advantageous?* Only when companies answer these questions with moral clarity and not marketing polish, will CSR be reborn not as a symbol, but as substance—reconstructed as an ethical duty rooted in good motive or good will. For CSR to undergo a true renaissance, businesses must move beyond symbolic gestures and recognize ethical responsibility as a duty rooted in right intention.

### **Ethics in Tension: The Fraud Triangle and the Kantian Response**

Auditing and forensic accounting often rely on the Fraud Triangle to explain why ethical lapses occur within corporations. Developed by criminologist Donald Cressey, the model suggests that most fraudulent actions arise from the convergence of three factors: pressure (often financial), opportunity (the chance to act without detection), and rationalization (the internal justification of wrongdoing).<sup>63</sup> Though born in empirical auditing, the fraud triangle can be reinterpreted

<sup>58</sup> Bowie, *Business Ethics*, 62–75.

<sup>59</sup> Robert A. Montaña, "Corporate Sustainability and Responsibility 2.0: Moral Foundations and Implications," in *Kritike* 11:1 (June 2017): 108, <[https://www.kritike.org/journal/issue\\_20/montana\\_june2017.pdf](https://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_20/montana_june2017.pdf)>.

<sup>60</sup> Kant, *Groundwork*, 37–38.

<sup>61</sup> Wood, *Kantian Ethics*, 192–204.

<sup>62</sup> Bowie, *Business Ethics*, 138–142.

<sup>63</sup> Donald R. Cressey, *Other People's Money: A Study in the Social Psychology of Embezzlement* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1973), 30–33.

philosophically—as a diagnostic of moral collapse that reflects the absence of Kantian duty and moral reasoning within organizational life.

**Pressure vs. Duty.** The first vertex, pressure, reflects external or internal incentives to compromise ethics. It includes hitting quarterly earnings, retaining investors, or surviving in a competitive market. In Kantian terms, these represent heteronomous motivators: they come from outside reason and are therefore morally irrelevant.<sup>64</sup> The good will, Kant insists, acts from duty alone, not from compulsion, fear, or self-preservation.<sup>65</sup> When corporate decisions are driven by pressure rather than principle, the moral will is already corrupted—even if no fraud occurs.

**Opportunity vs. Moral Law.** The second vertex, opportunity, refers to weak oversight or loopholes that make unethical behavior possible. Kant, however, rejects the idea that people do good only when watched. Morality must stand independently of surveillance. What matters is not that one is caught, but that one's action is aligned to the universal law.<sup>66</sup> In a Kantian perspective, “lack of detection” is never a moral excuse, because duty is never conditional. Here, the fraud triangle reveals how absence of internalized moral law, and not merely enforcement creates space for wrongdoing.

**Rationalization vs. Autonomy.** Finally, rationalization is the most philosophically disapproving. It is the self-deception that enables immoral acts to masquerade as justified; “I’m underpaid,” “everyone does it,” “it’s just a bonus round.” These statements signify a failure of judgment and moral autonomy. According to Kant, the rational agent must legislate for herself in accordance with universal moral law.<sup>67</sup> When individuals or firms deceive themselves to permit unethical behavior, they forfeit autonomy and become enslaved to inclinations.

Thus, the Fraud Triangle does not just explain unethical behavior, it diagnoses the erosion of the Kantian moral self. Each vertex signals a departure from duty: pressure replaces principle, opportunity replaces conscience, rationalization replaces autonomy. In globalized markets, unethical rivals may achieve temporary advantages, but such advantages are contingent upon precisely the heteronomous pressures: rationalization, regulatory arbitrage, and moral compromise. Therefore, it increases the systemic risk and eventual collapse of the company.<sup>68</sup>

Analyzed against the Philippine cases, the Fraud Triangle track corporate moral failure. First, for SMC or NMIA (New Manila International Airport), pressure appears as nation-building and growth imperatives; opportunity emerges in complex regulatory regimes and asymmetries of expertise; rationalization is framed as “greater-good” infrastructure logic. Second, for Jollibee, pressure takes the form of cost control in a thin-margin QSR (Quick Service Restaurant)<sup>69</sup> sector; opportunity exists in multilayered contracting ecosystems; rationalization leans on industry practice

<sup>64</sup> Kant, *Groundwork*, 13–14.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>68</sup> Cressey, *Other People's Money*, 30–38.

<sup>69</sup> The Quick Service Restaurant (QSR) sector includes companies such as fast food and fast-casual restaurants that offer quick, easy, and reasonably priced meal service with a small menu and short wait times. Counter service, drive-thru, takeout alternatives, uniform procedures, and an emphasis on speed are important features to accommodate clients with hectic schedules.

and flexibility narratives; backgrounded by DOLE's (Department of Labor and Employment) 2018 findings.<sup>70</sup> Third, for PMFTC (Philip Morris Fortune Tobacco Corporation), pressure is inherent to an addiction-based revenue model; opportunity persists where enforcement gaps remain; rationalization is voiced via adult-choice and harm-reduction storylines. Yet, as mentioned, article 13 of WHO FCTC treats tobacco CSR publicity as advertising. None of these rationalizations can be universalized as a moral law.

Based on these, the triangle's pressure–opportunity–rationalization pathologies are, from a Kantian standpoint, symptoms of heteronomy: reasons for action grounded in inclination, expedience, or image rather than duty. When public-facing CSR proceeds alongside displacement risks, unlawful contracting practices, the marketing of inherently harmful products, and commodifying addiction, the maxim guiding action cannot pass the tests of Universal Law or Humanity. Kant therefore reclassifies these CSR displays from “commendable benevolence” to performative contradiction.

### *Practical Implication: A Kantian Reorientation*

A truly ethical corporate culture must not only guard against fraud but cultivate duty, replace rationalizations, and promote decision-making that withstands universalization. This transforms compliance into character. Internal controls must be matched by moral education, while policy audits must be paired with categorical self-scrutiny. As Kant wrote, “In law, a man is guilty when he violates the rights of others. In ethics, he is guilty if he only thinks of doing so.”<sup>71</sup> CSR initiatives should therefore not merely be monitored; they should be moralized. Embedding Kantian ethics into corporate training, governance, and strategic vision can make CSR not just performative but principled. If the fraud triangle reveals the structural absence of ethics, the Kantian moral framework provides the architecture for its return.

## **Conclusion**

We live in an era where morality is marketed, and responsibility is reputation-managed. CSR, when driven by image rather than principle, risks becoming a theatrical gesture—public, polished, but ethically hollow. Kant offers a counterculture: do what is right because it is right. Not for tax breaks, not for shareholder meetings, not for headlines. CSR must be duty, not decor. This paper has argued that CSR rooted in utilitarianism and stakeholder theory, though practical, lacks the moral rigor required by Kantian ethics. A Kantian reconstruction does not offer shortcuts; it offers a compass. And that compass always points to duty. The road to moral business is not paved with optics, but with intention. And in that spirit, CSR must be reborn. Not as a mere performance, but as a principle.

CSR, as practiced today, staggers between performance and principle, often falling squarely into the former. Behind the publicized donations and sustainability pledges, many corporations continue to operate within frameworks driven by self-interest, branding calculus, and instrumental reasoning. Such practices violate not only the spirit but the letter of Kantian moral philosophy, which demands that ethical action stem from duty and be governed by universally valid maxims.

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<sup>70</sup> Ferdinand Patinio, “Jollibee tops list of firms engaged in labor-only contracting: DOLE,” in *Philippine News Agency* (May 28, 2018), <<https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1036679>>.

<sup>71</sup> Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 18.

This article has argued for a Kantian reconstruction of CSR; one that rejects the idea that ethics must bend to market utility. Drawing from Immanuel Kant's Good Will, Categorical Imperative, and Formula of Humanity, and building upon the work of Norman Bowie, it has shown that CSR, to have genuine moral worth, must arise from an unconditional obligation to human dignity and rational autonomy.

The cases of San Miguel Corporation, Jollibee Group Foundation, and PMFTC illustrate the ethical contradictions that arise when CSR is deployed as reputation management rather than as moral responsibility. These are not outliers but symptoms of a broader performative trend in global business ethics, where doing good is increasingly framed as an investment, not an imperative. Critics of Kant may caution against his rigidity in the context of real-world commerce, yet Kant's ethics offer not rigidity but clarity. As Allen Wood notes, Kant provides "a compass, not a script." It is this moral compass. Anchored in reason, duty, and consistency that businesses today most desperately lack.

The incorporation of the Fraud Triangle further underscores how CSR breakdowns often arise from a deeper failure to internalize ethical principles. When pressure, opportunity, and rationalization converge, what is lacking is not just compliance, but character. The very kind that Kant's moral law is designed to cultivate.<sup>72</sup> Thus, I have with hope, that Dr. Cortez' words shall resonate, "Thus, those who will teach Business Ethics and Social Responsibility must create opportunities and look for small pockets and openings when and where an alternative approach may thrive."<sup>73</sup>

As such, when critics say Kant is too "idealistic" for business, perhaps what they really mean is: he makes it harder to hide behind results. And that, Kant would say, is exactly the point. CSR does not need to be efficient to be ethical; it needs to be intentional. Kantian ethics does not deny the value of impact. Instead, it demands that the impact begins with principle, not performance because a Renaissance of CSR is not a return to charity but to ethics. It is the recognition that companies, like individuals, are moral agents. Hence, they are bound not by what profits demand, but by what reason commands. To achieve what this paper calls the Renaissance of CSR, businesses must abandon the illusion that doing good is optional, flexible, or conditionally strategic. Ethics must no longer be an appendage; it must be the architecture. The categorical imperative must not merely guide public statements, but it must govern silent decisions.

The article systematically dismantles the objection that "prioritizing ethics over profit will render business unviable" by reframing the very premise of that objection through Kantian ethics. Kantian ethics does not prohibit profit as it demands that profit be earned ethically. The Kantian reading of the Fraud Triangle shows that when profit becomes the supreme value, it enables rationalization, pressure, and opportunity—the conditions that breed ethical failure, corruption, and fraud. However, it does not deny the importance of profit. Additionally, it demonstrates that profit without duty leads to collapse: in culture, in credibility, and sometimes in criminal law. To prioritize ethics is not to abandon profit. It is to earn it with honor. In this moral vision, CSR is not a choice corporations make to be admired. It is a duty they must fulfill to be human. To act ethically is not to

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<sup>72</sup> Cressey, *Other People's Money*, 30–35.

<sup>73</sup> Cortez, "Critical Business Ethics," 114.

rise above business; it is to humanize it. Let the market chase appearances. Let the moral company pursue something rarer: the good will.

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## Re-threading the Terrains of Filipino Identity through the Native Canopies

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**Abstract:** This article interrogates the Filipino ontological constructs of *kapwa*, *pakikipagkapwa*, and *loob*, tracing their genealogical and philosophical provenance to elucidate pre-colonial articulations of selfhood and sociability; and thus, contends that Filipino identity is best understood not through colonial nomenclature, but through the recuperation of indigenous ontological constructs. The author argues that the concepts of *kapwa* (shared self), *pakikipagkapwa* (relationality), and *loob* (interiority) constitute a pre-colonial “native canopy” that continues to provide the architectural scaffold for Filipino subjectivity. Through the prism of *Bayanihan*, conceptually contiguous with *bayani*, *bagani*, *berani*, and *wani*, the study foregrounds the axiological and relational frameworks endemic to Austronesian epistemologies, which predate colonial interpellations. The paper proceeds by first critiquing colonial narratives of “primitivism” before examining archaeological evidence, such as the *Manunggul Jar* and *Balangay*, to establish a maritime-based epistemology of interconnectedness. The author then reinterprets the *Sandugo* (blood compact) as a sacred covenant of *kapatiran* (brotherhood) among equals, rather than a ritual of surrender. Finally, the study traces the trajectory of these indigenous values into the contemporary praxis of *kabayanihan* (communal heroism). The scope focuses on Austronesian genealogical roots to offer a significant philosophical framework for modern national identity. By recuperating these indigenous epistemic formations, the paper seeks to reconstruct a decolonized Filipino subjectivity, rearticulating the *kapwa-loob* nexus and examining the continued operationalization of *kabayanihan* within contemporary sociocultural praxis.

**Keywords:** *bayanihan*, *bagani*, *bayani*, *kapwa*, *loob*

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### Introduction

The question of Filipino Identity is a very polarized subject to discuss, or even touch because, due to several factors, we have no unified and consensual ontologico-existential standard that will serve as the architectural scaffold of (national) Identity. Teodoro Agoncillo, a renowned historian, believed that we lack a singular, unified history. Our past is fragmented, with the histories of Caviteños, Ilocanos, Bisaya, Bicolanos, and others existing in isolation, each developing largely apart, reflecting the deep regional divides within the archipelago. This motto of

‘nation/identity building’ was only triggered because of and after the execution of Gomburza in Bagumbayan. Our islands are packed with many cultures, ethnic groups, languages, religion, etc.<sup>1</sup>

Today, our sense of national identity and participation in nation-building remains relatively shallow, partly as a legacy of the nineteenth-century Eurocentric project of nationalism, which originally sought to justify wars in the name of the nation. This fragility is further compounded by persistent economic challenges, while our approaches to nationhood often mirror the patterns set by America. Whether it is a product of past colonial rules/cultural imperialism or of the natural familial belongingness of the Filipinos, it is certain that we are mostly cornered by the question of what makes us Filipinos.<sup>2</sup> This question starkly contradicts the identity created by centuries of foreign narratives, often loaded with bias and prejudice. In the pre-colonial Philippines, the archipelago has often been described by foreign observers as “backward” compared to other parts of the Far East, lacking organized political structures and governed through fragmented, localized communities. Colonizers have often described the people of the Philippine Islands as lacking “*elaborate political organization*.”<sup>3</sup>

In his *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*, Antonio de Morga explicitly hinted at the inferiority and being backwards and ‘heathens’ (*gentilidades*); that prior to conversion, we are in a state of ‘darkness’ brought by our ‘pagan religions.’

Sujetadas las islas, con la soberana luz del santo Evangelio, que en ellas entró, se bautizaron los infieles, desterrando las tinieblas de su gentilidad, y mudaron sus nombres en el de cristianos. Y dejando también las islas el que tenían (2), tomaron (con la mudanza de ley y bautismo de sus Naturales) el nombre de Islas Filipinas, en reconocimiento de las grandes mercedes que recibieron de la Magestad de Filipo segundo nuestro señor; en cuyo felice tiempo y gobierno, fueron conquistadas (3), favorecidas y regaladas, como obra y hechura de sus reales manos.<sup>4</sup>

What de Morga appeals here, to the *lector* specifically, is to portray Spain as a savior and bringer of light and organized political system under the Spanish Royal hands. As an important piece

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<sup>1</sup> See Ferdinand Blumentritt, *An Attempt at Writing a Philippine Ethnography*, trans. by M.N. Maceda (Marawi City: Mindanao State University, 1980), originally published in 1882. N.B.: It was during the 19th century that another classification of the people of the Philippines came into being, this time divided into Negritos, Proto-Malays (or Indonesians), and Deutero-Malays (or Malays). Among the principal proponents of this classification were J. Montano in 1886 and F. Blumentritt in 1882.

<sup>2</sup> Niels Mulder, “Filipino Identity: The Haunting Question,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 32:1 (2013): 55–80; 57-59. N.B: For the readers who find the question of identity would really benefit from delving into the works of national heroes such as José Rizal and Emilio Jacinto, for pretty important proponents of the topic at hand. However, for this discussion, the author have chosen to temporarily leave out their contributions to instead delve into redefining Filipino identity through the most prominent cultural concept of *Pakikipagkapwa*, seen through the lens of Bayani/Bagani.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A Short History of the Far East* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1946) 277-278.

<sup>4</sup> Antonio de Morga, *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* (París: Librería de Garnier Hermanos, 1890), 30. Translation: After the islands had been subdued by the entry there of the conquering light of the holy Gospel the heathen were baptised, the darkness of their paganism was banished, and they changed their names for Christian ones. The islands, also, abandoned their old name, taking (with the change of religion and the baptism of their inhabitants) the name of Philippine Islands<sup>1</sup>, in recognition of the great favours received from his Majesty Philip the Second, our lord, in whose happy reign and under whose government they were conquered, protected and favoured as a task accomplished by his own royal hands.

of history, many of its aspects predominantly reflect a Eurocentric view, wherein native societies are represented as being more primitive. The book perfectly explains the technologies, governance, and culture of Filipinos that subtly shapes the thoughts of the readers that Filipinos are ‘inferior’ to the Spanish civilization. This colonial misrepresentation and cognition that our ancestors are inadequate reflects through how we view ourselves up until today.

In this sense, the *Doña Victorina Syndrome* is an embodiment of the enduring legacy of sustained low self-esteem or self-contempt embedded in centuries-long colonization and internalized foreign values. Named after a character in José Rizal’s *Noli Me Tangere*, Doña Victorina embodies the tragic mentality of those who abandoned their identity for installed ideals-thoughts. This is exemplified in her distaste of her skin color and her marriage with a white Spaniard for the sake of social promotion. This syndrome manifests through doubting one’s capabilities for achievement, tendencies of belittling, lack of mutual respect, and the failure to utilize rich cultural resources. All these contribute, in turn, to the underdevelopment of Philippine society since these negative self-perceptions impede the growth of individuals and collectives.<sup>5</sup>

Given these, the *hermeneutical rearticulation*—the ongoing process of reinterpreting and reshaping the Filipino sense of self in response to evolving realities—that the author, and many others historians and scholars alike, have been committed to do ever since will be the serving defense frontier as to why this study is important.

## Rethinking the word “Filipino”

When getting a balanced framework of the Filipino, one should ask, “*where do we begin?*” For now, the laying of historical and archaeological facts is necessary.

Ruy López de Villalobos on November 1, 1542, sailed from Barra de Navidad, equivalent to modern-day Mexico, for an expedition to the Philippine Islands. Under this voyage, Villalobos named the islands “Felipinas,” in honor of the Crown Prince, Don Felipe of Spain, who would later ascend the throne as King Felipe II. This appellation was conferred circa 1543. In Antonio de Morga’s *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*, Villalobos originally gave the name to some various islands, the appellation “Felipinas.” Eventually this name spread to the whole archipelago.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, one should be careful enough to clarify that Ferdinand Magellan did not “discover” the Philippine Islands—they had already been there long before his arrival in 1521. This kind of claim shows a Eurocentric and imperialistic mentality favored towards European narratives, living through the rich heritage and lifestyle of the indigenous peoples. Indeed, as Teodoro Agoncillo emphasized,<sup>7</sup> one should understand that Magellan *came* to the Philippines, highlighting

<sup>5</sup> Felipe M. De Leon Jr., “Defining the Filipino through the Arts: From Specialistic Innocence to Participatory Consciousness,” in *Philippine Humanities Review* 13:1 (November 2015) 3-41; 19-20.

<sup>6</sup> Antonio de Morga, *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*, 4; 256. Luzon, Mindoro, Tendaya, Capul, Burias, Mazbate [Masbate], Marinduque, Leite [Leyte], Camar [Samar], Ybabao, Sebu [Cebu], Panay, Bohol, Catenduanas [Catanduanes], Calamianes, Mindanao and others of less renown.

<sup>7</sup> Antonio C. Hila, “The Filipino Point of View in Historical Interpretation as Articulated by Teodoro A. Agoncillo,” in *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review* 2:1 (May 2001) 111-138; 114-115. N.B.: Agoncillo jocularly used to criticize the statement that Magellan “discovered” the Philippines, labeling it a colonial point of view promoted by Spanish

that there were already societies and flourishing traditions existing on the islands. That is the opposite of a heretofore largely hegemonic historical discourse about these people, which often minimized the supposed agency of colonized people in favor of magnifying imperial achievements.

The very word, however, that is supposedly meant to encompass the identity under scrutiny in this debate—and indeed in many debates preceding it—is not something of our making. It is a heritage of colonialism and oppression. This original disjuncture, this vast and unsurpassable chasm between the imposed name and the people it is meant to describe, raises the question of whether it even can be totally bridged. Teodoro Agoncillo's *History of the Filipino People* might be of a great help with regards to resolving an insurmountable problem. In the seventh section of the second chapter, "From Indio to Filipino," Agoncillo starts off with the Ilustrados in Paris, who, in October 1889 signed their names as "*The Filipinos*" and addressed their statement to "*Our Dear Mother Country, Spain*."

When a people is gagged; when its dignity, honor, and all its liberties are trampled; when it no longer has any legal recourse against the tyranny of its oppressors, when its complaints, petitions, and groans are not attended to; when it is not permitted even to weep; when even the last hope is wrested from its heart; then. . .! then. . .! then. . .! it has left no other remedy but to take down with delirious hand from the altars the bloody and suicidal dagger of revolution!<sup>8</sup>

A nomenclature demands a reclaiming of identity while at the same time suggests the lengthy struggle that would be hooked up to its colonial roots. Reclaiming the Filipino identity is something born out of resistance and historical rupture. Nonetheless, the question of identity is more than mere labels; indeed, it points to an existence of values in competition with the current conditions and treatment—in short, *a la* state of *ontological deprivation*. Whether this hidden essence lies in the *pakikipagkapwa* or is in some other ideal that the Ilustrados and revolutionaries sought to revive and propagate is something that must, prior to tackling *bayani*, come up later. Despite these complexities, the past and recent efforts to rename the country from Philippines to Maharlika, historically referring to the noble or warrior class in pre-colonial Philippines, proves that perhaps the project of identity is still alive today. However, it also proves how such discourse can be perceived and/or manipulated, depending on one's political affiliations, as a form of political "rehabilitation."<sup>9</sup>

Is it then proper to claim that Filipinos have an innate epistemic faculty to domesticate foreign elements, may it be symbolic, cultural, or material, from being something unmistakably our own, even when the latter came from an adversary? Consider, for instance, the culinary culture today that is mixed both from Asia and Europe, or festivals like the Ati-Atihan which are a mix of

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chroniclers to point out Spain's magnificence. He argued that the Philippines had already been known to many Asian nations long before the coming of Magellan, and contested the claim by Gregorio F. Zaide of "rediscovery" was even more wrong because it postulated a miraculous re-emergence of the islands. Agoncillo proposed instead: it would be more correct to say that Magellan and the Spaniards simply came to the Philippines in 1521, reflecting a more authentic Filipino view of history instead of the glorified Spanish narrative.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *History of the Filipino People; Eighth Edition* (Quezon City; R. P. Garcia Publishing Co., 1990) 102. N.B.: The repetition of "then...! then...! then...!" builds a powerful crescendo, signaling that when all avenues for peaceful redress are closed, the only option remaining is revolution; it rather frames revolution as the tragic, yet inevitable consequence of extreme tyranny.

<sup>9</sup> Ana Roa Ramos and Marlon Ramos, "What's in a Name? 'Maharlika' Evokes Time of Mythmaking," *INQUIRER.net*, December 4, 2022, <<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1701010/whats-in-a-name-maharlika-evokes-time-of-mythmaking>>.

Christianity and native practices, and so on. As the Venetian Scholar Antonio Pigafetta recounted in his observations of the early encounters with Raja Humabon's wife Hara Humamay (baptized as Juana):

While the priest was dressing, I showed her an image of Our Lady, a very beautiful child Jesus made of wood, and a cross; thereupon, she was seized with contrition, and, weeping, asked for baptism... She asked us to give her the little child Jesus to keep in place of her idols; and then she went away.<sup>10</sup>

The journal shows how quickly the image was integrated into their spiritual practices, suggesting a form of *syncretism* between indigenous and Catholic beliefs. This depicts that, in the Philippines, culture, religion, and identity are fluid or adaptive and continually shaped rather than static. This fluidity of religion and culture opened and expanded the possibility of altering the indigenous religions. For this purpose, the author will attempt to retell this story of history as we continue the discussion about our identity.

*Sigaw sa Pugad Lawin* epitomizes the Filipino ability to reclaim identity, where the fight against Spanish rule turned a foreign imposition into a rallying cry for national unity and self-determination. For over three centuries, the lives of Filipinos were influenced by Spanish colonialism, creating a lasting narrative of oppression. This call for rebellion was not just an outburst of anger but a powerful declaration of Filipino independence and dignity. By tearing their cedula, Bonifacio and the Katipuneros boldly rejected the idea of Spanish "motherhood" over the Philippines. This act shattered the illusion that Spain was a caring protector, revealing a painful reality: Spain was a conqueror, thriving on the labor and submission of a people deprived of their rights and humanity.

Moreover, this rebellion also redefined the Filipino idea of heroism, or *kabayaniban*, shifting it from mere submission to a selfless commitment to the common good. True heroism was no longer about appeasing foreign powers but about standing up for one's people, willingly facing hardship to secure freedom for all. As the document highlights, a hero responds to the cries of the oppressed, not for fame or reward, but out of genuine and enduring love for the nation. By heeding this call, the Katipuneros illuminated a path of hope and resistance, encouraging their fellow Filipinos to believe in their own strength and take pride in their cultural and national identity. This act, therefore, served a dual purpose: reclaiming both the people's dignity and their right to self-determination, igniting a revolution that would reshape the concept of Filipino heroism for generations.

The adage "History is written by the victors" highlights how historical accounts, especially those concerning our ancestors, are often shaped by Eurocentric perspectives. Such narratives were crafted to glorify European conquerors and their empires. It emphasizes the daring exploits of circumnavigators and portrays colonial expansions as heroic achievements, while marginalizing the experiences and voices of the colonized. As such, History is inherently subjective, shaped by the author, the era, and prevailing political forces. This makes constructing a precise genealogical mapping of our past challenging, yet not impossible, requiring careful interpretation and critical engagement with available sources. Before written records could be made, oral traditions also served

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<sup>10</sup> Antonio Pigafetta, *The Voyage Round the World (1519–1522) An Account of Magellan's Expedition*, ed. and intro. by Theodore J. Cachey Jr. (London; The Hakluyt Society, 2011) 50.

to pass on history, laws, epics, songs, and chants within pre-colonial societies. It was the community oracles, or *babaylans*, who played the central role in this undertaking within a certain *datu's nasasakupan* (chieftain's subjects). Though the Austronesian ancestors left behind few written records, some artifacts—that are mute and void of text, except perhaps for heavy meanings—carry ideas. These may indeed encapsulate what Filipino identity is, which written history alone cannot achieve. For now, I leave you the less-popular Manunggul Jar. A burial jar with a cover featuring a *bangka* (boat or ship) with two souls aboard the boat, the one steering while the other sitting in a position of a corpse.<sup>11</sup>

## Maritime and Relational Ontologies

### *Manunggul Jar*

The Manunggul Jar is one of the most extraordinary Neolithic artifacts unearthed in 1964 from the Tabon Cave Complex in Lipuun Point, Palawan, a testament to the profound symbiosis between pre-colonial Filipino artistry, cosmological beliefs, and ritual practices.<sup>12</sup> Its profundity lies not merely in its form but in the esoteric cultural narratives it encodes, revealing a civilization imbued with sophisticated spiritual and metaphysical ideations. The jar is unparalleled in artistic skill, and in its expression of Austronesian religiosity, maritime culture, and funerary customs. The Manunggul Jar is, in Robert Fox's analysis, an introduction into Philippine archaeology that is innovative, an isolated object representative of a Southeast Asian funerary aesthetic. In opening a passage for the soul to the transmundane, the lid of the jar decoratively represents a "*ship-of-the-dead*" in a manner most intimately tied to maritime culture<sup>13</sup> (perhaps this is why we refer to corpses as *yumao*; departed, as if they are in a state of journey). The figures, posed to evoke current ethnographic burial traditions, are testament to a continuity of mortuary practices from ancient to modern. The folded arms of the figures, their banded heads, and the precisely carved boat all come together to form a complex visual allegory for death: *a maritime voyage*.

Thus, the vessel stands as a dialectic between the material remains of the deceased and the immateriality of the soul, navigating its way through the liminal waters of the afterlife. Additionally, it captures our way of life connected and not divided by the vast waters of our archipelago. This maritime culture was salient within prehistoric Southeast Asia and is highlighted by the boat motif of the jar. The sea was not just a physical feature, but an existential axis of life, trade, and communication. Austronesian-speaking peoples developed a proto-maritime culture that allowed such expansive migrations across the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Thus, our geographical landscape extended to our metaphysical consciousness. We saw that everything is interconnected, with this binary seen-unseen, material-immaterial, everything should be in harmony.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Robert B. Fox, *The Tabon Caves: Archaeological Explorations and Excavations on Palawan Island, Philippines* (Manila: National Museum, 1970) 112-114. Also quoted in Xiao Chua's, a public Filipino historian, essay entitled *ART AS A VESSEL OF HISTORY: Emotional Reflections on Culture, Nation and the Manunggul Jar*. His projects can be accessed through various platforms such as his personal Wordpress channel and Youtube.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>14</sup> Francisco Alcina, *La historia de las Islas Indios Visayas*, trans. P.S. Lietz, *The Muñoz Text of Alcina's History of the Bisayan Islands 1668*, Part I, Book 3 (Chicago: Philippine Studies Program, Department of Anthropology, [n.d.]), 162,

Furthermore, the Manunggul Jar gives a glimpse into the ontological structures of pre-colonial Filipino *animistic* religiosity, where *kaluluwa* is the rule that governs the transition from life to death (*pagyao*). The intricacy of the design of the jar involves not only the deceased but also the boat as an animate entity, reflecting a cosmology in which human and nonhuman entities are assigned sentience. This animism, far from the reductionist interpretations of Western colonial scholarship, represents a world full of life forces, even when an ordinary boat is somehow coming alive.

Ang paniniwala sa kaluluwa ng mga bagay na likas at likha ay sumasaklaw sa mga Malay na naniniwalang 'tao, mga hayop at ibon, halaman, mga isda at buwaya, mga bato, sandata, pagkain, damit, palamuti, at iba pang obheto' ay may kaluluwa (Skeat 53). Sa gayon, ang bangka ay mayroon ding kaluluwa, at hindi lamang isang sakayan ng kaluluwa tungo sa kabilang buhay sa paggamit nito sa pagliling. Ang buong proseso at ritwal sa paggawa ay nakaugat sa paniniwala sa kaluluwa na nagsisimula sa paniniwalang ang puno na pinagmumulan ng kahoy para sa bangka ay mayroong kaluluwa. Itong kaluluwa ng bangka ang nagbibigay ng mabubuting katangian ng bangka.<sup>15</sup>

This belief in the agency of objects and spirits finds parallel in the funerary practices of several indigenous communities in the Philippines, where rituals surrounding death and burial underscore a deep respect for the natural world. The Manunggul Jar, then, is not merely an artifact of cultural history but a linking object of the *seen* and the *unseen*, encapsulating the indigenous Filipino *ethos* of interconnectedness between the human soul and the natural environment.

Funerary artifacts show a deep maritime culture about our ancestors because they believe that the boat delivers the soul to the afterlife. An example of this is the boat-shaped coffin designs which are popularized in Butuan, Cagayan de Oro, Masbate, and in Cordillera. They believe in the idea that the journey of the soul travels through a boat across the water.<sup>16</sup> These boat-coffins not only serve the purpose of transition into afterlife, but it also indicate that there is respect to nature that is shown with rituals in burial. In company with these boats, grave artifacts often show souls onboard in order to drive the message home between the world of the living and spiritual realm. Further, there is the use of urns or jars and coffins shaped like boats containing bodies—emphasis on their souls is indicated here. Although funerary practices vary in their multicultural and ethnically

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Photoduplication Service, Ateneo de Manila Libraries, Kab. 9. Quoted in Maria Bernadette, "Bangka, Kaluluwa at Katutubong Paniniwala," in *Philippine Social Sciences Review* 57:1 (January 2005) 35-36. N.B.:As Francisco Alcina noted, the rituals of harmony between humans and nature were so abundant that he could not even begin to document millions of superstitions about cutting wood and shaping it. For example, they would count the knots on a piece of wood and determine its placement on the boat, believing this would affect the vessel's fate. Such rituals reflect the deep reverence that early Filipinos had for nature, ensuring that every aspect of their maritime life was aligned with the unseen forces that governed their world. This meticulous attention to natural balance reveals the intricate symbiosis between culture and environment, a testament to how essential harmony was to their very existence.

<sup>15</sup> Maria Bernadette, "Bangka, Kaluluwa at Katutubong Paniniwala," *Philippine Social Sciences Review* 57, no. 1 (January 2005) 35-36. Translation: The belief in the soul of natural and man-made objects encompasses the Malays' view that 'humans, animals and birds, plants, fish and crocodiles, stones, weapons, food, clothing, ornaments, and other objects' possess a soul (Skeat 53). Thus, the boat also has a soul, and is not merely a vessel for the soul to transition to the afterlife during burial. The entire process and ritual of its construction are rooted in the belief in the soul, beginning with the understanding that the tree from which the wood for the boat is sourced possesses a soul. This soul of the boat imparts positive qualities to it.

<sup>16</sup> See Rosa C. P. Tenazas, "The Boat-Coffin Burial Complex in the Philippines and Its Relation to Similar Practices in Southeast Asia," in *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* 1:1 (March 1973): 19, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/29791037>>.

diverse backgrounds, most of them point to a deeper commonality that transcends individual traditions and emphasizes their faith in higher powers and ancestor spirits that continue to watch out for the living. So, this unifying trend in diverse practices is a testament to deep-rooted connections from different communities, reinforcing instead a collective identity grounded in respect for nature and reverence for the dead.

Our maritime identity echoes well *pakikipagkapwa*, vis-a-vis the recognition of shared humanity and interconnectedness between people. In his essay *Loob ng Tao*, Albert Alejo said:

Sa ibabaw ng tubig, ang mga isla ay tila magkakahiwalay, subalit kapag ikaw ay sumisid, lahat pala'y magkakaugnay. Dito nabubunyag ang loob bilang kapwa. Sa pagmamalay sa malalim na kaisahan ng lahat ng tao sa larangan ng loob—dito nakabatay ang posibilidad ng mapaglikhang pagbabago ng daigdig. Gayon din naman, sa pagkawasak ng ganitong pagkakaisa guguhon ang munti mang pag-asa kahit sa pinaka-indibidwal na paninindigan.<sup>17</sup>

This metaphor lights up how our *loob* is not a simple space but a vast, meaningful expanse of connection. Every person's *loob* reflects a bigger community where the essence of *kapwa* shines, deep knowing of being together. Viewed through this prism, we realize that the maritime heritage may itself have embodied some elements of *pakikipagkapwa* through the spirit of exploration and navigation. This serves as a testament of the cultural link between the archaeological past and the ethnographic present.<sup>18</sup> The currents of the sea could unite the lands (and also the unseen) and our collective experiences in creating mutual understanding as a transformation that would breathe creativity into our world.

### *Balangay*

Archeological evidence reveals that although *Homo luzonensis* inhabited the islands 67,000 years ago, it was the Austronesians who were the ancestors of the people who created the maritime culture of the Philippines. They arrived by crossing the vast waters of Southeast Asia and the Pacific in kayaks (*balangay*). This innovation enabled them to establish trade routes, intermarry, and migrate over long distances from the Philippines to Polynesia, even as far as Madagascar and South America.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the Austronesian world became a network of interlinked cultures sharing not only material artifacts but also linguistic and navigational knowledge.

Maritime culture fostered an appreciation for the interconnectivity of the islands and its people. The Austronesians were not only good ship builders but also in the art of stellar navigation.

<sup>17</sup> Albert E. Alejo, "Loob Ng Tao," in *Social Transformations: Journal of the Global South* 6:1 (May 2018): 17, <<https://doi.org/10.13185/2865>>. Translation: On the surface of the water, islands appear to be apart, but if you dive deeper, you will see that they are connected. This is where *loob* is revealed as *kapwa* (my fellow human being). In being conscious of the deep unity among all men in the field of *loob*—the possibility of a creative transformation of the world lies here. In the same manner, in the destruction of this kind of unity, even the slightest hope in even the most individual of commitments also crumbles.

<sup>18</sup> Robert B. Fox, *The Tabon Caves...*, 112.

<sup>19</sup> Florent Détroit et al., "A New Species of *Homo* from the Late Pleistocene of the Philippines," in *Nature* 568:7751 (April 2019): 181–86, <<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-019-1067-9>>, 181, 185. See also Peter Bellwood, James J. Fox, D. T. Tryon, and Australian National University, *The Austronesians: Historical and Comparative Perspectives* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2006).

They named constellations such as Orion's Belt, *malatic*, and the Big Dipper, *bubu*, indicating a worldview deeply embedded in nature and the cosmos. These stellar guides further entrenched their perception of the world as a connected space, with shared experiences and knowledge passed down through generations.

Isa ang bituin sa mga penomena sa langit na pinahalagahan ng mga Pilipino. Binuo nila ang mga talampad o konstelasyon ayon sa mga bagay na pinapahalagahan nila sa buhay. Nakita nila ang hugis ng mga bagay na ito sa mga bituin kaya mula sa lupa at dagat kar ilang iniakyat ang mga ito sa langit. May mga paliwanag sa anyo ng mga mito na nagsasalaysay kung bakit napunta ang mga ito sa langit at kung bakit kumikilos ang tao ayon sa gabay ng mga ito. Habang itinatak nila ang sariling kabihasnan sa langit, naimpluwensyahan naman nito ang kanilang pag-iisip at pagkilos sa lupa.<sup>20</sup>

This advanced navigational and boat-building technology made the Austronesians the true people of the seas centuries before European colonizers arrived in Southeast Asia. The finding of a 1,600-year-old boat in Butuan,<sup>21</sup> as well as other remnants of boats, shows how this technology helped in commerce and diplomacy. One artifact that speaks of this interconnectedness is the Laguna Copperplate Inscription, which gives more evidence of the diplomatic relationship between early Filipino communities and kingdoms as far as Indonesia.

The balangay is not just a watercraft meant for travel but also acts as an adhesive that would bind communities together. On the open seas, stability was the reason for these tight-knit groups or villages and communities that take their names from it. The *barangay*, as it still is used in the local governance units that are found today, originated from this shared maritime heritage. In other words, the boat was literally and symbolically structured as a form of social cohesion.

Since being normally led by a chieftain, the class of balangay structure was very hierarchical to show the roles and tasks in the community at large. The head would be the chieftain or *datu*, an authority with both political and military powers to lead not only the governance but warfare within the community. Beneath the chief were the freemen or nobles who normally acted as advisers and fighters. They took a hands-on role in plundering and protecting their community. Commoners are composed of skilled laborers, fishers, and cultivators who helped to nourish and sustain the economic status of the balangay. Lastly, there are the slaves, or at least those people classified for

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<sup>20</sup> Dante L. Ambrosio, "Balatik: Katutubong Bituin ng mga Pilipino," in *Philippine Social Sciences Review* 57:1-4 (2005): 3. Translation: A star is one of the celestial phenomena valued by Filipinos. They formed constellations based on the things they cherished in life. They saw the shapes of these things in the stars, so they raised them from the land and sea to the heavens. There are explanations in the form of myths that narrate why these things ended up in the sky and why people act according to their guidance. As they imprinted their own civilization in the heavens, it, in turn, influenced their thoughts and actions on earth.

N.B.: For instance, the constellation Orion in the Western world, but differently interpreted by ancient Filipinos. In the center of this figure is a triad of stars: Zeta, Epsilon, and Delta Orionis. Although the ancient Greeks regarded the three stars as the belt of a huntsman, Filipinos considered them as a sharp arrow ready to strike. Other stars that made up the body of the huntsman, Betelgeuse, Bellatrix, Saiph, and Rigel were considered a bow and the sword was the string of the bow. Orion, to the Filipinos was not a man, but an object: an instrument of ballista armed boar trap called *balatik*. This constellation was known generally across the archipelago by similar names, such as balatik for the Bagobos and Tagalogs, *bayatik* for the Mandayas, and belatik for the Manobos.

<sup>21</sup> Jesus T. Peralta, "Ancient Mariners of the Philippines," in *Archaeology* 33:5 (September/October 1980): 47, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41726497>>.

doing menial laboring and working under a master, usually with them trading for protection and for keeping alive.

This highly reflects the *bayanihan spirit*, which, in turn, refers to collective heroism. Regarding its difference from the western notion of heroism, it fundamentally revolves around the concept of cooperation and communal fraternity vis-a-vis *pakikipagkapwa* or *kawanggawa*. Ultimately, the balangay symbolizes more than just seafaring prowess; it reflects the relational culture of cooperation, shared heritage, and the deep ties that bound these island people to one another. In this sense, through their boats, the Austronesians traversed seas but built bridges between cultures for survival and prosperity across the vast Pacific world. The Balangay, as a boat and a symbol, reveals profound insight into the relational culture of our Austronesian ancestors. This connection is not merely metaphorical but very practical, for in the design of the balangay lies the essence of community and collaboration crucial to early seafaring and settlement. The boat itself, made without nails but with wooden pegs, speaks of the complex skills and cooperation that defined the first people of the archipelago. At this point, the ritual of blood compact or *Sandugo* shall be discovered first to expound how balangay(s) can be turned into *bayan(s)*.

### *Sandugo*

The bayan or community or town did not just suddenly appear in pre-colonial Philippines. It is actually a political construct derived from economic units such as the *barangay*, which was primarily familial or clan-based. The *barangay*, which was once considered to be the smallest political unit of the time, is now known by scholars to be a kinship group or economic entity.<sup>22</sup> A *datu* is like a chief who exercises authority over this unitary and extended family unit. However, in cases where various datu are trying to organize a stronger political organization, they would carry out the ritual of *sandugo* or *pacto de sangre*. This group of leaders was said to have forged their brotherhood through cutting their skin and mixing their blood with wine, making a *bayan*, the higher political unit that had a paramount leader that was named a *lakan* or *raja*. Thus, this *sandugo* was more than an alliance; it symbolized an unbreakable fraternal bond between individuals and communities representing a form of shared destiny.

The blood compact (*sandugo*) is an ancient practice. The most profound *pakikipagkapwa* of the Filipinos of old, the *sandugo* is a sacred and strong bond for the greater good of those who have become united by blood. In the old culture, two individuals may have a blood compact in order to become siblings — i.e., cut from the same umbilical cord. It may also be a union among many, to carry out one objective as siblings. The most prevalent kind is the blood compact that seeks to receive a “stranger” or an “outsider” into one’s own group.<sup>23</sup>

This interpretation of bayan as a fraternity further deepens the significance involved in the performance of ritualistic practice of *sandugo*. While it is certainly also an agreement made at some

<sup>22</sup> William Henry Scott, *Barangay: Sixteenth-Century Philippine Culture and Society* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1994), 6.

<sup>23</sup> Ma. Bernadette Abrera, *Ang Numismatika ng Anting-Anting: Panimulang Paghawan ng Isang Landas Tungo sa Pag-unawa ng Kasaysayan at Kalinangang Pilipino* (Lunsod Quezon: Publikasyon Bilang 2, Programang Kaalamang Bayan, Tanggapan ng Dekano, Dalubhasaan ng Agham Panlipunan at Pilosopiya, Unibersidad ng Pilipinas, 1992). See also quoted in Clemen C. Aquino, “Mula sa Kinaroroonan: Kapwa, Kapatiran and Bayan in Philippine Social Science,” in *Asian Journal of Social Science* 32:1 (2004): 105–139, 127, <<https://doi.org/10.1163/15685310432301833>>.

level of political bargain, it takes the form of a pledge sealed in a ritual that is meant to consecrate a kind of trust and loyalty to one another. Also, the *sandugo* was meant to foster peace between *barangays* or tribes, hence the allegiance is made not merely between the two *datus* but between the tribes they represent.<sup>24</sup> Once admitted into this fraternity, one receives not just an allegiance for *datu*, but as brother, to the siblings as well and become bound together in this new *bayan* social structure, bonded by their blood—no less, in ways permanent.

When the Spaniards, led by Ferdinand Magellan and later Miguel Lopez de Legazpi, encountered the *sandugo* ritual, they participated without fully grasping its cultural and deep spiritual implications. Antonio Pigafetta has written about their experiences involving the blood compact, one of which is the celebrated *sandugo* between Legazpi and Rajah Sikatuna in 1565.<sup>25</sup> Sharing blood meant a relationship for native Filipinos, and this meant the acceptance of the Spaniards by the community founded on equality and brotherhood. However, the Spaniards arrived at the ritual with an entirely different mindset: to them, it was an opportunity for solidifying sovereignty over the archipelago. To the Spanish colonizers, the *sandugo* became a seal of domination, not a relation of kinship.

Now, in the solemn ritual, native and foreigner would consecrate the friendship that eluded earlier efforts. But, though blood had blended, minds remained apart. To the Filipino, the blood compact was an agreement between equals, a pledge of eternal fraternity and alliance. In the same instant that Tupas and Legazpi now drained their cups, it was clear on the other hand that to the Spaniard this was a ceremony between victor and vanquished foe. . . .<sup>26</sup>

Just as the Filipino chiefs had extended brotherhood, this was for the Spaniards surrender to their dominion—a precedent that set up many centuries of colonization. John Schumacher notes, the *ilustrados* such as Paterno, Rizal, and Del Pilar would later present this pact as a contract between equals, wherein the Filipinos swore allegiance to Spain. But this was a justifiable cause for Filipinos to pull out of the *pacto de sangre* since Spain did not uphold their side of the agreement, an argument Bonifacio would later use in the 1896 Revolution that the Filipinos were free from Spanish sovereignty.

The true meaning of the *sandugo* was renewed by Andres Bonifacio in the Philippine Revolution. Bonifacio invoked *sandugo* in establishing the *Kataas-taasang Kagalang-galangang Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan* (KKK). He did this symbolically with a similar ritual when initiating new members into the Katipunan; this means uniting (and perhaps renewing) Filipinos and not just political allies to become brothers and sisters from the same country. He wanted to reclaim the term of *sandugo* away from the distorted meaning given to it by colonial usage but instead adapted it as the signification of the common Filipino struggle of freedom from oppression.

<sup>24</sup> William Henry Scott, *Barangay: Sixteenth-Century Philippine Culture and Society* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1994) 156.

<sup>25</sup> Antonio Pigafetta, *The Voyage Round the World (1519–1522) An Account of Magellan's Expedition*, 43, 63–64.

<sup>26</sup> Ferdinand Marcos, *Tadhana: The History of the Filipino People*, vol. 2, part 1: *The Formation of the National Community (1565–1896)* (Manila: Ferdinand E. Marcos, 1976) 45. Quoted in Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr., “The ‘Pacto de Sangre’ in the Late Nineteenth-Century Nationalist Emplotment of Philippine History,” *Philippine Studies* 58:1/2 (2010): 81–82.

The application of *sandugo* by Bonifacio was a manifestation of the national kinship, an imagery for the sense of unison in which Filipinos could be bounded by common blood and dedication to Inang Bayan. For Bonifacio, the blood compact was not only a re-enactment of an ancient tradition but also a symbolic assertion that the Filipino people were bound together by more than mere political expediency—they were siblings in the same fight for freedom.

Gayon man sila'y ipinailalim sa talagang kaugalian ng mga tagalog na sinaksihan at pinapagtibay ang kanilang pinagkayarian sa pamamagitan ng isang panunumpa na kumuha ng kaunting dugo sa kanikanilang mga ugat, at yao'y inihalu't ininom nila kapua tanda ng tunay at lubos na pagtatapat na di mag tatakil sa pinagkayarian. Ytoy siang tinatawag na "Pacto de Sangre" ng haring Sikatuna at ni Legaspi na pinaka katawan ng hari sa España.<sup>27</sup>

In fact, at the core of the *sandugo* ritual are *pakikipagkapwa* and *kapatiran*, the most important Filipino cultural values. *Pakikipagkapwa* is an important Filipino ethic that means relating to others as equals and recognizing common humanity. In the context of the *sandugo*, it means forming a bond of mutual respect, loyalty, and unity-values that shape the interpersonal relations of the Filipinos to this day. Brotherly is the term, the meaning behind *kapatiran*, a kinship amongst Filipinos that extends beyond the blood family to be embraced by those bound by shared struggles and aspirations in communal life. The metaphor extends even to the notion of the *ship of state*, emphasizing unity, cooperation, and collective progress toward a common goal. Today, the values embodied in *sandugo*, *pakikipagkapwa*, *kapatiran*, *bayanihan*!, and the shared journey of Filipinos as one people in the *same boat*, continues to shape the Filipino identity, grounded in deep sense of community, solidarity, and shared destiny.

Meanwhile, *Kalayaan*, or freedom, carries a multi-layered meaning deeply embedded in the psyche of the Filipino. While *kalayaan* was the term used to refer initially to freedom or independence, it had the connotation of wholeness or oneness. As Reynaldo Ileto explained in his *Pasyon and Revolution*,

(Propagandists) like Bonifacio, Jacinto, and perhaps Marcelo H. del Pilar built upon the word *layaw* or *laya*, which means "satisfaction of one's needs," "pampering treatment by parents" or "freedom from strict parental control." Thus, *kalayaan*, as a political term, is inseparable from its connotations of parent-child relationship, reflecting social values like the tendency of mothers in the lowland Philippines to pamper their children and develop strong emotional ties with them. Childhood is fondly remembered as a kind of "lost Eden," a time of *kaginhawaan* (contentment) and *kasaganaan* (prosperity), unless one was brought up in abject poverty or by an uncaring (*pabaya*) stepmother. In "*kalayaan*," revolutionists found an ideal term for independence that combined separation from a colonial ruler (i.e., a mother who showed cruelty instead of love) and the "coming together" of people in the Katipunan. Katipunan is *kalayaan* in that it is a recovery of the country's pre Spanish condition

<sup>27</sup> Andres Bonifacio (attrib.), "Ang Dapat Mabatid ng mga Tagalog," in *Si Andres Bonifacio at ang Himagsikan*, ed. by José P. Santos (Manila: n.pub, 1935), 6–7. In Jim Richardson, *The Light of Liberty: Documents and Studies on the Katipunan, 1892–1897* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2013) 189–190. Translation: The Spaniards, however, were required to follow the custom of the Tagalogs, and to bind their agreement by means of an oath, which consisted of taking blood from each other's veins, and then mixing and drinking it as a token of their sincere and wholehearted pledge not to betray the agreement. This was called the "Blood Compact" of King Sikatuna and Legazpi, the representative of the King of Spain (191).

of wholeness, bliss and contentment, a condition that is experienced as *layaw* by the individual, who is thus able to leap from the “familial” to the “national.”<sup>28</sup>

In this sense, *kalayaan* can also be interpreted in the context of *kaginhawaan*, or well-being, which is closely related to the concept of *layaw*. This quest for *kaginhawaan* expresses a collective dream, an aspiration for society by individuals who can strive there to meet their simple desires free from the inhibitive grip of colonial power. For Bonifacio, *kalayaan* means escaping the cruel mother's frown of the metaphor, a mother, the Spanish regime had been to the Filipinos, who was reluctant to give them even that much comfort emotionally and otherwise. Accordingly, *kalayaan*, individual and collective alike, signifies a regained co-harmony in society—a unity as one's relations are nurtured back like how it was with a mother. This is how Bonifacio has so aptly defined *kalayaan*; under the “light of truth,” this awakening of Filipino consciousness about their inherent dignity and the collective responsibility to forge a nation rooted in unity and mutual care.

### Understanding *Bayani*

Two major concepts in the Filipino indigenous beliefs are *ginhawa* and *kaluluwa*. These two concepts explain what a person is, as well as how well-being exists, in relation to the spiritual realm and its interaction with the living world. In this case, *ginhawa* is in the body (physical well-being), while *kaluluwa* symbolizes the soul (moral well-being), pointing to a holistic worldview in which material and spiritual existence are intertwined. This duality residing in a person's *kalooban* intertwine to the rituals including the *anito* (ancestors' spirits) and *pagpupunas* (rubbing rituals), as applied to the Filipino worldview. In this regard, the person is held to be compounded of two basic parts—the physical or outer body *panlabas* and the inward essence or inner self, *panloob*. On one hand, within the *panloob* rests the *kaluluwa*, a person's source of spirit and moral living. This force governs not just the mind but also stands on good or evil. The body is, on the other hand, believed to have *ginhawa*, a kind of life force allegedly contained in the liver.<sup>29</sup>

*Ginhawa* forms part of physical well-being, which is, broadly speaking, comfort, health, and vitality. Zeus Salazar expresses *ginhawa* as not being free from illness but rather a condition of having a ‘sense of balance, peace, and ability to live fully.’ Filipino people always aim to attain *kaginhawaan*,<sup>30</sup> it is a *teleological endpoint* as in the semantics of existentialism, and this is not the same as *kayamanan* (wealth) but an all-around state of well-being. One may well be rich without experiencing *kaginhawaan*, demonstrating how even the body had to find harmony with the soul.<sup>31</sup>

The connection between the two is very important: it is only when a person's *kaluluwa* finds alignment with righteousness and goodness that *ginhawa* thrives. Whenever the balance of the *kaluluwa* is upset, such as when it becomes distracted or displaced, it brings about illness or

<sup>28</sup> Reynaldo Clemeña Iletto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840–1910* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979) 87.

<sup>29</sup> Zeus A. Salazar, “Faith Healing in the Philippines: An Historical Perspective”, in *Asian Studies* vol. XVIII (Quezon City: UP Asian Center, 1980) 35.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Consuelo J. Paz, ed., *Ginhawa: Well-being as Expressed in Philippine Languages*, in *Ginhawa, Kapalaran, Dalambati: Essays on Wellbeing, Opportunity/Destiny, and Anguish* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2008), accessed October 29, 2024, <<https://infocus.philartsvenicebiennale.org/?p=380>>.

discomfort, usually in children. That realization highlights the traditional Filipino belief that physical health coincides with spiritual health. This worldview explains the grammatical structure of the term "*nausog*" in Filipino indigenous belief, which happens when the *kaluluwa* and *ginhawa* fall out of alignment within the *kalooban*—whether through internal imbalance or the influence of a negative force, the affected individual will become ill.

Who is responsible for bringing *kaginhawaan* to the community, ensuring that the alignment of spiritual and physical well-being is restored? A *bayani*, *berani* in Malay, *wani* in Javanese,<sup>32</sup> or warrior-hero, would bring *kaginhawaan*, a feeling of well-being and prosperity, to his community because of the activities of *pangangayaw*, which is raids against enemy tribes. Decapitating the rival warriors was part of this practice since the *gahum* (power or spiritual force) was believed to reside in the head of the enemy. By leaving home carrying the heads and other booty of war, the *bayani* not only reinstated power in their community but also prestige in its honor. These acts of violence were not devoid of ritual intentions; the warriors prepared spiritually beforehand to justify their mission. The *bayani's* raid must be fair and for rectifying the wrong, a broader sense of moral and social duty.

Tutungo sila sa ibang bayan, mangangayaw o kakayaw—pupugutin ang ulo ng mga kalabang mandirigma. Naroon kasi sa ulo ng mga mandirigma ang gahum o kapangyarihan ng mga ito, at iuuwi ang mga ulong ito at mga kagamitang nakuha sa bayan upang magbigay ng ginhawa, at sa kanilang pagwawagi, nagbibigay sila ng dangal sa bayan. Hindi basta-bastang ginagawa ang pangangayaw ng mga bagani, nagsasagawa sila ng mga rituwal upang maging karapat- dapat ang kanilang misyon. Kumbaga, dapat ito ay makatuwirang pagkilos upang itama ang isang mali.<sup>33</sup>

The *bayani* acted as the defender of the community, and so they practiced *pangangayaw*, or headhunting. Although it was violent, this was claimed to be necessary for gaining the fertility of the land, the reproduction of animals, and the continuation of the lineage of the community. In this respect, then, the *bayani* is not a warrior in the modern, militaristic sense but rather a very vital figure in safeguarding the communal life force, *ginhawa*. It was a sacred duty that was above all acts of bravery: to defend the *bayan* so that the life and well-being of generations could be continued.

The concept of a *bayani* is a multifaceted concept, with each province or local region having unique interpretations and practice through which heroism could be gauged. By broad definition, the term refers to a warrior-leader with valor during fighting and wedded to the defense of the community. Among the Tagalog and Visayan societies, upward mobility for a *bayani* or *bagani* was

<sup>32</sup> Zeus A. Salazar, "Si Andres Bonifacio at ang Kabayanihang Pilipino," in *Bagong Kasaysayan: Mga Pag-aaral sa Kasaysayan ng Pilipinas*, 2 (Lungsod Quezon: Palimbagan ng Lahi, 1997) 8-9. Quoted in Michael Charleston "Xiao" B. Chua, "BAGANI, 1892-1896: Mga Aral Mula kay Rizal Para sa Makabagong Panahon ng Lockdown," in *Kaningningan: An Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Journal of New Era University Center for Philippine Studies* 1:1 (August 2022): 166-181, 167.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Charleston "Xiao" B. Chua, "BAGANI, 1892-1896: Mga Aral Mula kay Rizal Para sa Makabagong Panahon ng Lockdown," in *Kaningningan: An Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Journal of New Era University Center for Philippine Studies* 1:1, 166-181, 168. Translation: They will journey to another village, engaging in raids—decapitating the heads of enemy warriors. This is because the power or authority of these warriors resides in their heads, and they would bring home these heads and the items taken from the village to provide relief. In their victory, they bring honor to their community. The raids of the bagani (warriors) are not done recklessly; they perform rituals to ensure that their mission is worthy. In essence, it must be a justifiable act to correct a wrong.

measured by the number of enemies whom the individual had killed in battle.<sup>34</sup> It was oftentimes the case that such opponents were believed to be of a superhuman nature aided and abetted by deities like *Tagbusan*, god of war. The more enemies a warrior defeated, the higher the warrior was in rank, hence increased respect and honor. These several ranks introduced the title of *manildad* for warriors who had killed one or two enemies. This hierarchy then ascended to *lunugum* for those who would themselves kill enemies within their homes, especially exalted, where this was signified by the observation of black robes/garments.

Regional terms also reflect distinct interpretations. In Maguindanao, the term *barani* specifically referred to bravery and heroism, while in Sulu, *balani* implied courage and inherent worth. Unlike other communities that viewed heroism mainly as martial prowess, some regions placed significant emphasis on *bayani* as a community servant or *lingkod-bayan*, embodying honor, humility, and selflessness.

Hindi siya [ang bayani] uring naghahari at nangingibabaw kundi totoong lingkod-bayan, isang supertaong hindi maaaring magkaiit ng tulong sa sinumang nangangailangan at hihingi nito. Obligado siyang tumulong sa nangangailangan nang walang hinihintay na kapalit.<sup>35</sup>

This societal expectation highlighted that true heroism extended beyond warfare; it also included qualities like wisdom, justice, and the protection of social harmony. The *bayani*, therefore, was not just a warrior but a guardian of cultural values and a model of leadership, crucial in maintaining both the physical and moral well-being of the community.

The *barangay* was formed for an increased production in agriculture for the survival and prosperity of its people. In the organization of Filipino society, therefore, *ginhawa* or *kaginhawaan/kaginhawahan* means not a mere condition of personal comfort but the general view toward the improvement of the total well-being of the community. This communal focus is reflected in the interconnected roles of the *datu* (chieftain), the *babaylan* (priestess), the *panday* (craftsman), and the *bayani* (warrior).<sup>36</sup> Each of these figures had a unique responsibility toward ensuring the overall flourishing of the barangay.

The term *bayani* is deeply rooted in the concept of *layan*, which refers both to the people and the territory they inhabit. Unlike the Western notion of the individualistic hero (*hērōe*), who is celebrated for singular acts of valor and nobility, the *bayani* operates within a collective framework. Central to the *bayani's* identity is that the welfare of the community is not just individualized acts of courage or strength but the ability to contribute towards the common good. It is in this communal

<sup>34</sup> Spanish conquistadors have named certain native groups from the Philippines who bore body graffiti, known as *batik*, which was a mark of victory in wars and honors brought to their clans. In the Filipino context, this has adapted as *batikan*, referring to someone who is an expert or proficient in any endeavor.

<sup>35</sup> Ricardo Ma. D. Nolasco, "Kabayanihan: Ang Salitang Bayani sa Kasaysayan at Lipunan," in *Diliman Review* 45:2-3 (1997): 15. Translation: He [the hero] is not the type who rules or dominates, but rather a true public servant—a superhuman who cannot refuse help to anyone in need who asks for it. He is obligated to assist those in need without expecting anything in return.

<sup>36</sup> Zeus A. Salazar, *Kasaysayan ng Kapilipinuhan Bagong Balangkas* (Lunsod Quezon: Bagong Kasaysayan, 2004), 12-13.

concept of *kabayanihan* that the precolonial setup best exemplifies with all the different societal roles geared toward ensuring the *kaginhawaan* of the entire barangay.

Ang pinakabuod ng lahat ng pagkakaibang ito ay makakatas sa indibidwalismo at preokupasyon ng héroe sa sariling “persona,” kung ihahambing sa bayani na nakapaloob sa kanyang sariling grupo at nakatuon lamang at tangi sa pagpapaibayo ng interes ng grupo...Ang kilos naman ng bayani ay batay sa ugaling bayan, kung saan mas pinahahalagahan ang pagpapakita ng kababaang-loob at ang pagiging katulad lamang ng ibang kasama...<sup>37</sup>

In this regard, *bayani* comes closer to the western term of patriotism than being a hero. Patriotism derives from the Latin *patria* or homeland.<sup>38</sup> It refers to someone who shows care for the betterment of his country and its people. The Filipino *bayani* exhibits the same faith in carrying out action directed to enhance *ginhawa* for the greater good rather than for individual glory. As such, while the *bayani* may turn to warfare or defense, this is a means always to the *bayán*—the land and people.

*Ginhawa*, on the other hand, becomes one of the historical events where Filipinos saw it in a different light. For over three centuries, the Filipinos endured colonial subjugation, which fundamentally disrupted their way of life. In this context, *ginhawa* became a lens through which Filipinos assessed the legitimacy of colonial rule. The Spaniards, claiming to be the bearers of civilization and religion, positioned themselves as the granters of well-being. However, this notion of well-being was often contradicted by the lived experiences of the colonized. In *Gising na mga tagalog!!!* Emilio Jacinto lamented that the Philippines had inherited nothing but enslavement and negation from Spain; hardship and misery, a clear negation of the precolonial sense of *ginhawa*.

....¿Hangang kailan, hangang kailan, mga tagalog, sisikat ang araw ng inyong lakas kasabay ng inyong kaginhawahan? ¡Ay! kung nakikita ang inyong kalagayan, pusu’y nagpuputuk, mata’y nagdidilim, dugu’y kumukulu at kusang napapahaw ang tapat na dibdib:- ¿Diyata, mga kapatid? ¿diyata’t kayo’y mamamalagi na sa ganitong kabulagan at kaalipinan?<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Zeus A. Salazar, “Si Andres Bonifacio at ang Kabayanihang Pilipino,” in *Bagong Kasaysayan: Mga Pag-aaral sa Kasaysayan ng Pilipinas*, no. 2, 36,39. Quoted in Michael Charleston “Xiao” B. Chua, “BAGANI, 1892-1896: Mga Aral Mula kay Rizal Para sa Makabagong Panahon ng Lockdown,” in *Kaningningan: An Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Journal of New Era University Center for Philippine Studies* 1:1, 166-181, 170. Translation: The very essence of all these differences can be distilled into the individualism and preoccupation of the héroe with their own ‘persona,’ in contrast to the *bayani* who is embedded within their own group and focused solely and exclusively on advancing the interests of the collective... The actions of the *bayani*, meanwhile, are based on ugaling bayan (communal custom), where greater value is placed on demonstrating humility and being just like one's fellow companions...

<sup>38</sup> Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *History of the Filipino People*, Eight Edition (Quezon City: Garotech Publishing, 1990), 153. N.B.: Here, Agoncillo translates *bayani* as “patriot” rather than “hero.” In the Katipunan, the third grade, called *Bayani* (Patriot), wore a red mask and a sash with green borders, symbolizing courage and hope. Translation: The essence of all these differences can be distilled from the individualism and the hero’s preoccupation with their own “persona,” in contrast to the *bayani*, who is embedded within their group and solely focused on advancing the group’s interests... The actions of the *bayani* are guided by community values, where humility is emphasized, and being just like any other member of the group is highly valued...

<sup>39</sup> Emilio Jacinto, “¡Gising na, mga Tagalog!!,” October 23, 1895, *Archivo General Militar de Madrid: Caja 5677, leg. 1.83*. In Jim Richardson, *The Light of Liberty: Documents and Studies on the Katipunan, 1892–1897* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2013) 50. Translation: When, Tagalogs, when shall the sun blaze, when shall you be strong and

The *Katipunan* was a revolutionary movement that espoused the tension between colonialism and the Filipino longing for *kaginhawan*. Founded by Andrés Bonifacio in 1892, the movement described the suffering experienced under Spanish rule in the same language of *ginhawa*. In this light, the *bayani* took on a new role as not only the defender of the *bayán* but also as a symbol of resistance against colonial oppression. The revolutionaries of the *Katipunan* appropriated the term *bayani* to refer to those who fought for the liberation of the Philippines.<sup>40</sup> For them, restoring *ginhawa* to the Filipino people meant overthrowing the oppressive colonial regime and reclaiming the autonomy of the *bayán*. Despite these debates, however, one fact persists: the *bayani* is ever and always connected with *bayán's* best interest. In connection with the Philippine Revolution and the notion of *bayani*, all *bayani* strives to ensure there is restoration or improved *ginhawa* for the common good of all people concerned.

This interconnection between the *bayani* and the community is further exemplified in *bayanihan*, a term that, although believed to originate from *bayán*, is linguistically founded on *bayani*. It gives credence to the thought that true communal effort arises from the heroism and solidarity of individuals. *Bayanihan* is said to have derived from the word *bayán*, community or nation, but evidence in linguistics discredits such claim. The term comes from *bayani*. Therefore, etymologically, *bayanihan* connotes the spirit of *bayani* in heroism in unity and solidarity in the performance of communal tasks.

Base sa mga sinaunang diccionario , ang salitang 'bayán' ay cognate o kaangkan ng 'bayani' at 'bayanihan' (Lianes at Veneración 2001:159). Ang 'bayani' ay isang mandirigmang hindi naghihintay ng gantimpala sa kanyang paglilingkod bayan, maliban na lamang sa pagtanggap sa kanya ng kanyang mga kababayan bilang isang marangal na indibidwal (Lianes at Veneración 2001). May kaugnayan din ang salitang 'bayán' sa 'pagbayani,' o sa tinatawag natin ngayong 'bayanihan,' na nangangahulugang pagtulong sa kapwa ng walang hinihinging bayad (Lianes at Veneración 2001). Ang bayanihan ay ang pagtutulong-tulong ng mga magkakapit-bahay upang sa pamamagitan ng kanilang pinagsama-samang lakas ay mairaos kaagad ang isang gawain tulad halimbawa ng paglilipat ng bahay (Lianes at Veneración 20).<sup>41</sup>

While *bayanihan* does not hail from the word *bayán*, its meaning remains the same and deepens with its central thrust on *pakikipagkapwa* and collective action. In *bayanihan*, people are not working for the community but become *bayani* to unite and carry out shared acts of service and help. This reinterpretation frames *bayanihan* as a more beautiful and profound concept, not merely communal work for the *bayán*, but rather as being imbued with the heroic and cooperative spirit of the *bayani*. Thus, it can be concluded that *bayanihan*, both as a heroism and collective endeavor, is oriented towards the good of the other. It has its lexical weight when examined closer with our modern

your suffering end? Ay! Seeing your situation makes the heart burst, the eyes cloud over, the blood seethe, and the righteous breast howl with rage. Is that not so, brothers? Or will you remain blind and enslaved? (52)

<sup>40</sup> See Nicholas P. Cushner, *Spain in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1971) 126.

<sup>41</sup> Praksis Miranda, "Konsepto Ng 'Bayan' Sa Mga Tagalog Na Awiting Liturhikal," in *Philippine Sociological Review* 64:1 (2016): 45–78, 51, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/44211751>>. Translation: Based on ancient dictionaries, the word 'bayán' is cognate or related to 'bayani' and 'bayanihan' (Lianes and Veneración 2001:159). The term 'bayani' refers to a warrior who does not expect a reward for their service to the community, except for being recognized by their fellow citizens as a noble individual (Lianes and Veneración 2001). The word 'bayán' is also connected to 'pagbayani,' or what we now call 'bayanihan,' which means helping others without expecting payment (Lianes and Veneración 2001). Bayanihan involves neighbors working together so that, through their combined efforts, a task—such as moving a house—can be completed quickly (Lianes and Veneración 2001).

philosophy of *kapwa* which, as reiterated by Agoncillo, *bayani* is a patriot, someone who sacrificed the most for the common good and with cooperation.

## From Canopies to Identities

The lexical concepts of *pakikipagkapwa* and *loob*, found in Filipino culture, form foundational building blocks that influence everything ranging from social interaction to individual identity. *Pakikipagkapwa*, loosely translated, refers to engagement with others but says more than recognition of another person—it is rather an action indicative of an intensive recognition of interconnectedness and shared humanity. Unlike the English term “others,” which in its very construction shows a division between self and other, *kapwa*, and *pakikipagkapwa* as the moral actuality of *kapwa* as *potentia*, foregrounds togetherness among self and others and fosters sympathy and sense of community. It makes them see themselves as being part of something more: some kind of social bondage in which one’s welfare is tied to others. It enforces a belief of shared responsibility to tend to one another, knowing that the struggles of one are the struggles of all.

The connotation of *loob* in Filipino culture runs deeper than its reduced contents in Western analyses. Its basic sense of innermost self and emotional depth shows incorporation into numerous psycho-social concepts in Filipino culture. As such, *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) refers to a kind of relational obligation based on kindness or favor, but this is only a part of the greater contents of the concept of *loob*. Other words such as *sama ng loob* (resentment), *kusang loob* (initiative), and *lakas ng loob* (guts) show how *loob* is infinitely useful for putting complex affective states and intersubjective relations into words. The specific connotations of each of these words are not only telling but also deeply related to the Filipino sense of self and social practice. Reducing *loob* to a mere “debt of gratitude” also risks oversimplifying and distorting the richness of Filipino social reality, thereby itself reproducing colonial mindsets that refuse to see the particularism of local customs and values.

In this regard, such understanding of *loob* as an inward/outward/upward movement speaks to the introspective nature of the Filipino spirit: it is the journey that links us to others (*kapwa*) and to *maykapal*, the creator or divine force. This movement, from self, through others, and up to the divine, seems like a maritime reflection of our ancestors. That life itself is merely a continuous voyage, both literal and metaphysical. For instance, the Manunggul Jar has been a striking manifestation of this maritime identity and belief in life as travel. Such a jar, crafted as a burial artifact, is depicted with two figures on a boat, representing the transportation of the dead from this world to the next. This reflects, of course, the seafaring roots of our ancestors and the deep belief that life and death are a cycle towards the divine and the eternal. Moreover, there is the Filipino approach towards death itself in the context of words like *yumao* (the one who has departed) and the more graphic *bangkay* (corpse, which might share etymological roots with *bangka*, boat). The dead “left” or is “like a boat,” suggests that death is not the end but rather a continuation of the journey, a passage from this world to the next, like the figures represented in the Manunggul Jar. This conceptualization of death in some ways reflects a deep connection of the Filipino to the sea as both physical and spiritual frontier. Here, life and death are part of an ongoing cycle of journeys.

Beneath it all lies the historical figure of the *bayani*, which epitomized the substance of altruism and communal duty vis-a-vis *bayanihan* as *kapatiran*. As noted,

(The) bayani is the genteel and harsh knight of the village whose job is to right wrongs or perform revenge on account of another party after the performance of a ritual act.” He may exercise his task either on his own or with only few of his subordinates he commands and answers for. He does not report, however, to any individual official nor citizen. His service is open for anyone citizen-low or high, poor or rich, even a blood kin or not. He cannot decline to perform his office if approached.<sup>42</sup>

The *bayani* epitomizes an ideal example of ‘selfless service’ by representing honor, justice, and communal support values. From this history, given archetype, we see how it calls out to people to act on behalf of others while underlining the responsibility that falls on the shoulders of every individual within that community to defend and care for one another. In this sense, *bayani*’s willingness to share his effort with every citizen, regardless of status, is conducive to the prevalence of *pakikipagkapwa*. Among the social, political, and economic inequality being promoted here is encouraging people to stand up for the marginalized and the oppressed.

This “realm of action” is an important feature in Filipino spirituality, especially with regards to our understanding of self in relation to others and nature. As maritime people, constantly engaging with new environments and other cultures, Filipinos developed a sense of *loob* that is not static but dynamic, capable of adaptation, growth, and responsibility. This concept of *abot-kaya*, to reach or strive in meeting challenges and responsibilities, embodies the virtues and characteristics that attempt to explain why Filipinos can persevere through life’s trying moments, be it the crashing of waves from the literal ocean or the influx of other metaphorical turbulent spaces of life.

*Loob* is lived in the realm of action. If the *loob* that could be seen in the *abot-malay* (ambit or reach of consciousness) and the *abot-dama* (ambit or reach of feeling) is the breadth and depth of my receptivity, in the *abot-kaya* (ambit or reach of strength), I respond to the invitation to responsibility, I answer to the call to make a choice. Here, the breadth of *abot-malay* and *abot-dama* is filled and made whole as *abot-kaya*.<sup>43</sup>

This framework illustrates how the inner self or *loob* manifests in consciousness, emotional responses, and finally, in one’s ability to act with moral responsibility. *Abot-kaya* (or *sa maaabot ng aking makakaya*) is the strength of the individual and the agency able to respond well to the needs of the community, converting awareness and emotions into action. The clear progression from awareness to action talks about what Filipino understanding is all about: this is where social responsibility is not an abstract principle but a lived reality that needs dedication and involvement.

Tied to this notion of *kapwa* is the sense of *loob* or inner self, which in turn stands as a seamless journey inward, outward, and upward-toward the self, others, and the divine. As Mercado puts it:

What is *loob*, *buot*, *nakem* and its other Philippine counterparts? We think that the English translation equivalent is the inner self. This inner self embraces *loob* as the intellect, will, the feelings. They are also

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<sup>42</sup> See Michael Charleston “Xiao” B. Chua, “BAGANI, 1892-1896: Mga Aral Mula kay Rizal Para sa Makabagong Panahon ng Lockdown,” in *Kaningningan: An Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Journal of New Era University Center for Philippine Studies* 1:1 (August 2022): 166–181.

<sup>43</sup> Albert Alejo, “Loob as Relational Interiority: A Contribution to the Philosophy of the Human Person,” trans. Julia E. Riddle and Albert E. Alejo, in *Social Transformations: Journal of the Global South*, May 2018, 34, <<https://doi.org/10.13185/2866>>.

connected to the physical. Kalooban embraces the entire self. It is holistic and interior. It is non-compartmentalized. In other words, kalooban is the inner self.<sup>44</sup>

Understanding *loob* as an inner journey conveys the introspective Filipino spirit, yet it is also a movement that binds us with others (*kapwa*) and to *maykapal*, the creator or divine force. That flow of movement that has been described traditionally as *loob* to self, to others, then to the divine, is parallel to our maritime heritage where we saw life as a full-time voyage, literal and metaphysical. The 'Manunggul Jar' is a strong statement of this maritime identity and of the belief of life as a journey. The burial artifact is this jar, where two figures are shown on a boat, in which the deceased must travel from this world into the next world. This reflects not only the sailing roots of our ancestors but also their deep-rooted belief in the cyclical nature of life and death, a passage toward the divine and the eternal. When the individualistic and competitive forces of society threaten to overwhelm it, *pakikipagkapwa* and *loob* present a different narrative for the meaning of community and collective well-being. They encourage people to look beyond their personal interest, invite them to get deep involvement with others, share their burden, and rejoice in their happiness. Once these values are embraced by the Filipinos, they can cultivate an understanding and cooperative environment that leads to a more compassionate and inclusive society.

## Conclusion

For too long, the story of the Filipino has been told through the eyes of others, narratives that often painted our ancestors as "primitive" or "lost" until foreign intervention arrived. But as this paper has shown, our identity was never missing; it was simply waiting to be reclaimed from beneath the colonial layers. Through the *Manunggul Jar*, we see a people who viewed life and death as a shared journey, and through the *Balangay*, we find a society built on the literal and metaphorical "boat" of community. These are not just artifacts; they are proofs of a deep-seated belief that we are inherently connected to one another and to the world around us.

This sense of belonging, of *kapwa* and *loob*, is what transforms a political agreement like the *Sandugo* into something far more profound: a sacred bond of brotherhood. By shifting our perspective from the individualistic Western héroe to the communal Filipino *bayani*, we realize that our strength has always come from looking inward and toward each other. As we face the uncertainties of a modern, globalized world, returning to these "native canopies" offers more than just historical pride. It provides a compass. By honoring our maritime soul and our tradition of communal heroism, we can build a future that isn't just a shadow of our colonial past, but a vibrant, decolonized reflection of who we truly are.

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<sup>44</sup> Leonardo Mercado, "Understanding the Philosophy of Buot- Loob- Nakem," in *Scientia: The International Journal on the Liberal Arts* 6:2 (December 2017), <<https://doi.org/10.57106/scientia.v6i2.75>>.

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## Mending the Metabolic Rift: Dialectical Compatibilism, Ecosocialism, and Land Ethic<sup>†</sup>

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**Abstract:** Marxists argue that the capitalism-driven rift in the metabolic relations between humans and nature underpins the ecological catastrophe now besetting the world. The struggle against capitalism, which Marx said must not include “preaching morality,” is met with two points: (i) alter the logic of our present production system that is in inherent tension with nature’s regenerative capacity; and (ii) subsequently change prevailing social practices in a way that will restore our metabolic link with our environment and cease morality altogether. However, I will argue that (1) the supplantation of the economic system with ecosocialism is merely a necessary, but ultimately not sufficient, condition to mend the metabolic rift; (2) following (1), a type of moralism repudiated by some Marxists must also actively govern the political-economic struggle; and (3) such an ethos, typified by Aldo Leopold’s land ethic, must persist even after the replacement of the political and economic structures. In proving (1), I will examine the Marxist position on freedom to ground the debate on the necessary and sufficient means of advancing and sustaining change. I reject the determinist accounts and accept Vanessa Wills’ exegetical appraisal of Marx’s historical materialism as a form of “dialectical compatibilism.” I will show that adopting this interpretation commits one to abandoning claims that: (a) morality should not be preached in the struggle; and (b) it will be eliminated in a classless society. Thus, (2) follows: rejection of the determinist view must entail the acceptance of the need for continuing normativity, a project already explored by analytical Marxists such as G.A. Cohen and Kai Nielsen, which I aim to extend to the ecosocialist movement. I will then show why, proving (3), the land ethic provides the ethos that may furnish the set of sufficient conditions for the restoration of our human-nature metabolism.

**Keywords:** *Ecosocialism, environmental ethics, land ethic, Marxist ecology, metabolic rift*

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### Introduction

Two remaining trajectories are now left to the world: ecosocialism or barbarism.<sup>1</sup> The globe seems to be increasingly careening toward the latter as six of the nine planetary boundaries have already been transgressed by humanity, spanning from climate change to biosphere integrity.<sup>2</sup> Communities are subjected to the deleterious ramifications of ecological overshoots,

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<sup>†</sup> This first appeared for a presentation at the Emmanuel Q. Fernando Undergraduate Philosophy Conference at UP Diliman

<sup>1</sup> Alberto Garzón Espinosa, “The Limits to Growth: Ecosocialism or Barbarism,” in *Monthly Review* (2022): 35.

<sup>2</sup> Levke Caesar, et al., *Planetary Health Check* (Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, 2024), 5.

presaging a future that seems to be bleaker by the day.<sup>3</sup> Human intervention in the natural world has now come to be so unprecedented that some geologists and ecological scholars deemed it necessary to mark our current epoch as that of the Anthropocene in the “Capitalinian” age.<sup>4</sup> The labels of the epoch and corresponding age suggest two crucial propositions: (i) rapid alterations in the Earth have been driven largely by human activity; and (ii) such activities, in the current age, have been structured by the distinct system of capitalism that is responsible for the breach in many of the natural world’s biophysical limits.

In response to this crisis, Marxist academics<sup>5</sup> attempted to provide a critical intervention to the ecological question by explicating and developing Marx’s concept of social metabolism—a project initiated by István Mészáros, later systematically explored by John Bellamy Foster and Paul Burkett, and more recently expanded by Kohei Saito who summarized his thesis as such: “the metabolic interaction of humans with the rest of nature constitutes the basis of living, but the capitalist way of organizing human interactions with their ecosystems inevitably creates a great chasm in these processes and threatens both human and non-human beings.”<sup>6</sup> By extending the social metabolism analysis to the environmental terrain, these thinkers contend that the ecological catastrophe that besets the world is caused by the rift in the metabolic relations between man and nature following capitalism’s drive for inexorable profit generation. Thus, they offer the claim that a way out of the current crisis entails a restructuring of the current world order. For the ecological rift theorists, this means that the supplantation of capitalist arrangements with an ecosocialist model that eschews the current economic system’s destructive compulsion.

Yet the practical question regarding the effective means to realize the movement that will produce such a transformative project remains. The prediction of the proletariat’s successful revolt against capitalism has yet to succeed on the global stage despite the ever-deepening contradictions entrenched in it. To be sure, such a question resists simplistic explanations that do not appeal to the broader developments in the machinations of capitalism over the decades. As such, I narrow my focus on one observation often leveled against the Marxist tradition: that it tends to relegate the concern of morality to the ideological realm and therefore repudiates moralism. This is not to claim that Marx dispensed with normativity altogether or that all Marxist currents reject moralism, but only that there is a prevailing Marxist reading that subscribes to the “epistemological break” interpretation, underpinning the objections against an appeal to morality.<sup>7</sup> As such, the present situation demands a rethinking of the revolutionary subject and the means through which change must be delivered, which I argue the aforementioned ecosocialist thinkers have yet to adequately account for. This is where my main contention will come in: there is an imperative to look at the ethical dimension of the ecosocialist struggle, especially in the pursuit of the vision to restore our metabolic unity with nature.

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew L. Fanning, et al., “The Social Shortfall and Ecological Overshoot of Nations,” in *Nature Sustainability* 5:1 (November 18, 2021): 26–36.

<sup>4</sup> John Bellamy Foster, *Capitalism in the Anthropocene: Ecological Ruin or Ecological Revolution* (Monthly Review Press, 2022), 14.

<sup>5</sup> Ning Zhang, “A Forgotten History: Marxist Ecology after Marx,” in *Critical Sociology* 49:1 (January 2023): 165–71.

<sup>6</sup> Kohei Saito, *Marx in the Anthropocene: Towards the Idea of Degrowth Communism* (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 23.

<sup>7</sup> This is expounded in the third section. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for pointing me toward this direction.

In view of the foregoing, the overarching thesis guiding this paper is: mending the metabolic rift between humanity and nature would require both the replacement of (a) the economic system governing much of the world now with a democratic socialist model; and (b) prevailing anthropocentric and utilitarian ethos with an ecological conscience that must be normatively sustained even once the system has already been changed. This thesis serves to add the (b) condition to the current discourse on ecosocialist thought and contests the orthodoxy that the superstructural components must be seen as a mere secondary terrain of the struggle arising as a repercussion of replacing (a).

This thesis will be reinforced by three main arguments: (1) the replacement of the economic system with ecosocialism merely furnishes a necessary, but ultimately not sufficient, condition to mend the metabolic rift; (2) following (1), a morality-driven campaign must also actively govern the political-economic struggle; and (3) such an ethos, best typified by Aldo Leopold's land ethic, must persist even after the replacement of the political and economic structures.

In doing so, this paper will be divided in four parts. In the first section, I argue why ecosocialism is a necessary condition to mend the metabolic rift. I first interrogate the concept of metabolic unity, assess the internal dynamics of capitalism, and demonstrate how this system's logic intrinsically impedes any hope for the creation of a genuinely sustainable economic framework. I engage with Foster and Saito's conceptualization of metabolic rifts and shifts, and their proposed structural changes to overcome these dilemmas. In the second section, I argue that the necessary structural changes advanced by the thinkers fail to provide sufficient grounds for the restoration of metabolic relations between humanity and nature on logical and practical bases. In this section, I shift the discussion towards the logic of domination over nature that capitalism instilled among humans and how this challenges the possibility, tenability, and sustainability of the success of the ecosocialist revolution. By adopting Vanessa Wills' reading of Marx as a dialectical compatibilist, I will show why this exegetical argument for historical materialism contravenes claims that: (a) morality should not be preached in the struggle; and (b) it will be eliminated altogether in a communist society. The origins of this tension with the view on morality among Marxist thinkers will be explored in the third section. Here, I will argue that the aversion to moralism is unwarranted following the dialectical compatibilist reappraisal of Marx. Contrarily, I will affirm Kai Nielsen's position that the observance of objective values even in a classless society is completely compatible with the claim that morality has the propensity to be used as mere ideology. Once these points have been established, I will be in a position to assert in the fourth section that a form of moralism may furnish the set of sufficient conditions for the restoration of metabolic unity. This may be well situated in the thoughts of land ethic proponents such as Aldo Leopold and J. Baird Callicott.

## Metabolic Rift and Ecosocialism

Human activities are mediated by the environment, while people also can and do transform nature in the process of their undertakings. Labor, as far as Marx is concerned, connects humans and nature. Such interdependence constitutes the crux of the metabolism between nature and humanity. However, this process has been radically disrupted by capitalism as its unregulated quest for expansion "generates rifts in natural cycles and process, forcing a series of shifts on the part of capital, as it expands environmental degradation."<sup>8</sup> Capitalism, in its basic formulation, is an

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<sup>8</sup> John Bellamy Foster et al., eds., *The Ecological Rift: Capitalism's War on the Earth* (Monthly Review Press, 2010), 76.

economic arrangement characterized by the private ownership of the means of production, the prime goal of which is the maximization of profit and expansion of capital in the market.<sup>9</sup> The competitive mechanism intrinsic to it and the resulting need for unrestrained generation of profit facilitated by massive industrial capacity come into odds with the biophysical regenerative limits of the natural environment. I reconstruct the metabolic rift schema as follows:

- (1) Earth is finite with a limited regenerative capacity.
- (2) Such a process of regeneration by (1) is affected by human activity.
- (3) Human activity is also mediated by nature, constituting a metabolic relation of interdependence.
- (4) Human activity is now structured by capitalism.
- (5) Capitalism's social metabolism, following the competitive mechanism's compulsion for endless profiteering, requires limitless growth.<sup>10</sup>
- (6) (5) conflicts with (1), rendering capitalism's social metabolism "anti-ecological" and creating a rift between humanity and nature.<sup>11</sup>

This development demonstrates why, according to Foster, it is the metabolic rift that "constituted the main structure of ecological crisis under capitalism."<sup>12</sup> (1) represents the reality of biophysical constraints, as captured by the nine planetary boundaries, six of which have already been transgressed. Impairing regenerative capacities has ruinous ramifications. Land degradation brought by exhaustion of the farm plots, for example, imperils the fertility and productivity of the soil—a subject that Marx himself devoted copious time to tackling in *Capital* and recently translated notebooks. This human intervention proves (2), as Marx wrote:

Capitalist production collects the population together in great centres, and causes the urban population to achieve an ever-growing preponderance. This has two results. On the one hand it concentrates the historical motive power of society; on the other hand, it disturbs the metabolic interaction between man and the earth, i.e. it prevents the return to the soil of its constituent elements consumed by man in the form of food and clothing; hence it hinders the operation of the eternal natural condition for the lasting fertility of the soil.<sup>13</sup>

This passage also vindicates (3) by showing that all human activities—such as the act of farming for sustenance—are mediated by the natural environment, thereby constituting a metabolic link defined by interdependence. Marx recognized in *The Grundrisse* a form of productive consumption: when one produces, one simultaneously consumes from the means of production and raw materials that come

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<sup>9</sup> This, of course, is a very rough definition of capitalism that may not capture all the complete features that constitute it. But these features are ones that figure commonly among Marxist thinkers and Marx himself in describing capitalism, in addition to the necessary condition of labor's subsumption to capital. See Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes and Ernest Mandel, (Penguin Books, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> Kai Nielsen, "Global Justice, Power and the Logic of Capitalism," *Critica* 16:48 (1984): 35–51.

<sup>11</sup> Foster, et al., *The Ecological Rift*, 74.

<sup>12</sup> Foster, *Capitalism in the Anthropocene*, 27.

<sup>13</sup> Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 637.

from the natural world.<sup>14</sup> Unity between these two is paramount in maintaining their survival. But now, following (4) and (5), a fissure emerges. Despite said biophysical constraints, Saito pointed out that “capital is incapable of limiting itself. On the contrary, capital constantly attempts to overcome these limits only to increase its own destructiveness against society and nature.”<sup>15</sup> As such, (6) follows: the internal logic governing capitalism is incompatible with an ecological model that allows for the interdependent coexistence of nature and humanity.

Foster and Saito identify the three forms that the rift takes. The first one refers to “the material disruption of cyclical processes in natural metabolism under the regime of capital.”<sup>16</sup> The soil exhaustion scenario typifies this. The second type refers to the spatial rift, characterized by the resulting inimical and extractive relations between the core and periphery. The concentration of the population and resources in the core, for example, is premised on the massive uprooting of materials in the periphery to sustain the growing demands at the expense of the environment’s health. Lastly, the rift also manifests in the temporal domain. The time between the natural environment’s regeneration and the need for capital to expand increasingly diverges, where the valorization of capital necessitates truncating the turnaround time of material resources extracted.

These rifts, being inherent in capitalism as established in (6), are impossible to surmount under the same economic arrangements that caused them. According to Foster and Saito, even the current solutions being advanced are mere shifts that divert the problem elsewhere. The first one takes the form of a technological shift, which aims to use mechanical solutions to temporarily mitigate ecological problems without necessarily changing the system. Saito cited the example of the Haber-Bosch process, which aimed to ameliorate soil exhaustion by mass-producing ammonia and inorganic fertilizer. This innovation, however, merely shifted the rift because the production of ammonia entailed the widespread consumption of another scarce resource as its ingredient: natural gas.<sup>17</sup> The process also involved the emission of more carbon dioxide. On the other hand, the spatial rift births its corresponding shift, where the burdens of environmental harms are externalized to peripheries. A recent study, for instance, found that countries in the Global North collectively accounted for 92% of the total excess emissions in the world.<sup>18</sup> Despite this, Global South nations bear the disproportionate brunt of climate change.<sup>19</sup> Even the renewable energy transition, which purportedly aims to address this problem, perpetuates the same shift. Most metals used in decarbonized technologies, such as copper and nickel, are extracted from mines in the Global South, thereby externalizing the direct ecological impact of destructive practices to them.<sup>20</sup> In the same breath, the temporal rift drives a temporal shift, where the disparity arising from the time of capital

<sup>14</sup> Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse*, (Harper & Row, 1972), 23.

<sup>15</sup> Kohei Saito, *Marx in the Anthropocene: Towards the Idea of Degrowth Communism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>17</sup> Patricia M. Glibert, et al., “The Haber Bosch–Harmful Algal Bloom (HB–HAB) Link,” in *Environmental Research Letters* 9, no. 10 (October 1, 2014): 105001.

<sup>18</sup> Jason Hickel, “Quantifying National Responsibility for Climate Breakdown: An Equality-Based Attribution Approach for Carbon Dioxide Emissions in Excess of the Planetary Boundary,” in *The Lancet Planetary Health* 4:9 (September 2020): e399–404.

<sup>19</sup> Abdulaziz I. Almulhim, et al., “Climate-Induced Migration in the Global South: An in Depth Analysis,” in *Npj Climate Action* 3:1 (June 14, 2024): 47.

<sup>20</sup> Joshua Matanzima and Julia Loginova, “Sociocultural Risks of Resource Extraction for the Low-Carbon Energy Transition: Evidence from the Global South,” in *The Extractive Industries and Society* 18 (June 2024): 101478.

and nature's cyclical process likewise brings a certain delay in the full realization of the cumulative costs of destruction, as is the case with climate change, which gives the fossil fuel industry further pretext to shift the burden to the future generation.

The conclusion that ecological recovery is impossible under the growth-oriented character of capitalism, regardless of palliatives that supposedly aim to overcome the environmental crisis, is vindicated by empirical trends. The concept of *decoupling* describes the attempts made by states to eradicate the acceleration of the climate catastrophe while maintaining capitalist arrangements. Under this principle, countries must endeavor to decouple the pursuit of absolute quantitative growth of material throughput, resource use, and carbon emissions. Projections based on available data and historical trends, however, show no possibility for such a goal; even if it were to happen, it cannot do so in a manner that is fast enough before irreversible damage has already been wrought.<sup>21</sup> The solution is therefore clear: limiting economic growth on a global scale is necessary to address ecological overshoot. But this is a goal that is, as (5) shows, incompatible with capitalism's logic. Therefore:

(C1) Transcending capitalism and instituting ecosocialism are necessary to mend the metabolic rift.

The conclusion is akin to Mészáros's call for social control, contra capitalism's anarchic propensity to pursue market-mediated inexorable growth, regardless of the destructive implications.<sup>22</sup> According to (C1), the socialist aspect of "ecosocialism" refers to a system where the means of production are collectively owned and operations are democratically planned, as opposed to the current system that valorizes capital and is primarily concerned with exchange value over use value. This variant of socialism also incorporates an ecological approach, because it is logically conceivable to have a socialist economy that is at the same time growth-oriented and where people collectively plan to produce beyond the world's biophysical limits. In fact, this tendency for a Promethean and geo-constructivist Marxism is exactly what the likes of Foster and Saito criticized.<sup>23</sup> As such, ecosocialism is necessary to address the shortfalls of both capitalism and certain streams of socialism. Foster endorses a triangle of ecology, characterized as such: (i) nature's social use, instead of mere ownership; (ii) a commune of workers' regulation of the human-nature metabolism; and (iii) meeting common needs of those in both current and future times. This is, according to Foster, to be integrated with the "elementary triangle" of socialism, defined by common ownership, the proletariat's social production, and meeting the needs of all.

It is important to note that such prescriptions of the model are largely structural, institutional, political, and economic changes. Saito's recommendations for degrowth communism are similar in that regard.<sup>24</sup> They are correct to suggest that these are necessary conditions to mend humanity's metabolic relations with nature that were impaired by a system that is just as structural, institutional, political, and economic. However, given the totalizing nature and repercussions of capitalism, I

<sup>21</sup> Jason Hickel and Giorgos Kallis, "Is Green Growth Possible?," in *New Political Economy* 25:4 (June 6, 2020): 469–86.

<sup>22</sup> István Mészáros, *The Necessity of Social Control* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2015).

<sup>23</sup> John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark, and Hannah Holleman, "Marx and the Commons," in *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 88:1 (March 2021): 1–30.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Kohei Saito, *Slow down: The Degrowth Manifesto*, trans. by Brian Bergstrom, First edition (New York: Astra House, 2024).

contend that its necessity does not furnish its sufficiency. There are still notable blind spots in the vision being forwarded. To understand this, the next section elaborates on the Marxist theory of historical materialism, its implications for bringing change in the material and superstructural dimensions, and the need for an emphasis on the other aspects that will complete the set of conditions to restore our unity with the natural environment.

## Ecosocialism and Dialectical Compatibilism

Central to the Marxist emancipatory project is its conception of historical materialism. It is a framework that remains contested as its interpretation among scholars is divided among those who continue to develop it and those who say that Marx had no—and is not in need of—any theory as such.<sup>25</sup> In this section, I will only focus on the question of the base-superstructure relations and the implications of exegetical answers as to how movements should approach methods of change toward and even after capitalist supplantation.

G.A. Cohen, in his early intellectual career, attempted the most comprehensive defense and analytical reconstruction of Marx's historical materialism.<sup>26</sup> It is there that he explicated the first and second primacy theses, roughly summarized as such: “the first primacy thesis, according to which the productive forces, narrowly construed, have explanatory primacy over the economic structure, and the second primacy thesis, according to which the economic structure has explanatory primacy over the superstructure.”<sup>27</sup> It is the *second primacy thesis* I am most concerned with in this section:

(SPT) “The material determines the spiritual to the extent necessary to prevent the spiritual from determining the material.”<sup>28</sup>

This means that the material base—for this instance, capitalism—definitely shapes superstructural entities, such as culture and laws, in a way that the prevailing economic arrangements are maintained and legitimized. In the case of the ecological rift, capitalism inculcates a culture of domination and mastery over nature that pushes people to treat the environment as a mere resource.<sup>29</sup> In doing so, the disruption of cyclical and regenerative processes is deemed acceptable as long as capital is continuously valorized. Coercive and noncoercive structures work simultaneously to mold humanity's internal and spiritual dispositions in a way that renders them incapable of radically shifting the ruling economic relations governing them. The metabolic rift may, thus, be construed as constituting a resulting rift between nature and humans, whereas the latter no longer see themselves as part of the same community as the former and therefore hold no moral responsibility for them. These propositions are plausible, but become more contentious once fully committed to (SPT), stating that any substantial change in the spiritual terrain is incapable of substantially altering the material domain. Vrousalis claim that this is problematic because under this formulation, “materialism would be conclusively refuted if one could offer examples where religious charisma, political leadership, or military genius could be shown to effect epochal transformation,

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Richard W. Miller, *Analyzing Marx: Morality, Power and History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

<sup>26</sup> See Gerald A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>27</sup> Nicholas Vrousalis, *The Political Philosophy of G. A. Cohen: Back to Socialist Basics*, (New York: Bloomsbury academic, 2015).

<sup>28</sup> Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, 369.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Carolyn Merchant, ed., *Ecology: Key Concepts in Critical Theory*, 2nd Ed., (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2008).

without recourse to claims about economic structure.”<sup>30</sup> The repercussions of this technological materialist view invite charges of economic determinism, eliding the supposedly dialectical nature and causal interaction between the two. Such is the realization that Cohen, in his latter life, underscored: that production relations alone gloss over the other equally important factors that allow for the possibility and necessity of change. It also dulls the potency of human agency in effecting a revolutionary shift to the superstructural terrain to the extent that the structural underpinnings of a system may be upended altogether.

A more promising alternative interpretation has been expressed by Vanessa Wills through an iteration she dubbed “dialectical compatibilism” (DC). The central idea is that “human freedom is itself a human product, one that emerges gradually over the course of history out of human beings’ goal-directed interactions with their natural and social environment.”<sup>31</sup> I reconstruct some of the corollary central tenets as follows:

- (7) Humans are determined by biological needs and external conditions to a certain extent.
- (8) By responding to (7), humans exercise their agency to change their conditions, thereby broadening their power to control their environment and freedom to shape its processes.

The last clause in (8), however, is erroneous. It is logically possible, and indeed has historically happened, that humans may move to exercise their agency in a way that would lead to the constraint of that freedom. Take the case of fascism adherents who are voluntarily changing extant conditions to push for a society that would heavily constrain their ability to control their environment and shape its processes. I thus introduce a modified version of dialectical compatibilism:

**(DC)** By responding to (9), humans exercise their agency to change their conditions and the very structures that determined their initial disposition.

The removal of the last clause eludes the baggage of a linear, progressive, and teleological historical view entailed by (8). If we are to take this conclusion further, I argue that it also supposes a further set of claims:

- (9) Superstructures are shaped by economic arrangements in a way that legitimizes these conditions.
- (10) Superstructures, in turn, determine human action and beliefs to a certain extent.
- (11) In the same token as (DC), humans, in responding to the superstructures that determine them, may contest them and eventually change them.

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<sup>30</sup> Vrousalis, 38.

<sup>31</sup> Vanessa Wills, *Marx's Ethical Vision* (Oxford University Press, 2024), 100.

- (12) Upon the delegitimization of material arrangements due to (13), social transformation may emerge according to new superstructures.

The dialectical compatibilism schema can overcome the objections against the technological materialist appraisal of historical materialism by accounting for the more dynamic nature of human freedom and action driven by propositional attitudes for change that may depart from the initial determination of superstructures. But the adoption of this view requires a rethinking of some assumptions and proposals held by ecosocialists who unwittingly echo the contempt for moralism. First, it is important to note that by eschewing a purely economic-determinist account and involving an agent in the picture, both dialectical compatibilism and (11) must be committed to underlie another presupposition on *action theory*:

**(AT)** People act on their determined conditions based on their (i) desires or needs; and (ii) belief that such an action realizes their desires or needs.

This is especially true for (11), where superstructures are already impinging on their desires. If we take emancipatory actions to be governed by agents, then we can assume the standard Davidsonian stance in action theory that reasons causing action are constituted by a person's desires and beliefs, or psychological states more broadly.<sup>32</sup> Part of what shapes such motivational propositional attitudes is antecedently held ethical commitments. Given this, action theory makes two variants of a regression scenario possible:

*Strong variant.* — An ecosocialist society, which has already successfully transitioned its ecological and economic structures to jibe with Foster's triangle of ecology and socialism, reverts to a capitalist model after most of its citizens adopted a domineering ethos and revolted to supplant their prevailing arrangements.

*Weak variant.* — An ecosocialist society, which has already successfully transitioned its ecological and economic structures to jibe with Foster's triangle of ecology and socialism, maintains its socialist arrangement, but its citizens collectively decide to abandon their society's ecological thrust in order to pursue a Promethean agenda that undermines biophysical limits.

There is nothing in the dialectical compatibilism model that is incompatible with both scenarios occurring. One may contest this by arguing that (8) contravenes the stronger variant because the reversal to capitalist rule actually lessens their control over their environment and the freedom to shape their processes. But this is where the dialectical compatibilism and action theory propositions come into play: people may actually think that their move would broaden their freedom based on the internal ethos and values they come to adopt along the way. Such, too, is the case with the weaker variant. The establishment of institutions that will initially require the respect of biophysical limits during their inception may eventually be replaced through the associated producers' communal movement to do so. It may be argued that these moves leading to both variants are irrational, but this in no way blunts their possibility, because it could still be rational in the agent's own lights. This claim is hardly a controversial one. It is logically possible under

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<sup>32</sup> Donald Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes," in *The Essential Davidson* (Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press, 2006). I recognize, however, that the position is not without its controversy and this is a position merely presupposed here.

dialectical compatibilism that a shift in the ethical commitments among many of them may justify their decisions to replace the system that initially determined them.

The insufficiency of the current ecosocialist model, which involves changes in the structural and material domain, is thus established. This is consistent with Cohen's later observation that it is not merely coercive institutions alone that must be revolutionized, but the prevailing social ethos, which will ensure the sustainability of these structures. Following the tenets of action theory, this must entail not just cultural shifts, but a conscious moral reshaping down to an individual level that aligns with our natural environment—an ethical unity that undergirds the repair of our metabolic rift.

If one accepts dialectical compatibilism, we are also committed to accepting that the discussed ecosocialist models are merely necessary but not sufficient conditions to mend the metabolic rift between humans and nature. In the next section, I show how integrating the practice of moral cultivation into the ecosocialist struggle furnishes the set of sufficient conditions for the restoration of metabolic unity.

### Marxism and Moralism

Much of the succeeding socialist thinkers' ambivalence on morality may be traced to what was taken to be Marx's own relegation of it to the domain of ideology, as he wrote that "the communists do not preach morality at all."<sup>33</sup> However, it is important to note I do not commit myself to the claim that Marx never had any normative or moralistic position, for that would simply be erroneous. Indeed, his earlier works in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* underscore talk of man's "essential nature" and man as "species-being" to cement his position on the alienation that capitalism produces.<sup>34</sup> He also affirmed the "categorical imperative" of dismantling oppressive conditions that cause men to be "debased, enslaved, neglected."<sup>35</sup>

Changes, however, are stark in his latter works. In the *German Ideology*, his contentions against the Young Hegelians positioned him to reject what he deemed to be idealistic espousal of ideologies, of which morality is part: "They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking."<sup>36</sup>

From here, a paradox identified by Steven Lukes becomes apparent: Marx scorns moralism while at the same time appealing to impassioned normative terms in reviling the ramifications of capitalism.<sup>37</sup> Several attempts to address the seeming disconnect had been proposed by Marxists. Ernest Mandel identified three common interpretations: First, some thinkers reject the thesis that there are any ruptures between the early Marx of *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* and the late Marx of *Capital*. Perhaps there was merely a shift in emphasis, and this has been favored by those who advance a humanistic interpretation of Marx. Second, some interpret the early Marx to have

<sup>33</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels Collected Works: Marx and Engels: 1845-1847* (New York: International Publishers Company, Incorporated, 1976), 247.

<sup>34</sup> Karl Marx, "Estranged Labour," in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist Manifesto*, with Friedrich Engels and Martin Milligan, (Prometheus, 1988), 78.

<sup>35</sup> Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction," in *Marx: Early Political Writings*, trans. by Joseph J. O'Malley, (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 64.

<sup>36</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, (Foreign Languages Press, 2022), 14.

<sup>37</sup> Steven Lukes, *Marxism and Morality*, Marxist Introductions (Clarendon Press, 1985), 4.

had a more “total” grounding of his project, which allows a better grasp of his later positions. Finally, some disavow the merit of the early Marx’s works by regarding them as “pre-Marxist.”<sup>38</sup> Among the paradigmatic examples of the third strand is Louis Althusser, who advanced the epistemological break thesis. Such a break, according to Althusser, occurred when Marx wrote *The German Ideology*.<sup>39</sup> This ushered in his “scientific” period, which is to be distinguished from his “ideological” period, where Althusser claimed “all the expressions of Marx’s idealist ‘humanism’ are Feuerbachian.”<sup>40</sup> A prime example of this distinction can be gleaned from Marx’s treatment of the individual, wherein the “scientific” Marx veers away from talk of alienation and human essences, pivoting instead toward locating forms of individuality that are brought about by specific material and economic relations.<sup>41</sup>

Whether there is truly a rupture is still an open question. Some have tried to posit that the correct understanding of historical materialism can accommodate both the scientific and moral outlook of Marx.<sup>42</sup> But adjudicating in this debate is beyond the scope of this paper, for the answer will not affect what I criticize. The focus of my dispute is on the repudiation of moralism and the adoption of the belief that it ought to disappear in a communist society, whether they are truly upheld by Marx or simply by Marxists who interpret him to be doing so. Indeed, as Althusser said, “the recourse to ethics so deeply inscribed in every humanist ideology may play the part of an imaginary treatment of real problems.”<sup>43</sup> This is because one need not appeal to transhistorical normative standards, for “it is possible then to speak directly of those things that realize the emancipatory aims of the working class and are in its interest.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, like other ideologies in the superstructure, morality will also be supposedly abolished in a communist society—an idea which Wills also endorsed. Here is the argument’s reconstruction:

- (13) Morality is an ideology that forms part of the superstructure.
- (14) As an ideology, morality is a structure of ideas or practices that serves only a certain class to mystify real relations.
- (15) Persuading the oppressed to revolt involves merely appealing directly to their self-interest and rationality.
- (16) Once (18) succeeds, a classless society will no longer have any ideology.
- (17) Following (19), morality will be abolished in a classless society.

Two conclusions regarding morality may be explicated here: (i) appeal to morality is not necessary in struggling toward a classless society; and (ii) morality would no longer figure in

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<sup>38</sup> Ernest Mandel, *The Formation of the Economic Thought of Karl Marx, 1843 to Capital*, trans. by Brian Pearce (Monthly Review Press, 1971), 164.

<sup>39</sup> Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. by Benjamin Robert Brewster, (Verso, 2005), 33.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>41</sup> Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. by Ben Brewster, Radical Thinkers (Verso, 2009), 124.

<sup>42</sup> See Qu Hongmei, “Marxism and Morality: Reflections on the History of Interpreting Marx in Moral Philosophy,” *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 6:2 (2011): 239–57.

<sup>43</sup> Althusser, *For Marx*, 249.

<sup>44</sup> Wills, 193.

communism. This is because, as (13) articulates, morality is merely one of the many forms of ideology constituting the superstructure of a class-stratified society. Additionally, per (14) and following the Marxist conception of ideology, it distorts and mystifies the real exploitative relations governing classes. As such, one need not resort to this mystification and false consciousness to convince the exploited to emancipate themselves, for (15) establishes that one only needs to appeal to their rationality and self-interest as part of a class that has nothing else to lose but everything to gain. (16) is proven if one accepts the claim (17), for there is no longer any class to be served by a distortive account of reality in such a society.

I argue that these claims and their conclusion are misguided at best and detrimental to the movement at worst. As Kai Nielsen points out in concurrence with the paradox raised by Lukes, there appears to exist a tension between Marx's brazen negative assessment of capitalism—using value-laden descriptions and appeals to criticize its dehumanizing, alienating, exploitative features—in contrast to his positive endorsement of socialism, and his repudiation of the very act of moralizing.<sup>45</sup> These assessments, after all, can only be made possible by a normative account of concepts such as exploitation.

As Nielsen correctly argued, (13) should be construed as a proposition on the sociology or anthropology of morals rather than a metaethical claim that adjudges the ontological status of ethics. That is, societies merely tend to use morality as an ideology that mystifies exploitative relations and legitimizes regimes of oppression. However, this propensity does not furnish a necessity. Therefore, it does not follow that just because morality has the tendency to act that way, then it must already be committed to only having that intrinsic function. One can reasonably claim, as Nielsen did, that morality is not a proper subset of ideology. There are merely overlaps between the two as part of a superstructure. There may thus be forms of morality that are not ideological but still superstructural.<sup>46</sup> Following the refutation of (14), this would entail that not all moralizing necessarily mystifies the relation. For one, I can make the moral claim that inflicting harm upon someone is wrong. This maxim may be used by both oppressors and the oppressed to further their cause. This moral truism may be normatively employed to assess events in the past, present, and even the future of a classless society. By itself, it shows the maxim distorts no reality in service of the ruling class. It only does so conditionally, once applied to mystify facts and obscure relations. Therefore, it only becomes ideological in certain instances as a repercussion of the indeterminacy in interpretation or the availability of facts to which such morals are applied.

Corollary to this is Nielsen's point that "it is not man's consciousness as such which is so determined but the public self-conceptions extant in society. It is those that are ideological; not all his thoughts and beliefs."<sup>47</sup> This dovetails with the dialectical compatibilism formulation. If this is correct, then we must also be committed to abandoning (15). Causal antecedents of action, as I claimed in action theory, can also be constituted by desires and beliefs. As S. M. Love contends, the very superstructural entrenchment of capitalism may embed such a deep ethical commitment among individuals to revere its institutions to the point that its maintenance becomes part of the realization

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<sup>45</sup> Kai Nielsen, *Marxism and the Moral Point of View: Morality, Ideology, and Historical Materialism* (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 1988).

<sup>46</sup> William H. Shaw, "Marxism and Moral Objectivity," in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy Supplementary* 7 (1981): 19–44.

<sup>47</sup> Nielsen, *Marxism and the Moral Point of View*, 149.

of their self-interests.<sup>48</sup> When this occurs, a successful appeal to these people will only work through compelling them to abandon their beliefs through normative discourse—the act of moralizing that some have undermined. For example, a Promethean socialist model over an ecosocialist model may be preferred by people because the former would afford them more luxuries in the immediate. That is a rational position. One could argue that it is not completely rational because it undermines the aspects of temporal shift, for example, in which the future generation will bear the brunt of their destructive activities. But for that to even matter, one has to commit to an ethical position that requires abandoning self-interest alone and caring for those of future generations. Nielsen, however, contended that superstructural changes alone have no causal primacy because moral argument alone “is not the cause of major social changes.”<sup>49</sup> Although this may be true as a matter of empirical fact, one has to construe moral argumentation as being part of a causal chain toward concrete, material action. This is a reiteration of my point in my invocation of the standard story of action theory. No doubt moralizing alone will not change conditions. But the result of such moral cultivation is what will drive people to adopt an intention to move and sustainably change their circumstances. I agree with the young Marx in this instance: “The weapon of criticism certainly cannot replace the criticism of weapons; material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory, too, becomes a material force once it seizes the masses.”<sup>50</sup> This is consistent with my position because a further question is asked: so how can theory seize the masses in the first place? If we follow my account of human action in section two, we find a commitment to antecedent motivation theory, according to which there must always be an antecedent motivational set that serves as the basis for the generation of new motivations.<sup>51</sup> Such moral commitments form part of this motivational base.

The merits of this moral cultivation extend beyond merely driving the struggle toward its success. It is also pivotal in sustaining these gains and cementing its permanence, because, as Nielsen said, it is only the public self-conceptions that are determined, but not all of a person’s thoughts and consciousness. If this is true, then (16) is futile. But this contradicts Wills’ claim that the need for morality disappears in a communist society because in such arrangements, the is-ought gap has already been bridged. Yet this is an odd conclusion to accept, given that doing so would be to affirm the very determinist thesis she eschewed. Consider:

- (18) Communist society abolishes all antagonistic social relations.
- (19) Following (18), everything that ‘is’ is tantamount to how everything ‘ought’ to be.
- (20) Given the conditions in (19), there is no longer any need for morality because people are already predisposed to act in a prosocial way.
- (21) Therefore, in a communist society, morality is abolished.

It is particularly the movement from (18) to (20) that I am interested in. I have two contentions. First, I dispute the position in (19) that the way everything is must already be seen as being how it ought to be because of (18). While I can accept the thesis that exploitative social

<sup>48</sup> S. M. Love, “Kant After Marx,” in *Kantian Review* 22:4 (December 2017): 579–98.

<sup>49</sup> Nielsen, *Marxism and the Moral Point of View*, 132.

<sup>50</sup> Marx, “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right: Introduction,” 64.

<sup>51</sup> Alfred R. Mele, *Motivation and Agency*, (Oxford University Press, 2005), 101.

relations comprise the primary problem of humanity, they are not the only dilemma. It is logically conceivable to think of a communist society—that is, where all classes have already been dissolved—that is still rife with problems. Surely, there will still be pain, natural disruptions, and interpersonal conflicts that are not premised on economic exploitation. How would one claim that pain is bad or adjudicate between conflicts without some normative account?

Second, one can dispute my argument by appealing to (20) and saying that, though there may still be such tendencies, people are already going to be internally driven to treat others well and come to certain agreements because the lack of exploitative economic relations shapes their internal dispositions to be prosocial. But then committing to this means having to concede to determinism, suggesting that acting against what one is initially determined to do is impossible, which contravenes (11) claim of dialectical compatibilism and the point that not all of consciousness can be determined. This is also the case with the scenarios I mentioned in the previous section. Although one can correctly assert that ecosocialism represents the communal interest of the oppressed class, it does not necessarily follow that it will also be adopted by individuals of that group. As seen in the possibility of the weak variant of the ecosocialist regress scenario, it is conceivable under dialectic compatibilism that individuals may possess the interest to return to conditions that oppress them.

In view of all the foregoing, I am now in a position to assert two propositions that may form part of the sufficient conditions in mending the metabolic rift:

(T1) Inculcating and adopting a moral position are necessary in the struggle for ecosocialism

(T2) Inculcating and adopting a moral position are necessary for sustaining ecosocialism and restoring ecological metabolic unity

The first one is needed for the victory of the struggle, while (T2) is needed for its longevity. It must be noted, however, that such a moral position need not be explicitly held, for it can also be implicitly inscribed in an agent's subjective motivational base. Both must come with (C1). In the next section, I argue that the land ethic is a viable moral position for (T1) and (T2).

## Land Ethic and Ecosocialism

Aldo Leopold concludes his seminal work, “The Sand County Almanac,” with the “Land Ethic,” which heavily impacted conservation efforts and introduced an environmental ethical framework that J. Baird Callicott deemed “the more radical ecocentric point of view.”<sup>52</sup> The crux of introducing this view is premised on the conception that an ethic is a form of limitation that impels cooperation with fellow members of a community whose relations are defined by interdependence. What his land ethic intends is expanding our conception of that community to include the natural environment as well.<sup>53</sup> A corollary attitude of this is the adoption of respect for other constituents of our ecological community, appraising them not as a mere resource to be exploited, but as entities with their own right to regenerate. We are therefore neither dominators nor conquerors of nature, but mere members of its community. I schematize this as such:

<sup>52</sup> John Baird Callicott, *In Defense of the Land Ethic: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 7.

<sup>53</sup> Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

- (22) A person is part of a human community
- (23) Those in a human community are part of a larger biotic community
- (24) A person has a moral responsibility to members of their community
- (25) Following (22) and (23), a person has a responsibility to both fellow humans and other ecological community members

The basis undergirding (25) aligns with the concept of a metabolism governing humans and nature. There is interdependence between humans and their fellow humans, just as humans and nature are interdependent. Therefore, there is no reason why moral obligation among those with the capacity to exercise such must not also extend to the larger biotic community members without expecting reciprocal responsibility from those without the capacity to do so. The caveat regarding capacity, as Callicot also noted, is important because it is simply a fact that not all members of the ecological community—such as the land, plants, animals—are capable of conceiving and exercising moral agency, which just means that the burden of restraint to maintain the metabolism rests on contemplative agents who can either disrupt or sustain it based on their intentional actions. In delivering this, Leopold articulates the thesis of land ethic as: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”<sup>54</sup> Recent empirical developments, however, show the inadequacy of this formulation, especially in accounting for the necessary disturbances at given scales; this led Callicot to reformulate land ethic’s thesis as: “A thing is right when it tends to disturb the biotic community only at normal spatial and temporal scales. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”<sup>55</sup>

This is also consistent with accounts that aim to move beyond “conservation” and toward “expenditure,” such as Thomas Nail’s vision for kinetic of metabolic communism. For him, what is needed is the observance of the principle of reciprocity, wherein we give the extent that we can to the natural environment and we, in turn, receive whatever it gives us.<sup>56</sup> Doing so, however, must not destroy nature’s capacity to continue giving, which is what the anthropocentric logic of capitalist appropriation currently does.<sup>57</sup>

Such a holistic ecocentric perspective held by Leopold and others presupposes the following claims:

- (26) Ecological community members have their own intrinsic value
- (27) Recognition of (26) is necessary in ingraining an ecological conscience
- (28) The existence of an ecological conscience is necessary for the adoption of the modified land ethic thesis

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<sup>54</sup> Leopold, 211.

<sup>55</sup> John Baird Callicott, *Beyond the Land Ethic: More Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, Suny Series in Philosophy and Biology (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 138.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas Nail, *Theory of the Earth* (Stanford University Press, 2021), 260.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

These presuppositions already set the stage for a deontological view of the land ethic. After all, Leopold himself claimed that one can only be moral toward something that one has an affective affinity to. It requires an inward and cognitive acceptance of moral sensibilities that will direct one's intentions and actions. Such is the point of (27), in which one's ecological conscience fixes an internal conviction to uphold responsibility for the health of the environment, leading to (28). But even then, Callicott recognized that the land ethic is still compatible even with the prudential view from an objective perspective, because the rift in the interdependence between humans and nature can cause their mutual destruction if the former, for example, commits to large-scale activities that transgress the modified land ethic thesis.

The ecological conscience that facilitates the observance of the modified land ethic thesis thus adequately fits the moral position referred to in (T1) and (T2), or the other necessary conditions for the repair of the metabolic rift. As I mentioned in the first section, the ecological rift also entails an ethical rift in the superstructural terrain. Further, given the causal role that moralism can play in delivering and sustaining ecosocialism, as tackled in the preceding section, this ecological conscience is necessary to drive the struggle toward its victory and take hegemonic superstructural influence right after. It ensures that the system will be maintained and that the metabolic rift will be mended. It is, however, only necessary as part of a sufficient set of conditions. By itself, it cannot be sufficient, because one can have an ecological conscience, but be rendered incapable of exercising or putting it into practice because of coercive institutions that put valorizing capital as their prime interest.

Given this, I propose that Foster's ecosocialist triangle be modified so that its reflected interdependence between ecology and socialism is extended to the ethical terrain. The three conditions—namely, nature's social use, rational control of human-nature metabolism among workers commune, and meeting the necessities of both current and succeeding ages—must be expanded with the fourth requisite: individuals' embrace of an ecological conscience. Once recalibrated as such, both scenarios of regression I mentioned would be deterred. The weak variant, namely the regression from ecosocialist to Promethean socialist model, would not happen because those collectively planning the production are already inculcated with an ethos and desire that hamper them from impairing their metabolism with nature upon recognition of its intrinsic value. The strong variant, which is the regression from ecosocialism to capitalism, would also be precluded because, following (6), the incompatibility of capitalism and ecology would render the former undesirable by those who already adopt the land ethic. This proposal, of course, is not immune to contestations. I may be disputed on the grounds of: (i) the viability of the land ethic as an ethical underpinning; and (ii) the tenability and sustainability of moralizing. The first one concerns the plausibility of the land ethic's necessity. Some may argue that other moral frameworks may be better suited to supplement the pursuit of mending the ecological rift, such as Callicott's developed earth ethic<sup>58</sup> or any other deontological view. The answer to this is simple. It is an ecological conscience that is necessary. I did not argue that the land ethic itself is necessary, but only sufficient as the moral foundation of the ecosocialist struggle. This means that other equally compatible ethic may be sufficient to endow one with an ecological conscience.

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<sup>58</sup> John Baird Callicott, *Thinking like a Planet: The Land Ethic and the Earth Ethic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Indigenous ethical principles, for example, are just as equipped to do so, as seen in the Philippine experience.<sup>59</sup> The second possible objection concerns the unnecessary role of adopting a normative theory for Marxism.<sup>60</sup> If one grants the position that no such theory is required and that perhaps a revolution based solely on self-interest-driven rationality will someday come, then one must also commit to accepting determinism and the possibility of the weak regression scenario occurring. It is absolutely compatible with the rational and immediate interest of humans. Surely, this is a position that ecosocialists will find difficult to accept, given that it will also mean that ecosocialism may not even last long enough to mend the metabolic rift. The more plausible line of objection comes from the position that normative reasons are not necessarily motivational. Here, I agree, but note that it does not blunt the force of my position. (T1) and (T2) must be read carefully: both say “inculcating and adopting a moral position,” which means that the moral position I speak of is not just some “external” reason, but is an internalized *de re* commitment that is therefore *ceteris paribus* motivational. The point of moral cultivation within ecosocialism thus turns not only to didactically preach moral codes but to form an ethical disposition that integrates normativity into one’s subjectivity. Thus, (T1) and (T2) stand if one accepts that barring the strong and weak variants scenario is necessary for any adequate theory of sustainable ecosocialism. Other than this, not all external, normative reasons—including the normativity of revolting itself—are motivational actually lend further credence to my position: moral cultivation is needed precisely to connect normative principles to the agent’s motivational base and practical commitments, enabling genuine moral adoption and sustained action.

## Conclusion

Throughout the paper, I managed to show how the capitalism-created metabolic rift between the relationship of humans and nature underlies the ecological crisis that now besets the world. Any response to this would therefore require an ecosocialist solution, elucidated by the likes of Saito and Foster. Necessarily, I argued that it is still insufficient. I did so by showing that, despite the success of an ecosocialist struggle, two variants of a regression problem are rendered possible according to our dialectical compatibilism account of historical materialism. This poses a problem regarding both the tenability and success of this model as a path toward the restoration of metabolic unity. As such, I have shown that a way out of this may be through the recognition of another necessary condition to furnish the set of sufficient conditions—that of moralization, which Marx and some of his followers are ambivalent about. In the last section, I showed that this moral position is embodied sufficiently by the land ethic and its presupposed ecological conscience.

In doing so, I do not intend to claim that only the necessary conditions I mentioned complete the necessary and sufficient set. Surely, these are INUS conditions, or insufficient but necessary parts of an unnecessary but sufficient set of conditions.<sup>61</sup> They only hold given the manifold conditions I have set throughout the article. I also do not make the claim that the land ethic alone is necessary for the moral position I spoke of. Other moral frameworks may be just as equally compatible with providing the ecological conscience I argued for. I also understand that

<sup>59</sup> Jeanette Yasol-Naval, “From Kapre to Ecological Conscience: Indigenous Beliefs and Practices and the Holistic Perspective of Environmental Ethics,” in *Kasarinlan: Philippine Journal of Third World Studies* 17:1 (2002): 52–65.

<sup>60</sup> See Brian Leiter, “Why Marxism Still Does Not Need Normative Theory,” in *Analyse & Kritik* 37:1–2 (November 1, 2015): 23–50.

<sup>61</sup> J. L. Mackie, “Causes and Conditions,” in *American Philosophical Quarterly* 2:4 (1965): 245–64.

there are possible problems that may be raised with the tactical difficulty of the moralizing I spoke of, which is beyond the scope of this paper. A possible trajectory that further inquiries can pursue, however, may lie in the direction of the model of emancipatory education that Paulo Freire discussed.<sup>62</sup> The bottom line is thus: if one is committed to the pursuit of human freedom and environmental sustainability, solutions that eschew purely determinist accounts must seriously engage with the need to go through the arduous process of contending with our moral sensibilities and ethical commitments.

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## On What Women Are Actually Able To Do and To Be: Understanding the Women at Informal Economy Using Martha Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach

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**Abstract:** In this paper, I aim to understand women in the informal economy using Martha Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach. In the informal economy, women have limited or no access to safety, physical integrity, healthcare, and security. However, they have rights and dignity and deserve to be respected by the government and other institutions. Nussbaum argues that capabilities are significant entitlements that must be constitutionally guaranteed to ensure a worthy and dignified human life for women. Thus, to understand women's capabilities in the informal economy, this paper will be divided into three sections. The first section will discuss the challenges and conditions of women in the workforce. Women in developing countries endure a critical capability failure and experiences different forms of marginalization in their working spaces. I shall analyze why capability should be reinforced as a key to women's development. With this, I seek to examine the theoretical reinforcements of Nussbaum's capability approach to comprehend gender justice in an informal economy. The second section will briefly examine the list of Nussbaum's human capabilities. Following the ideas of Nussbaum, it emphasizes and explain why capability is an appropriate political goal. This aim goes further by examining women's limited access to institutions. Here, I will assert that economic and political thought should be considered and included a feminist and philosophical approach in policy-making, exploring women's problems in the workforce. In this study, I argue that women's development is best attained through institutions that have a central duty to promote women's capabilities. Finally, the last section will draw attention to the connection between Nussbaum's capabilities approach and Amartya Sen's perspective on the capabilities approach. I shall try to show the need to theorize women's capabilities and development as a proper philosophical base for viewing occupational justice. Overall, my study will provide important elements for understanding the discrimination, marginalization, and inequality that women confront in the informal economy, and women's capability is what they are *able to do and to be*, despite their working conditions.

**Keywords:** *women, capabilities approach, informal economy, workforce, development*

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*"Our emotional life maps our incompleteness: A creature without any needs would never have reasons for fear, or grief, or hope, or anger."*  
— Martha Nussbaum<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It is advice on a Full Life from Philosopher Martha Nussbaum, *Do Not Despise Your Inner World*. See Martha Nussbaum, "Do not Despise Your Inner World," in *Take My Advice: Letters to the Next Generation from People Who Know a*

## Introduction

In her book *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*, Nussbaum argued that women confront greater impediments by attempting to enter a workplace, including coercion from their family or spouse, sex discrimination in hiring, and sexual harassment in the working spaces all without sufficient legal recourse.<sup>2</sup> In the case of informal economy, women are primarily bound to low-income activities, have few opportunities for organization and representation, and are underserved by social protection, particularly during times of work injury, sickness, maternity, and unemployment. Governments and other institutions fail to protect women's capabilities in rudimentary ways, both in theory and, more significantly, in praxis. Women's capabilities are not as safeguarded, developed, or promoted as men's. According to Nussbaum, this inequality appears as a tremendous global concern for social justice, implying that governments fail to fulfill their most fundamental constitutional obligations to their women citizens.<sup>3</sup> Nussbaum then contended that social policies of the government are supposedly responsible for providing "the social basis of these capabilities" based on the capabilities approach.<sup>4</sup> For Nussbaum, capability is an appropriate political goal.<sup>5</sup>

The philosophical and theoretical approaches to assessing women's conditions were articulated by Amartya Sen,<sup>6</sup> and further developed by Martha Nussbaum. These scholars' approaches are established on the idea that human freedom (i.e., women's freedom) and access to opportunities are critical to social development. Sen's capabilities approach is substantial for producing justice by accentuating women's independence, enabling them to live dignified lives. Nussbaum elaborates on Sen's capabilities approach by outlining ten key human capabilities, all of which must be safeguarded by the state for the individual to develop into a productive member of society.<sup>7</sup> Nussbaum frames these central capabilities as universal yet context-sensitive, establishing minimum entitlements while leaving individuals free to decide how to exercise them. The lens of intersectionality does not dissolve the normative force of a shared claim of justice; rather, it ascertains how similar foundational entitlements are constructed in distinct and compounding ways. Meanwhile, Nussbaum's capabilities approach is grounded on the intuitive idea that human beings are worthy of equal respect and dignity.<sup>8</sup> When we say, "human dignity," it means that individuals

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*Thing or Two*, ed. by James L. Harmon (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002), 176-77.

<sup>2</sup> Nussbaum, *Women and Development*, 1. This is stated by Nussbaum in her opening paragraph of the book, along with the issues about women's access to education and to healthcare.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 13.

<sup>6</sup> For the articulations of Sen's views on capabilities (in the last section) see Amartya Sen, *Rights and Capabilities* (1984), Amartya Sen, *Justice: means versus freedoms* (1990b), Amartya Sen, *Missing Women* (1992), Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (1999)

<sup>7</sup> The lists will be elaborated in the subsequent sections. See Nussbaum, *Women and Development*, 78-80. This version is updated even more and referenced in her other books, see also Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 76-78; Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 33-34.

<sup>8</sup> In introducing the intuitive idea behind the capability approach, Nussbaum asserts that the passage of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* in 1844 is useful, written when he was reading Aristotle and was influenced by Aristotle's idea of human function and capability. In the argument of a human worthy of a life of dignity and equality, Marx found in Aristotle - that one must perform functions in a fully human way and not in an animal way. Marx's illustration is a starving person cannot consume food in a fully human way, by which he points a manner ingrained by practical conviviality and reasoning.

are active, have goals, and have projects. They seem to be, in some way, above nature's mechanical work, but they also require assistance for the fulfillment of their certain capabilities.<sup>9</sup> Hence, human dignity is embodied and socially mediated. It is expressed in the development of concrete capabilities assessed in the everyday lives of informal women workers. It transcends abstraction by embedding normative principles in the material and institutional conditions that shape women's informal labor.

In this paper, I aim to understand the problems that women face in an informal economy using the perspective of Martha Nussbaum's Capability Approach.<sup>10</sup> By "informal economy," I refer to domestic work, home-based production, care work, and other forms of informal self-employment that operate outside formal regulatory frameworks, without a formal safety net such as secure contracts, social protections, and employment-related benefits.<sup>11</sup> Women in this sector confront different economic and social realities from those encountered by men.<sup>12</sup> Despite their overrepresentation in informal work, women continue to experience restricted access to safety, bodily integrity, healthcare, and economic security. Women are not considered as ends in their own right. Instead, they are simply considered as instruments for others' ends, taking care of children, the elderly, and families. Although women formally possess equal legal rights and liberties, their working conditions are shaped by embedded customary norms and gendered expectations, which mirror a failure to recognize women as bearers of inherent moral worth. While legal opportunities are important, it is insufficient. It is necessary to act on the informal economy to reinforce women's capabilities. This necessitates the use of Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach.

Thus, understanding women in the informal economy furnished by the capabilities approach is centered on women's capabilities, that is, *what women are actually able to do and to be*.<sup>13</sup> Using Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach, I contend that Nussbaum's paradigm captures the conditions of women in the informal economy for the following reasons: (1) Nussbaum underlines the disparity between what women have and what women realistically achieve when working in the informal sector, where they often face job insecurity and a lack of social benefits. (2) Nussbaum's lists of central human capabilities establish minimum thresholds for human dignity and clear benchmarks for understanding the realities of women working in the informal economy. (3) By bridging theory and policy, Nussbaum establishes normative criteria that the government must adhere to, allowing for the evaluation of actual gaps like social protection and safe working conditions.

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<sup>9</sup> For a further elaboration of this view, see Nussbaum, "Victims and Agents," in *The Boston Review* 23 (1998), 21–24, and "Political Animals: Luck, Love, and Dignity," in *Metaphilosophy* 29 (1998), 273–87.

<sup>10</sup> For the rest of the paper, I will use Martha Nussbaum's forthcoming (a), focusing on legal issues and constitutional. See Martha Nussbaum, *Sex and Social Justice* (1999); Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Development: The Capabilities Approach* (2000) (to be cited *Women and Development* hereafter), Nussbaum, *Capabilities as fundamental entitlements: Sen and social justice* (2003), Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice* (2006), Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities* (2011). I wanted to specify, however, that I will use *Women and Development* as my main source.

<sup>11</sup> The facets of the informal economy, which I do not include from the definition are not crucial, such as the social or communal sector and the illegal sector.

<sup>12</sup> See Human Development Report 1999 of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

<sup>13</sup> Nussbaum, *Women and Development*, 71. It is important to note that this is distinct from a philosophical approach regarding people's desire-fulfillment, happiness or income, consumption, or expenditures. Other facets of the capability approach can be traced back to Adam Smith, Aristotle, and Karl Marx. See also Nussbaum 1988, 2001, 2003.

This paper is divided into three sections: the first section will elaborate on women's conditions and experiences in the informal economy. It examines the theoretical reinforcements of Nussbaum's capability approach in understanding occupational justice in the informal economy. The second section will discuss Nussbaum's list of human capabilities. This list of capabilities is essential in identifying women's reinforcing or weakening capabilities in the informal economy. In this section, I will focus on explaining why capability is an appropriate political goal. Additionally, it further examines women's limited access to institutions. I argue that economic and political thought should include a feminist and philosophical approach in policy-making concerning women's issues in the informal economy. I argue that these capabilities furnish a basic political principle that can be embodied in constitutional guarantees. Finally, the last section will discuss the conceptual relationships between Nussbaum and Sen, stressing the importance of theorizing informal women workers' capabilities as a philosophical foundation for occupational justice. Nussbaum's capabilities approach makes an actual contribution to the practical pursuit of social and gender justice. Thus, government has a central duty to ensure that such justice is guaranteed.

### Conditions of Women in the Informal Economy

Women are often disadvantaged in the workforce simply because they are women, poor, less educated, and unprotected by law. When a woman is elderly and disabled, she is more likely to face workplace discrimination. Men are also seen working in the informal economy, but women receive frequent low-paying and more vulnerable categories of work, such as domestic workers or self-employed home-based workers.<sup>14</sup> This is rooted in the idea that women are conventionally primary caretakers of the needs of their children, their families, and their homes.<sup>15</sup> Women's endowment to sustain their family's needs is frequently viewed as a *natural* part of women's responsibilities. Despite these stereotypes, women have dignity who deserve respect from laws and institutions. I will begin by discussing women's conditions in the informal economy to understand why women's capabilities in the informal economy are fundamental human capabilities that should not be diminished.

Informal economy is defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) as "all economic activities by workers and economic units that are—in law or practice—not covered by formal arrangements."<sup>16</sup> What is often neglected is that women make up an undeservedly large proportion of the informal economy's workforce, from domestic workers to street vendors to subsistence farmers and seasonal agriculture.<sup>17</sup> Women in the informal economy are confronted with structural barriers preventing them from having decent paid work, thus compelling them to attend to care responsibilities.<sup>18</sup> Discrimination in the availability of work, based on sex and gender

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<sup>14</sup> ILO, "Empowering women in the Informal economy," in *ILO Issue Brief 4* (2018), 1.

<sup>15</sup> Nussbaum asserted that women are burdened with what we call a "double day." Women have two jobs, one outside their homes as employees and another when they return home. This simply means that women, especially in poor countries, do not have time for self-improvement activities. See Nussbaum, *Women and Development*, 1-2; Nussbaum, *Women and Equality*, 238.

<sup>16</sup> ILO, 2002 ILC Resolution and Conclusions on Decent Work and Informal Economy, <https://www.ilo.org/topics-and-sectors/informal-economy>

<sup>17</sup> UN Women, "Progress of the World's Women 2015–2016: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights," in *UN Women*, 2015, chap. 2, 71.

<sup>18</sup> ILO, "Empowering women in the informal economy," in *ILO Issue Brief 4* (2018), 1.

increases women workers' vulnerability, leading to exploitation.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps there are numerous other reasons why women work in the informal economy. They either choose to work in the informal economy or are forced to do so due to problems in the formal economy or motivated by the need to survive.

Nevertheless, women's work has yet to be considered. Most often, they accept jobs that offer low wages with long hours of work and poor working conditions that expose them to health and safety hazards, with no security or protection.<sup>20</sup> Thus, I wanted to show emphasis on the non-recognition of women's work in the informal economy, resulting in unpaid or low-income wages or salaries, thereby impeding women's capability to receive equal social and legal protections. I will primarily focus on domestic workers, unpaid care, and homeworkers. Although these informal workers provide critical services, they frequently lack access to rights and protection. They also face some of the most challenging working conditions.<sup>21</sup> In domestic work, women work for low wages or no compensation at all. In many cases, women work without written contracts, resulting in various forms of exploitation.<sup>22</sup> I argue that the vulnerabilities that women experience are caused by their lack of formal arrangements.

In many developing countries like the Philippines, domestic work is almost unnoticeable as a form of employment, which contributes to the current situation. Domestic work is done at home as opposed to in an office or factory. The purpose of their work is to care for millions of households, not to create additional value.<sup>23</sup> Domestic work is often informal and undocumented, which is why it is undervalued. Although its roots can be found in the "master-servant" relationship, it is frequently seen as something other than regular employment because it does not fall under the broad purview of current labor laws. Due to this, a lot of laws do not specifically address the domestic employment relationship, which leaves domestic workers open to unfair, abusive, and unequal treatment.<sup>24</sup> Generally, women informal workers earn low wages, making it challenging for them to save money for emergencies or unexpected events, as well as to pay for their own or their family's medical needs and their children's education.

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<sup>19</sup> Marx argued that it is morally reprehensible to prioritize the ends of some over those of others. Treating a person like a mere object for the benefit of others is the essence of exploitation. The goal of this is to create a society where every person is respected and allowed to live genuinely human lives. This statement is cited in Nussbaum, *Women and Development*, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Lucita Lazo, "Challenges in the Economic Participation of women as entrepreneurs," PIDS Policy Notes, <[https://pidswebs.pids.gov.ph/CDN/PUBLICATIONS/pidspn1503\\_rev.pdf](https://pidswebs.pids.gov.ph/CDN/PUBLICATIONS/pidspn1503_rev.pdf)>.

<sup>21</sup> This is due with the thought that women in the informal economy are discriminated as "non-productive and symptom of bad governance." See Lucita Lazo, "Challenges in the Economic Participation of Women as Entrepreneurs," PIDS Policy Notes No. 2025-03; retrieved from <[https://pidswebs.pids.gov.ph/CDN/PUBLICATIONS/pidspn1503\\_rev.pdf](https://pidswebs.pids.gov.ph/CDN/PUBLICATIONS/pidspn1503_rev.pdf)>.

<sup>22</sup> ILO, "Without contracts, domestic workers' right unprotected," 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Asian Development Bank and International Labour Organization, "Women and Labour Markets in Asia: Rebalancing for Gender Equality," 2011, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/28620/women-labor-markets.pdf>. Asian Development and International Labour Organization will be abbreviated ADB and ILO for convenience hereinafter.

<sup>24</sup> ILO, "Asia-Pacific labour market update," 2010.

In his work *Divisions of Labour*, Pahl posited that much of the activity in the informal economy falls under the category of work rather than employment.<sup>25</sup> Hence, this is exemplified by working outside of agriculture, where women are more likely than men to be self-employed, domestic workers, unpaid contributors in family businesses, and industrial outworkers or homemakers. A significant proportion of women working in agriculture, on the other hand, are also unpaid contributors to the family farm. Pahl, like Burns, suggested that the lopsided emphasis on employment implies that paid or formal work is the only important type of work.<sup>26</sup> In this case, women in the informal economy are not identified as workers or legitimate economic agents. Their contribution to the economy is typically not captured by statistics.<sup>27</sup> In other words, women's work is invisible in the policy arena. I argue that the informality of women's work reduces the visibility and makes mainstream institutional interventions to occupational injustices. What is more concerning is that almost all women working in the informal economy come from the socially and economically disadvantaged sector, which requires a lot of work to make a living. As mentioned, women represent the largest number of individuals living in poverty. Within the informal economy, they are vulnerable to violence and other inequalities that aggravate their vulnerabilities. Women's work is not valued as labor. Their labor is devalued by the capitalist patriarchy. In Dorothy Smith's *Feminism and Marxism*, she argued that women are marginalized by the capitalist economic system and that women's work must fill the void left by wage depreciation, irregularity, and uncertainty when unemployment rates are high.<sup>28</sup>

Obviously, gender inequality is enormously linked with poverty, and when these are combined, the consequence is an acute failure of central human capabilities.<sup>29</sup> Thereupon, one of the consequences of activities not being considered employment is that all the work women accomplish is stereotypically perceived as holding no value, or it becomes undervalued. Women workers in the informal economy are the "working poor," toiling in survivalist activities, working difficult and long hours, but not gaining enough income to support themselves and their families.<sup>30</sup> Women's time and mobility are restrained by social and cultural norms that assign accountability for social protection to women and prevent investment in women's work. In that regard, women's work in the informal economy is easily hired, fired, cheapened, and exploited.<sup>31</sup> This is primarily because of women's perceived inability to compete in labor, capital, and product markets.

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<sup>25</sup> Raymond Edward Pahl, *Divisions of Labour* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1984), chap. 2. See also Ivan Illich, "Vernacular Gender." Here, Illich argued that the duality that strives for the unattainable ideal of social, legal, political, and economic equality is referred to as "economic sex." Both genders are reduced to mere consumer and worker roles, rendering them as neutered economic agents. Nonetheless, I can infer that women in the informal economy are neutered economic agents.

<sup>26</sup> Pahl, *Divisions of Labour*, 84. To see the connections of Pahl and Burn's discussion, see Scott Burns, *The Household Economy: Its Shape, Origins, and Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), 11.

<sup>27</sup> Lea Goelnitz, "Unheard, Unseen, Unrecognized: Women in Informal Employment," in *FES Asia* (2018) <https://asia.fes.de/news/unheard-unseen-unrecognized-women-in-informal-employment?>

<sup>28</sup> Dorothy Smith, *Feminism and Marxism, a Place to Begin, a Way to Go* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1977), 2.

<sup>29</sup> Nussbaum, *Women and Development*, 6.

<sup>30</sup> ADB and ILO "Women and Labour Markets in Asia," 2011.

<sup>31</sup> Women working in the informal economy are perceived as nothing more than a commodity, in this sense a source of labor, hired and fired at will. See further discussions, particularly on the four types of Alienation in Karl Marx, "Estranged Labour," *Marxists.org*, 1844, <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm>>.

It is important to note, however, that informal women workers are not a homogenous group. They are distinct in terms of employment, educational attainment, work location, and occupational group. For instance, women working in informal domestic work may confront vulnerability to abuse, a single mother may face discrimination and a lack of legal protection, while poverty or age may intensify economic insecurity. I contend that differences do not mean different standards of justice; they furnish different barriers to the same entitlements. Occupational justice acknowledges dimensions of human flourishing while maintaining a threshold that is shared equally by all. I argue that it produces patterns in how injustices are experienced. With that, it is grounded in human capabilities that give a framework that is attentive to context-specific inequalities.

*(In)accessibility to the Formal Safety Net*

Despite intersectional differences, working in the informal economy universally leaves women without any protection from labor laws, and social benefits such as health insurance, maternity leave, paid sick leave, and a pension. It is less viable for women to have access to social protection. Thus, gender inequalities in employment and job quality result in gaps in access to social protection acquired through employment. The primary focus of my paper is on domestic workers, unpaid contributors to family businesses, and industrial outworkers or homeworkers. Within this specific area of the informal economy, they are unlikely to have limited access to social protection.

As such, women in the informal economy toil for lower wages and in hazardous conditions, including the threat to their health and safety. The lack of social protections has long-term consequences for women,<sup>32</sup> resulting in labor segmentation. In the Philippines, women constitute “a large portion of the Philippine sector and are mostly found in small home businesses, contractual jobs, and other underdeveloped sector of the economy.”<sup>33</sup> Although there are both men and women working in informal employment, women are more likely to be employed in the most precarious and vulnerable positions, where their pay is low, variable, or nonexistent, their job insecurity is high, and they lack formal safety nets to support them in times of weak economic demand, when they are unable to work, or when they become unemployed.<sup>34</sup>

The World Health Organization (WHO) frequently reported that women working in the informal economy have to immediately return to work within weeks after giving birth, thus confronting hazardous conditions that adversely affect their health.<sup>35</sup> Self-employment or home-based work increases a woman’s economic vulnerability because her work is invisible and unlikely to be recognized as important economic activity. Similarly, they are unlikely to have access to opportunities to improve their skills or to benefit from the solidarity and bargaining power that

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<sup>32</sup> UN Women, “Women in Informal Economy,” 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Ecumerical Institute for Labor Education and Research, Inc. “Action Research on the Multi-dimensional Vulnerabilities of Women Workers in the Informal Sector” Philippines. June 2015.

<sup>34</sup> ADB and ILO, “Women and Labour Markets in Asia: Rebalancing for Gender Equality,” 2011.

<sup>35</sup> Gautam Bhan et al., “Informal Work and Maternal and Child Health: A Blind Spot in Public Health and Research,” in *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 98:3 (January 28, 2020): 219–21, <<https://doi.org/10.2471/blt.19.231258>>.

comes with being organized.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, workers in the informal economy may struggle to establish a legal identity due to regulatory or economic impediments. With this, the gender bias against women throughout the world is more dominant and widespread in Third World Countries. In the case of the Philippines, the study *Towards Inclusive Social Protection Program Coverage in the Philippines* proposed that women's access to social protection is linked to their working status. As a result, most social insurance programs are likely to cover those who are formally employed, as required by law, leaving women in the informal economy underserved. In addition, social insurance in the informal economy becomes only an option because of unstable and low earnings. Significantly, the agricultural sector, at least in the Philippine context, has the highest proportion of workers who are unable to receive GSIS, SSS, or PhilHealth benefits, with about ninety-eight percent of women workers compared to ninety-five percent of men working in the informal economy.<sup>37</sup>

Mapping the discussion of this section, I argue that although women make up the majority of the informal workforce and provide a disproportionate amount of support for a substantial number of dependents, the value of less paid, less income, and unpaid labor in society is not widely acknowledged or understood. It makes it difficult for them to be included as beneficiaries of government programs funded by taxes. Their predicaments are exemplified by the risks of poverty and the working spaces that informal workers face, along with a lack of access to the right tools for risk management and their gender, causing many women to experience financial instability or make them susceptible to destitution. Although both men and women are in the informal sector, women are undeniably disadvantaged because of the normative idea that women are the primary caretakers of their families. Hence, I will argue, through Nussbaum's philosophical ideas, that women in the informal economy are worthy of equal rights and dignity, i.e., women's development vis-à-vis work, government intervention, and policy. Ultimately, after examining the conditions of women in the informal economy, I will then discuss the theoretical reinforcements of Nussbaum's capability approach in understanding social and gender justice in the informal economy.

### *Capabilities Approach in the Informal Economy*

With the discussed conditions of women in the informal economy, Nussbaum's capabilities approach provides a framework for women's development that can integrate these economic and working realities. However, the primary question of the capabilities is not, "*How satisfied are the women?*" Or even "*How much in the way of resources is she able to command?*" It is, in lieu, "*What women are actually able to do and to be?*"<sup>38</sup> According to Nussbaum, we are not asking about women's satisfaction with what she does, but what she does, and what she is actually in a position to do. I contend that

<sup>36</sup> Carolyn Butler, "Solidarity Center - Info," Solidarity Center, September 21, 2017, <<https://www.solidaritycenter.org/what-we-do/info>>.

<sup>37</sup> Aubrey Tabuga and Carlos Cabaero, "Towards Inclusive Social Protection Program Coverage in the Philippines: Examining Gender Disparities," 2019, <<https://pidswebs.pids.gov.ph/CDN/PUBLICATIONS/pidsdps1911.pdf>>.

<sup>38</sup> Nussbaum, *Women and Development*, 71. I borrow the phrasing, of course, to Nussbaum and apply it to the women working in the informal economy. Here, the original phrase is: "How satisfied is Vasanti?" or even "How much in the way of resources is she able to command?" It is, instead, "What is Vasanti actually able to do and to be?" Vasanti is an impoverished Indian woman, portraying how capability approach performs institutional evaluations. Through a Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) loan, Vasanti had a source of income. See the phrasing also in Nussbaum, *Women and Equality*, 233.

this includes women's working opportunities. Particularly, in *Women and Human Development*, Nussbaum argues in great detail that this is not to be rational only, not only to be happy, but to be capable of engaging in dignified labor.<sup>39</sup> As such, women in developing countries are critical to the project for two reasons: first, women frequently experience acute capability failure; and second, their circumstances provide intriguing challenges for this and other approaches, revealing the issues they successfully or unsuccessfully resolve.<sup>40</sup> Understanding this from the perspective of women working in the informal sector makes them relevant to this project, as they experience capability failure as a result of their situation aggravated by poverty. Women's conditions are contentious in policy-making that will be imposed by the government.

Women's capabilities reflect a distinct view of economic development compared with the conventional goals of achieving a conclusive salary or income. A society that does not guarantee social justice to all its citizens is not a fully just society, regardless of its level of opulence. Hence, capabilities are regarded as necessary for all women, wherein each woman is treated as an end in herself, rather than as a mere adjunct or means to the ends of others. However, priorities may need to be set temporarily and capabilities must be understood as mutually supportive and all central to social justice. In the case of women working in the informal economy, I argue that a society that ignores their capabilities has disadvantaged these women and that the undervaluation and unrecognition of their work is unjust.

As mentioned, the capabilities approach gauges women's well-being regarding what they are *able to do and who they can be*. Eventually, Nussbaum grounded her theory in her intuitive idea that each person (i.e., women) is worthy of equal respect and dignity. Nussbaum argued that her version of the capabilities approach began with a conception of human dignity and a life worthy of that dignity, hence, a life with "truly human functioning," as described by Marx in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* in 1844.<sup>41</sup> With this basic idea as a foundation, Nussbaum attempted to justify a list of ten capabilities as essential components of a dignified life. I argue that reframing this concept of "dignified life" as "dignified labor," the following lists, although universal, are necessary to be achieved by women in the informal economy. As a result of the arduous working conditions of women in this sector, without social or any legal protection, some of the lists are not fully achieved by them.

### **What Women in the (Informal Economy) Are Able To Do and To Be**

To scrutinize the conditions of women in the informal economy, Nussbaum's list of human capabilities examines women's reinforcing or weakening capabilities in the informal economy. Here, I will explain why capability is an appropriate political goal, as Nussbaum argued, by juxtaposing their conditions with the provided lists. Nussbaum, nevertheless, situates this defined set of "central human capabilities" within a distinctive form of political liberalism, explicitly presents them as

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 6. Along with those two reasons, Nussbaum also discusses the issues faced by these women and helps us understand the flaws in "Standard GNP" and "Utility-based approaches." Nonetheless, the issues of women are necessary in and of themselves, and it is hoped that concentrating on them will make up for the prior disregard for gender equality in development as an economic and global human rights movement.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 86, 148.

“political goals.”<sup>42</sup> I will focus, however, on the first three capabilities in my discussion. I argue that these three capabilities are the most fundamental conditions of human dignity and survival, and these are precisely the areas where women in the informal economy are most vulnerable. These serve as a springboard for developing policies and interventions that safeguard women’s welfare and enable them to lead lives that are secure, healthy, and dignified.

*Nussbaum’s Central Human Capabilities*<sup>43</sup>

1. Life: being able to live a normal human life; not dying prematurely from normal curable illnesses or because one’s life has been reduced to the point where it is no longer worth living
2. Bodily Health: possessing sufficient nutrition, appropriate shelter, reproductive health, and general well-being.
3. Bodily Integrity: being able to move freely while being safe from sexual, physical, and domestic violence.
4. Senses, Imagination, and Thought: being able to use senses, imagine, think, and reason; acting humanely, guided, and honed by education, which includes instruction in science, math, and reading.
5. Emotions: having the ability to feel emotions for objects and people other than oneself (i.e., to love someone, grieve, etc.).
6. Practical Reason: possessing the ability to discern right from wrong and critically evaluate one’s life planning.
7. Affiliation: (a) Possessing the social foundations of dignity and non-humiliation; (b) having the capacity to coexist peacefully and show concern for others.
8. Other Species: the ability to live in concern for and relating to animals, plants, and nature.
9. Play: being able to laugh, play, and enjoy recreation.
10. Control over One’s Environment: (a) Political, being able to participate effectively in political choices; (b) Material, being able to hold property.

In examining the conditions of women working in the informal economy in the first section, we find that many, if not all, do not meet these capabilities because of the nature of their work. Women in the informal economy confront precarious and unsafe working conditions, limited access to healthcare, and high exposure to violence and exploitation. Within this situation, what are the reinforcing capabilities of women, given their extremely disadvantaged predicament in the informal economy?

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 87. Furthermore, placing them within a category “political liberalism,” which defines them as particular political objectives and gives them a presentation devoid of any particular metaphysical foundation.

<sup>43</sup> This version actually came from Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 33-34. A complete version of the lists found in Nussbaum, *Women and Development*, 78-80. After providing the lists, afterward, Nussbaum recognizes that these lists are open-ended and subject to revision. She argues that society’s understanding of its basic entitlements is always subject to revision.

Life underscores the essential priority of safeguarding survival from hazardous working conditions or inadequate social support systems. Bodily Health highlights the imperative of ensuring women's access to proper nutrition and comprehensive healthcare for sustaining a dignified standard of living. The inaccessibility of women in social protection, like paid sick leave, paid maternity leave, and, in the case of the Philippines, PhilHealth, would lead to circumstances like high mortality rates, serious illness, and severe malnutrition. Maternal health studies demonstrate how systemic challenges in healthcare access continue to endanger women's survival, particularly in low-resource areas.<sup>44</sup> Many of the women who work in this economy are compelled to return to work, as mentioned in the first section, based on the WHO's account. Although the embedded reason is not mentioned, I argue that this is because they do not have paid maternity leave to sustain their newborn child's needs. As Martha Nussbaum articulates: "The disability imposed by childbearing on a member of the labor force is to a large extent socially constructed, above all by the absence of support for childcare, from the public sphere, from employers, and from male partners."<sup>45</sup> In some cases, it is reinforced to women who can still get support from their husbands, families, and friends. However, considering most of them belong to underprivileged societies, the capacity to live a normal length, have good health, good productive health, and adequate nutrition is not fully achievable for women in the informal economy. Case in point, Amadora-Nolasco's study of women in low-income Philippine communities illustrates how poverty, environmental conditions, and limited access to healthcare compromise women's ability to achieve and maintain health.<sup>46</sup>

Given these situations, many women who rely on the informal economy find that they lack access to adequate financial protection against health risks, frequently resulting in a heavy financial burden on medical costs, which can lead to severe financial problems, like a decreased capability to cover other necessities.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the proportion of women's income allocated to health care is also a crucial factor in assessing women's capabilities, wherein a lack of access to health care is another facet that contributes to income insecurity and vulnerability to poverty. Undeniably, access to health care is one of the most important social protection areas for informal workers in the developing world, like the Philippines.<sup>48</sup> Even with the development of national health systems, at least half of the world's population remains without access to basic healthcare services.<sup>49</sup> Particularly, women who depend on the informal economy are more likely to be marginalized and excluded from health care services, because they have greater difficulties paying medical health insurance contributions.

Moreover, women working in the informal economy are vulnerable to sexual, physical, and domestic violence. Poor working conditions in this sector can have significant social consequences

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<sup>44</sup> Stella A. Quimbo et al., "A Systems Approach to Improving Maternal Health in the Philippines," in *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 90:10 (2012): 714–721.

<sup>45</sup> Nussbaum, *Sex and Social Justice*, 51.

<sup>46</sup> Fe Amadora-Nolasco, "Women's Health Challenges in a Low-income Philippine Urban Neighborhood," in *Journal of International Women's Studies* 10:2 (2009): 168–183.

<sup>47</sup> OECD and International Labour Organization, "Risks and Vulnerabilities in the Informal Economy," in *OECD iLibrary* (May 21, 2019), <<https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/2cfd8904-en.pdf?>>.

<sup>48</sup> ILO, "World Social Protection Report 2017-19: Universal social protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals," in *Internal Labour Organization, Geneva*, 2017.

<sup>49</sup> WHO/World Bank, "Tracking Universal Health Coverage: 2017 Global Monitoring Report," in *World Health Organization, Geneva*, 2017.

besides economic ones. Many people who work informally, particularly in developing countries, confront occupational safety and health risks. On the account of Bodily Integrity, Nussbaum took a proactive approach reflecting her view of violence against women as a capability deprivation. The rationale behind presenting this capability is to acknowledge that, those women who suffer from deprivation of capability due to a lack of bodily integrity, the government and institutions bear the responsibility of creating the social conditions, such as laws and interventions, which facilitate this capability.<sup>50</sup> This is necessary because maintaining one's physical integrity is a means of achieving more freedom and employment opportunities for women working in the informal economy.

The informal workers probably suffer from violence because of their job status. Women who work in the informal economy are particularly susceptible to gender-based violence due to the lack of protection in their work and gender intersection circumstances.<sup>51</sup> Eventually, the violence that women informal workers face can be rooted in material conflicts, exemplifying limited resources, such as urban space and materials, which can lead to competition.<sup>52</sup> Other working spaces, such as domestic homes, leave women vulnerable to domestic violence as a result of isolation and lack of access to mechanisms for making complaints and seeking legal recourse. But who are those perpetrators of violence? The state, including local police, traffic cops, border guards, coworkers, family members, the public, clients of informal workers, criminal actors, and strong vested interests with control over the working conditions and workspaces of informal workers, are some of the most common sources of workplace violence. Furthermore, domestic worker abusers may include the employer's friends, family, and coworkers, as well as the owners and employees of brokers, employment agencies, and placement services.<sup>53</sup> Considering that large numbers of women work in the informal economy, they are likely to experience violence from these perpetrators. Thus, in 2017, the International Labor Organization (ILO) contended that informal worker organizations ought to be involved in discussions concerning national laws prohibiting violations against informal workers. This discussion is embodied through the "Tripartite Meeting of Experts on Violence." It is deduced in the meeting that: "...governments should adopt or reinforce a policy or policies, in consultation with social partners and with other relevant and representative organizations of persons concerned...Due attention should be paid to workers in the informal economy..."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Nussbaum, *Woman and Development*, 81. The capabilities approach holds that the provision of "the social basis of these capabilities" is ultimately the responsibility of the government through its social policies.

<sup>51</sup> ILO, "Violence and Harassment Against Women and Men in the World of Work: Trade Union Perspectives and Action," in *Geneva: ILO* (2017).

<sup>52</sup> WIEGO, *Violence and Informal Work: Briefing Note* (2018). This has linkages to Marx's Estranged Labor, wherein workers are alienated from other workers because of competitions. Marx claims that work allows people to create strong community bonds. However, industrial capitalism creates work competitive rather than cooperative (Marx, "Estranged Labour," 1844). As a result, not necessarily in an industrial capitalism, we can deduce that women in the informal economy are alienated from other women working in the same sector due to scarce, if not limited, resources, given that they lack the resources that the formal economy possesses.

<sup>53</sup> International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF), "Response to ILO Questionnaire on Ending Violence and Harassment against Women and Men in the World of Work," (2017).

<sup>54</sup> ILO, "Final Report Meeting of Experts on Violence against Women and Men in the World of Work," 2016, para 19. It is based on "Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing" (WIEGO) experiences working with urban informal workers across four industries: waste picking, street vending, domestic work, and home-based work. It is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis; rather, it seeks to paint a broad picture of how industry, workplace,

For Nussbaum, bodily health and bodily integrity are significant to all other capabilities in that they can legitimately interfere with one's decision to some extent. While I prioritize the three capabilities, I argue that the ten lists of capabilities are of equal importance. There will always be disagreements about the exact boundaries of each list, but all are necessary to be possessed by all the women in the informal economy. Women's capabilities should therefore be taken into consideration when juxtaposing these capacities, particularly, life, bodily health, and bodily integrity, with the circumstances of women in the informal economy and their lack of access to any formal safety net. Scrutinizing its connections, due to low wages or unpaid work, those central capabilities are not guaranteed because women do not have access to these formal safety nets. With this, how can we guarantee women in the informal economy? Then, what women in the informal economy *are able to do and to be*.

I argue that the capabilities approach inquiries about what "genuine" opportunities are available to women in this sector. We will now shift our focus to women's development and policy-making to women's capabilities: substantive opportunities in their economic and social environment. The lists of central capabilities impose obligations on governments, which must ensure that all people meet the minimum thresholds for those capabilities. Nussbaum argued that access to these essential capabilities allows for the possibility of a fully human existence.<sup>55</sup> The recognition of these capabilities enables the government to respect and guarantee its citizens the opportunity to flourishing lives. Nussbaum argued that the advocacy for capabilities seeks to improve the low quality of human conditions in our nations. Additionally, she asserted that concentrating on the particular capabilities that improve general well-being, for example, employment and gender-related capabilities, reveals that different approaches are needed depending on the capability at hand, all of which advance the well-being of women.<sup>56</sup> Nussbaum then stated: "...the capabilities are an interlocking set; they support one another, and an impediment to one impedes others."<sup>57</sup>

That is where the concept of a threshold comes into the discussion: if a person does not have a certain level of capability in each area (i.e., the lists), they cannot live in a truly human way. Nussbaum calls this "principle of each person as an end," which can be further articulated as a "principle of each person's capability."<sup>58</sup> The capabilities are sought for every person, groups, families, friends, states, or other corporate bodies. Women, particularly, deserve support in their challenging conditions in the workforce. Women are worthy of support because of what they *are able to do and to be*, and the fundamental political goal is always the promotion of each woman's capability. Thus, my paper will focus on why women's capability in the informal economy an appropriate political goal.

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and gender interact with violent sources in order to identify the various types of violence that informal workers face. It also lists potential violent perpetrators based on informal worker accounts.

<sup>55</sup> Nussbaum, *Women and Development*, 87.

<sup>56</sup> Nussbaum, *Capabilities as Fundamental Entitlements*, 53.

<sup>57</sup> Nussbaum, *Women and Development*, 294.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, 12, 74, 198.

*Capability as an Appropriate Political Goal (in the Informal Economy)*

Nussbaum argued that capability is an appropriate political goal, not because the theory lacks moral grounding, but because its moral commitments inform public-policy, constitution-making, and international guidance. Nussbaum's account of central human capabilities thereby provides a determinate and action-guiding vision of social justice, lending critical force to policy-making critical for a life worthy of human dignity. Within this framework, the conditions of women in the informal economy may be understood as normative demands for the realization of capability thresholds.

According to Nussbaum, human dignity is grounded as a political doctrine, specifying the institutional conditions necessary for a life worthy of human dignity. In this context, dignity functions as a political conception of the good. In *Frontiers of Justice*, Nussbaum posited that dignity grounds a "political doctrine about basic entitlements."<sup>59</sup> Ultimately, the list of capabilities is a partial moral conception conceived to guarantee basic political principles<sup>60</sup> and unifies the overlapping consensus in pluralistic societies.<sup>61</sup> Case in point, political conception in the informal economy can be perceived in the collective struggles of domestic workers for legal recognition and enforceable rights. When domestic workers seek inclusion in labor legislation, such as access to social security, regulated hours, and a minimum wage guarantee, they affirm not just moral worth but a claim to equal civic standing as rights-bearing workers.<sup>62</sup>

In *The Right of Others: Aliens, Residents, and Citizens*, Seyla Benhabib develops a discourse-theoretic understanding of democratic legitimacy grounded in the moral right of all individuals. Democratic legitimacy hinges on inclusive public reasoning and the power of all individuals to challenge institutional arrangements.<sup>63</sup> In the case of informal women workers, dignity becomes a political objective when it requires not only protection through labor policy but also recognition of women as participants of the regulatory frameworks that structure their labor.

However, Nussbaum contended that the entitlements flowing from dignity are "prepolitical", not artifacts of laws and institutions.<sup>64</sup> It is an inherent quality belonging to an individual before legal recognition. In this case, informal women workers possess inherent and equal human dignity, a prepolitical moral status, regardless of their labor conditions. The government or the state does not give this dignity; they are responding to it. From the conception, I argue that Nussbaum is articulating that capabilities are political goals because states must organize laws, policies, and social structures to secure those thresholds as a matter of occupational justice. The structural deficiencies

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<sup>59</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, in JSTOR (Harvard University Press, 2006), <155, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1c7zftw>>.

<sup>60</sup> Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 109.

<sup>61</sup> Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 153-154.

<sup>62</sup> This is contemplated in Convention 189 of the International Labour Organization (ILO), also known as the *Domestic Workers Convention*, 2011. It established international labor standards such as fair employment terms and social protection, dedicated for domestic workers - a sector historically underserved by formal labor rights.

<sup>63</sup> Seyla Benhabib, "The Rights of Others: Aliens, Residents, and Citizens," in *Philpapers.org* (2012), <<https://philpapers.org/rec/BENTRO-27>>.

<sup>64</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, "Capabilities, Entitlements, Rights: Supplementation and Critique," in *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 12:1 (February 2011): 23-37, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2011.541731>>.

that women face demonstrated why capability is a political objective because, without constitutional efforts, the dignity of informal women workers remains nascent in praxis.

Iris Marion Young, for instance, structural injustice refers to the harms people experience because of the broader systems they are part of.<sup>65</sup> In this case, women in the informal economy face low pay and serious occupational risks not simply because of one employer's actions, but because multiple actors, such as government institutions, contribute to these conditions. As Young noted, the actions of institutions reinforce the existing rules in a specific context, thereby governments pursue efficiency and cost reduction with this structure. From the perspective of women's capabilities, these structural dynamics constrain women's substantive freedoms and limit their ability to achieve central capabilities. As Young maintained, such processes can be transformed only through collective action across different social positions.<sup>66</sup> I argue that these conditions represent capability deprivation that must be addressed by government institutions. Expanding women's capabilities in the informal economy, therefore, becomes a political goal requiring coordinated reforms among states, firms, and other institutions.

Thus, the main objective of Nussbaum's work is to give the philosophical underpinnings for an explanation of fundamental constitutional values that all governments ought to uphold and enforce as a necessary condition for maintaining human dignity. This is a liberal commitment to ensure basic rights for everyone. Thus, she argued that constitutional governments must "protect, promote, or create whatever conditions are necessary for citizens to possess these fundamental capabilities."<sup>67</sup> Hence, I argue that governments ought to protect women's fundamental capabilities, and this is a constitutional obligation. Nussbaum's universal list of capabilities is a sort of objective basis that allows putting women's lack of liberty to the fore. Why would women have fewer requirements than men in terms of liberty? The first step of our reflection on the improvement of women's quality of life is therefore to point out what central capabilities are hardly accessible to them. It is then crucial to understand what institutions are incompatible with women flourishing to act well on it. One must acknowledge the significance of social structures as well as individual agency. I contend that government and other institutions' interventions are necessary to increase women's access to social protection.

By foregrounding what women are *able to do and to be*, the study affirms informal women workers' capabilities at the center of inquiry. Thereby, it uncovers inequalities in resources and opportunities, violations of bodily integrity, and the continued failure to recognize informal labor as a legitimate form of employment. It is crucial to clarify the normative direction of policy on what constitutional commitments should structure informal women workers' participation in the workforce, what conditions impede their economic advancement, and what entitlements they possess as members of society. Women working in the informal economy remain disproportionately marginalized despite occupying some of the most precarious positions in the labor market, characterized by low wages, insecurity, and exploitation. Analyzing these conditions reveals the

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<sup>65</sup> Iris Marion Young, *Political Responsibility and Structural Injustice* (University of Kansas, Department of Philosophy, 2003).

<sup>66</sup> Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>67</sup> Nussbaum, *Women and Equality*, 227.

structural barriers that restrict women's access to institutions and underscores the need for policies grounded in justice rather than mere economic growth.

*Limit to Women (in the Informal Economy) Access to Institutions*

In light of the foregoing arguments, informal women workers frequently encounter a wider variety of risks, which most often reflect their living and working circumstances. I argue that it is therefore critical to undertake a systematic assessment of these risks to illuminate the social and economic costs of treating informal women workers as peripheral rather than legitimate economic agents. Moreover, women in this sector often lack the opportunity to communicate their concerns to policymakers, leading to the formalization of policies that do not align with their needs and priorities.<sup>68</sup> Such a case not only exposes women to economic insecurity and hazardous conditions but also conveys precarity, particularly for children and the elderly, who often reside in similarly informal and unprotected living arrangements in developing contexts.

Generally, women in the informal economy who “can” achieve economic independence are perhaps hindered by low and insecure wages, work in unsafe conditions, no paid health and medical benefits, no pension, and risk of sexual harassment. This being the case of women's liberty,<sup>69</sup> Nussbaum asserts, “liberty is not just about having rights on paper; it also requires being in a material position to exercise those rights”<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, governmental or institutional organizations play a paramount role in empowering women by providing real-world opportunities, with accessibility to formal safety nets. Women are not just simply denied the same rights as men; many are unaware of their subordination. Only political dialogue allows for the expression or emergence of personal choices and needs. Thus, to address inequalities, policies must prioritize both economic and political freedom.<sup>71</sup>

Nevertheless, Nussbaum constructs a theory of fundamental social justice using the capabilities approach. On top of that, women employed in the informal economy are the poorest working-class members and have the least influence on the government to implement certain policies that recognize their informal work as a form of employment. Recognizing informal women's work as a legitimate form of employment, consistent with the argument advanced in the first section of this paper, elucidates why women working in the informal economy face constrained institutional access to their capabilities as a political goal. Such evaluation provides both empirical grounding for sustained public investment and normative justification in legal protection, occupational safety, and labor regulation, while guiding the formulation of coherent and evidence-based policy responses.

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<sup>68</sup> See ILO (forthcoming), *Compendium of practice - Examples of relations developed by workers' and employers' organizations with the informal economy*, International Labour Organization, Geneva

<sup>69</sup> See Nussbaum, *Women and Development*, 53. Here, Nussbaum detest paternalism, to the extent that we do because we value every person's liberty when it comes to critical matters. It is entirely consistent to oppose some paternalistic ideologies while equally endorsing those that serve as the foundation for these core principles.

<sup>70</sup> Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 1.

<sup>71</sup> Muriel Gilardone et al., “The Weight of Institutions on Women's Capabilities the Weight of Institutions on Women's Capabilities How Far Can Microfinance Help?,” (2009), <<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00421839/document>>.

Having examined the empirical conditions of informal women workers and assessed what they are substantively *able to do and to be*, the discussion now shifts to the theorization of the accounts of occupational justice. In the next section, I will engage the capability frameworks of Nussbaum and Sen to conceptually ground the analysis and to develop a more relentless account of the capabilities of women within the context of informal labor.

### Understanding Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach and Amartya Sen's Capabilities

The goal of this section is to draw connection between Nussbaum and Amartya Sen's capabilities approach. With their complementing argument, I aim to show the need and importance of theorizing women's capabilities and development as a proper philosophical base in viewing occupational and gender justice in the informal economy. I will summarize Amartya Sen's development economics research and further detail the capabilities approach as a theory of development. As Nussbaum accurately notes, when formulating economic policies, we need a "counter-theory" for those that prioritize material well-being or, in the grand scheme of things, economic growth.<sup>72</sup> Towards this discussion, I will proceed to analyze the horizon of occupational justice and to articulate mediating principles necessary for translating its philosophical foundations into concrete institutional and policy frameworks.

The capabilities approach is predicated on the idea that opportunities and human freedom are essential to social development, as advocated by Sen, Nussbaum, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Generally, the capabilities approach forwarded by these scholars provides a social development framework that can consider the conditions of women. Women comprise the majority of those living in poverty, and that they are particularly vulnerable to violence and other forms of inequality that compound their vulnerabilities in working in the informal economy.

#### *Theorizing Capabilities Approach and Social Justice to Women's Development*

The value of informal women workers' labor, within the capabilities framework, lies not in labor participation itself but in the extent to which it expands their (real) opportunities to live with truly human dignity. Sen posited that how individuals live their lives, and the services and institutions to which they have access, are linked to their annual earnings, which are often neglected by many approaches. He argued that poor and low-income individuals are vulnerable and perform poorly not only because they do not have enough income or wages, but also because they lack certain freedoms or capabilities.<sup>73</sup> This position is linked to the conditions of most domestic and home-based workers. Sen's position has linkages to the experiences of domestic, care, and home-based workers, whose impediments stem not only from low income or wages but from institutional exclusions and limited accessibility to social and legal protection.

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<sup>72</sup> On other hand, an increasing number of economists and statistical offices are interested in evaluating the capabilities approach to understand and identify its practical effects, thus, to measure capabilities or reasonable proxies.

<sup>73</sup> Amartya Sen, "Development as Freedom" (Oxford University Press, 1999), <<http://www.c3l.uni-oldenburg.de/cde/OMDE625/Sen/Sen-intro.pdf>>.

Another point to consider, Sen has prioritized “what is of intrinsic value in life, rather than on the goods that provide instrumental value or utility.”<sup>74</sup> Sen demonstrated that welfare may increase with more freedom and choice, in contrast to a utilitarian measure of human welfare, which would suggest that individuals are worse off if their standard of living is lower. Low income and poverty are now understood to be the denial of fundamental liberties.<sup>75</sup> As a matter of fact, income is a means to an end rather than an end in and of itself. From the perspective of informal women workers, low wages in domestic work are not just a form of economic disadvantage but an indicator of a limited ability to transform into secure living conditions. The political goal, therefore, is not merely to raise incomes or wages, but to restructure the institutional conditions, enhancing informal labor and protecting women workers from exploitation.

As discussed in the second section, in the part of reinforcing and weakening capabilities of women, Sen advocated basic capabilities such as “the ability to be well nourished, to avoid escapable morbidity or mortality, to read and write and communicate, to take part in the life of the community, to appear in public without shame.”<sup>76</sup> This emphasizes the need of reinforcing women’s capabilities, since even basic thresholds of well-being remained unattained for many. At such a point, Sen argued that basic capabilities function both instrumentally and constitutively.<sup>77</sup> By this, I regard that they are instrumentally valuable in enabling substantive freedoms and opportunities, and constitutively valuable in the means to live well. Sen utilized the concept of capability primarily to define the range within which comparisons of life quality or, as he sometimes refers to it, “the standard of living” are most useful.<sup>78</sup> Here, we ask questions about people’s capability, not their level of satisfaction or the amount of resources they can possess, which is the same as Nussbaum’s idea. Additionally, Sen also argued that the best place to express concerns about social equality and inequality is in the realm of capabilities. Nussbaum explained how capabilities, along with the notion of a threshold level of capabilities, can serve as a foundation for fundamental constitutional principles that citizens have a right to demand from their governments.<sup>79</sup>

Gender inequality, according to Nussbaum’s capability approach, can be defined as a collection of dysfunctions in a social space in which women are disadvantaged in a variety of ways, including resources, education, health, control over their bodies, lives, and employment.<sup>80</sup> Meanwhile, for Sen, respecting people’s freedom to do the things they value, choose what they want to do, and make decisions based on their options is what it means to be free.<sup>81</sup> This line of reasoning emphasizes not only women’s material conditions but also the horizon of choices available to informal women workers. In contexts where patriarchal hegemonies remain ingrained in legal systems and economic arrangements, women are frequently positioned as secondary citizens.

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<sup>74</sup> This is quoted in Steven Pressman and Gale Summerfield, “The Economic Contributions of Amartya Sen,” *Review of Political Economy* 12:1 (January 2000): 97, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/095382500106830>>.

<sup>75</sup> Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 125.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>77</sup> See Thomas Wells, “Sen’s Capability Approach,” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1999, <<https://iep.utm.edu/sen-cap/>>.

<sup>78</sup> Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 127.

<sup>79</sup> Nussbaum, *Women and Development*, 92.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>81</sup> Sen, “Equality of What?” in *McMurrin S Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, Volume 1, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

All things considered, I argue that this is an issue of occupational justice in the realm of social and gender justice. These justices discern occupational recognition for all informal women workers in society, regardless of class, age, gender, or other institutional differences. This study is an attempt to build a theoretical bridge to the practice of occupational justice. It is grounded in the idea that human beings have a right to engage in dignified work. In understanding women in the informal economy, it serves as a lens to address the compounded structural injustice that impedes them from achieving legal protections and security at work.

With my aim to understand women in the informal economy, I assert that occupational justice is comprehended as both a matter of social justice and gender justice. First, it is a matter of social justice because accessibility to secure, meaningful, and protected work is structured by broader economic systems and institutional arrangements that shape informal women workers' opportunities. Reviewing the idea of dignity and inviolability, Nussbaum's capabilities approach is a foundation for social justice in drafting and framing policy and law, which promotes gender justice. It offers a struggle-focused framework for understanding the marginalized conditions of women in the informal economy. As such, Nussbaum's list of capabilities is a step in achieving a gender just society through constitutional guarantees. Whatever its level of opulence, an institution that does not guarantee those capabilities to all its citizens is not committed to being a just society. Second, it is a matter of gender justice because these occupational injustices are not neutral; they are affected by patriarchal norms, unpaid care responsibilities, occupational segregation, and the devaluation of women's labor. A capability-based theory of gender justice, as developed by scholars such as Ingrid Robeyns, shifts the focus of justice from resources or outcomes to individuals' real opportunities to achieve valuable ways of being and doing.<sup>82</sup> The Capabilities Approach, as articulated by Nussbaum, furnishes a normative framework for evaluating whether individuals have real opportunities to flourish. Even though the approach does not function as a complete distributive formula for social welfare, it institutes a threshold of central capabilities that any gender-just society must secure. Governments should guarantee this threshold, and failure to meet it signals structural social injustice.

Considering the practical implications of this study, mediating normative principles and ethical criteria are significant to guide the translation of capabilities into concrete policy interventions for informal women workers, assuring that the Capabilities Approach is operationalized in institutionally coherent and justice-oriented frameworks. I suggest that informal women workers should be treated as rights-bearing agents entitled to the institutional conditions necessary for a fully human life, not just passive welfare beneficiaries. This required guaranteeing thresholds of core capabilities, wherein policy aims not only at economic growth but also at ensuring substantive capabilities for women informal workers. Government policies must go beyond adopting gender-responsive measures, such as providing flexible social protection schemes, and including legal recognition of informal labor. This adds another layer of arguments linking capabilities to political principles, which can be embodied in constitutional guarantees. In addition, policy design must be context-sensitive while upholding universal standards of dignity. While the

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<sup>82</sup> Ingrid Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice: The Capability Approach ReExamined*, 1st ed. (Open Book Publishers, 2017), <<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1zkjxgc>>.

scope of capabilities is universal, their realization should respond to local economic realities and cultural contexts.

Based on these, the approach advocates for a structural transformation rather than mere compensatory welfare, accompanied by clear mechanisms. Legal recognition, inclusive labor reforms, and enforceable protections ensure that capabilities function as normative benchmarks of justice rather than symbolic commitments. A principle of recognition and status equality, grounded in Nancy Fraser's theory of participatory parity in *Scales of Justice*, holds that justice requires not just redistribution of resources but also the dismantling of institutionalized cultural patterns that deny certain groups equal social standing.<sup>83</sup> Applied to informal women workers, these principles emphasize how domestic work, care work, home-based production, and other forms of informal labor are often misrecognized as supplementary or marginal, strengthening structural subordination.

Whether the policy itself can offer a discursive framework to explain gender and employment in the informal economy is up for debate. I plead that an effort should be made to develop a discursive framework that is comprehensive and adequate to address issues regarding context, the significance, and nature of employment in general, course selection, success, and inaccessibility to safety nets that further impede women's development and capability. Indeed, since these are important and need sufficient attention, they should also cover complex realities about how women in the informal economy are positioned in society.

### *Capabilities Approach in Praxis*

For women working in the informal economy, access to employment and job development are essential tactics for fostering social, political, and economic opportunities for women. In the Philippines, there have been existing laws and policies to support women in this sector. Article II, Section 9 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution mandates the State to facilitate social justice, reduce poverty, and improve the quality of life for all. This commitment is supported by Republic Act No. 8425, which acknowledges the informal economy as a basic sector and offers for its participation in governance and reform planning. Republic Act No. 9710 ensures respect for their human rights and calls for the realization of decent work under conditions of dignity, equity, and security, as women in the informal economy are particularly marginalized as a group. Access to social protection is additionally mandated by Republic Act No. 10606 and Republic Act No. 11223, which equip universal health insurance coverage, as well as by the Social Security Act of 2018, which guarantees protection against income loss due to sickness, disability, old age, maternity, and other contingencies.<sup>84</sup>

I argue, however, these enactments remain deficient because they do not fully translate formal rights into substantive freedoms when regarded through the lens of Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach. Implementation gaps, contribution-based systems, and bureaucratic barriers preclude

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<sup>83</sup> Nancy Fraser, *Scales of Justice Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

<sup>84</sup> Philippine Commission on Women, ed., "Enacting a Magna Carta of Workers in the Informal Economy," 2019, <https://pcw.gov.ph/assets/files/2019/10/PCW-WPLA-PB-10-Magna-Carta-of-Workers-in-the-Informal-Economy.pdf?x34628>.

many informal women workers from effectively accessing decent work protections, despite the legal framework acknowledging women's marginalization and guaranteeing protection on paper. Structural gender inequalities, such as unpaid care burdens and occupational segregation, persist in constraining their real opportunities to achieve central capabilities. Thus, despite progressive legislation, a considerable gap persists between formal legal recognition and the tangible expansion of women's capabilities in the informal economy.

Against this backdrop, I can suggest that women's protection entails differentiated yet binding obligations structured according to institutional power because capabilities set threshold conditions of justice. The State bears primary responsibility to institutionalize capability thresholds, while market actors can systematize production in manners consistent with human dignity, beyond mere contractual compliance. Moreover, civil society can mediate and democratize these processes by promoting marginalized voices, scrutinizing institutional failures, and repurposing formal rights into entitlements.<sup>85</sup> This is echoing Iris Marion Young's social connection model of structural responsibility, which unveils responsibility among all actors who participate in and benefit from the structural processes that produce unjust consequences, rather than condemning it into single perpetrator.<sup>86</sup> In that regard, the capabilities of women working in the informal economy will be improved by the provisions of support services, specifically for those who face structural and intersectional forms of inequality.

With that in mind, to truly help women in the informal economy, resources such as care, legal advocacy, and capabilities should be institutionalized. Guaranteeing safety nets for informal workers is a critical part of social and economic development strategies. Thus, policy advocacy can be utilized to advance the right to protective security measures like a welfare safety net. However, I want to stress that my accounts might not offer a concrete solution, but it briefly provides recommendations for upholding the capabilities of women informal workers, thus transcending them from the informal to the realization of decent work.

## Conclusion

In this study, I aimed to understand the condition of women in the informal economy using the Capabilities Approach of Martha Nussbaum. Women across many societies are underprivileged, not just by economic position but by gendered norms that treat them as adjuncts to the ends of others. These impediments are heightened in the informal economy, which, while serving as a critical source of income for millions of women and their families, frequently exposes them to exploitation, absence of social protection, and legal invisibility. Women in this economy are overrepresented in unpaid, low-wage, and precarious forms of work, rendering them structurally vulnerable. I argued that women in the informal economy are bearers of equal human dignity and central capabilities. Their failure to reach threshold levels of these capabilities is not a matter of individual deficits but a problem of social justice. Drawing on Nussbaum's list of central human

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<sup>85</sup> See Wim Van Opstal, Nancy Bocken, and Jan Brusselaers, "The Roles of Civil Society Associations in Organising the Informal Circular Economy," in *Sustainable Development* (August 20, 2025), <<https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.70168>>.

<sup>86</sup> Iris Marion Young, "Responsibility and Global Justice: A Social Connection Model," in *philpapers.org* (2006), <<https://philpapers.org/rec/YOURAG>>.

capabilities, I examined whether these basic entitlements are reinforced or weakened under conditions of informal labor. My study implicitly demonstrated that many of these capabilities are systematically constrained by structural inequalities. Crucially, capabilities are political goals rather than comprehensive moral ideals. Therefore, women's capabilities in the informal economy are institutional obligations. Social justice demands that states secure threshold levels of capability, rather than conforming women to a particular model of flourishing.

I stressed in this study that this political conception of dignity maintains universality while remaining sensitive to context. Intersectional factors such as class, ethnicity, age, and migration status shape distinct pathways of capability deprivation. Intersectional differences do not dissolve the shared normative claim that all women are entitled to these entitlements. Dignity in this framework is embodied, wherein the violations of women's dignity surface through lived realities such as unsafe working conditions, exposure to harassment, lack of maternity benefits, and exclusion from legal recognition. Ultimately, by sitting Nussbaum's account alongside that of Amartya Sen, I highlighted both the evaluative and normative dimensions of the Capabilities Approach. While Sen stressed comparative assessment and public reasoning, Nussbaum furnished a more determinate threshold account that can ground constitutional principles. Nussbaum and Sen strengthen the argument that a capability-based framework offers a philosophically robust foundation for basic entitlements for women working in the informal economy.

Finally, I offered an argument that respect for women informal workers' dignity in the informal economy urges the establishment and enforcement of constitutional and institutional guarantees that secure central capabilities as a pressing foundation of social, economic, and occupational justice. The informal workplaces should not be a space where human dignity is suspended; instead, it is in such structurally vulnerable contexts that the political goals of justice become most critical and most palpable.

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## Fanon and Rancière on Racialized Guilt and the Distribution of the Sensible: An Affective-Aesthetic Regime of Exclusion

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**Abstract:** This paper theorizes the unexplored intersection between Frantz Fanon's account of racialized guilt and Jacques Rancière's theory of the distribution of the sensible, situating their convergence within what I term the affective-aesthetic regime of exclusion. While Ciccariello-Maher has argued that Fanon's decolonized dialectic spans both *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, and Macleod, drawing on Al-Saji, has illuminated the affective weight of the colonial past and the dangers of specularization, scholarship has yet to synthesize these insights with Rancière's embodied politics of dissensus. Building on Demandante's emphasis that "a subject is an embodied subject, a physical subject made of flesh, bones and blood" and Quintana's recognition of corporeality in *Proletarian Nights*, this paper demonstrates how affective paralysis and perceptual erasure collaborate to sustain racial domination. By naming this dual mechanism as a regime, I advance a novel analytic framework that explains why domination persists even under conditions of formal equality: it operates not only through institutions but through psychic burdens and perceptual partitions that render resistance irrational and exclusion natural. Finally, the paper shows how practices of rupture—whether through Fanon's cleansing violence, Rancière's dissensus, or their shared pedagogical interventions—can dismantle this regime. Beyond clarifying the conceptual stakes of Fanon and Rancière's dialogue, the framework provides a tool for analyzing contemporary struggles, from Black Lives Matter to postcolonial movements in the Philippines, where guilt and invisibility continue to structure exclusion.

**Keywords:** *affective-aesthetic regime of exclusion, distribution of the sensible, Fanon, Rancière, racial distribution of guilt,*

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### Introduction

What does it mean to be made guilty for one's own dehumanization? What does it mean to be excluded from the very domain where that guilt could be named, heard, or contested? I will begin this paper with the contention that modern forms of racial domination operate not only through law and violence but through affect and perception. Frantz Fanon's theory of the racial distribution of guilt and Jacques Rancière's concept of the distribution of the sensible, though developed in vastly different traditions, converge in their critique of these subtler, yet no less coercive, mechanisms of exclusion.

Frantz Fanon, writing in the context struggle for decolonization, exposes how colonial systems impose guilt upon the colonized as a means of psychic control. Through what he describes as a process of affective alienation, the colonized internalize their own inferiority and bear the moral burden of their subjugation. Fanon highlights how guilt structures the racial drama, leaving the black man unable to repress its effects. Building on this, I argue that such manufactured guilt disables subjectivity, renders resistance irrational, and permits the colonizer to appear morally clean.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, Jacques Rancière analyzes how political subjectivity is determined by perceptual regimes. His theory of the “distribution of the sensible” describes how certain bodies, voices, and gestures are rendered visible or invisible, audible or silent, according to pre-existing aesthetic and political orders.<sup>2</sup> In this schema, those excluded from the “sensible world” are not merely ignored: they are uncounted, illegible, denied the status of political agents.<sup>3</sup>

This paper advances a framework I call the affective-aesthetic regime of exclusion. By bringing Fanon’s account of racialized guilt into dialogue with Rancière’s distribution of the sensible, I argue that domination operates simultaneously through affective paralysis and perceptual erasure. Naming this convergence provides not only conceptual clarity but also a tool for analyzing contemporary struggles where guilt and invisibility continue to structure exclusion. This framework not only clarifies the conceptual stakes of Fanon and Rancière’s dialogue but also provides a tool for analyzing contemporary struggles, from Black Lives Matter to postcolonial media in the Philippines, where guilt and invisibility continue to structure exclusion. The argument unfolds in five stages. I begin with Fanon’s account of the racial distribution of guilt, then turn to Rancière’s theory of the distribution of the sensible. I next develop their convergence as the affective-aesthetic regime of exclusion, before examining practices of resistance—violence, dissensus, and pedagogy—as ruptures that reconfigure both affect and aesthetics. Finally, I ground this synthesis in two case studies, Black Lives Matter and postcolonial struggles in the Philippines, to demonstrate how the framework illuminates contemporary forms of exclusion and their contestation.

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<sup>1</sup> In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon writes, “Since the racial drama is played out in the open, the black man has no time to “make it unconscious.” The white man, on the other hand, succeeds in doing so to a certain extent, because a new element appears: guilt. The Negro’s inferiority or superiority complex, or his feeling of equality, is conscious. These feelings forever chill him. They make his drama. In him, there is none of the affective amnesia characteristic of the typical neurotic.” Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 116.

<sup>2</sup> The distribution of the sensible produces a system of self-evident facts of perception based on the set horizons and modalities of what is visible and audible, as well as what can be said, thought, made, or done. Strictly speaking, ‘distribution’ therefore refers both to forms of inclusion and to forms of exclusion. The ‘sensible,’ of course, does not refer to what shows good sense or judgement but to what is *aisthêton* or capable of being apprehended by the senses. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. by Gabriel Rockhill (New York: Continuum, 2004), 85.

<sup>3</sup> In *Disagreement*, Rancière refers to those excluded from society as “those who have no part.” He writes, “Whoever has no part—the poor of ancient times, the third estate, the modern proletariat—cannot in fact have any part other than all or nothing.” Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. by Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 9.

## Racial Distribution of Guilt

Fanon's critique of colonialism is both psychological and structural. From his earliest writings, he insists that colonization does not merely rob the subject of land, labor, or law: it seizes their interiority. "In the colonial situation, the social dichotomy reaches an incomparable intensity."<sup>4</sup> He thus declared that "decolonization is quite simply the replacing of certain 'species' of men by another 'species of men,'"<sup>5</sup> since colonization alters the emotional and cognitive conditions through which a person comes to see himself and others. Moreover, "this Manicheism goes to its logical conclusion and dehumanizes the native, or to speak plainly, it turns him into an animal."<sup>6</sup> Nowhere is this more sharply expressed than in his formulation of racial guilt. The racial distribution of guilt is essentially manufactured by the "superior," colonizing race. "Unable to stand up to all the demands, the white man sloughs off his responsibilities. I have a name for this procedure: the racial distribution of guilt."<sup>7</sup>

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon recounts the moment when a white child exclaims, "Look, a Negro!" and in doing so, calls the Black subject into a position of non-being. "I was an object among other objects,"<sup>8</sup> Fanon writes. "Locked in this suffocating reification, I appealed to the other so that his liberating gaze might lift me out of my objecthood."<sup>9</sup> But the gaze does not liberate—it imprisons. In the presence of the white, the Black subject "begin[s] to stutter" for he is considered as "a brute beast...hav[ing] no life in the world."<sup>10</sup> The Black subject is constituted through a series of images, fantasies, and myths produced by colonial "discourse." He is not guilty of a crime, but of a racialized existence that is always already marked as failure. Fanon writes,

[The Black man] lives in a society that makes his inferiority complex possible, in a society that derives its stability from the perpetuation of this complex, in a society that proclaims the superiority of one race; [he, then, must be] put in a position to choose action with respect to the real source of the conflict – that is, toward the social structures.<sup>11</sup>

This guilt is not personal, but structural. It is the guilt one bears for being what the world has defined as lack: lack of whiteness, culture, intelligence, or even humanity. Fanon calls this "an epidermal racial schema," a script that is imposed on the skin and operates like a second soul. The colonized thinks that he must apologize for his speech, his body, his gestures. Even when he masters the colonizer's language, when he speaks French "properly," he is not rewarded with equality, but with further alienation. "To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax," Fanon further writes, "to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization."<sup>12</sup> This "weight of civilization" becomes a psychic burden. Here, guilt is affective ideology. It is a feeling that sustains a lie. It is the moment

<sup>4</sup> Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. by Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 71.

<sup>5</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 35.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>7</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 77.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

when “language fails” and becomes a site of violence. The colonized subject finds himself in a world where translation is impossible.<sup>13</sup> This is not because his thoughts are incoherent, but because the symbolic order does not recognize him as a speaker. Speech, like vision, is racialized.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon moves from clinical description to revolutionary prescription. He declares that the colonized subject must reject this imposed guilt, even though violence is necessary. Violence, for Fanon, is not merely a strategic act but a redemptive one since it reclaims dignity, agency, and existential presence. “At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force,”<sup>14</sup> Fanon writes. “It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect.”<sup>15</sup> Liberation, in this sense, is not just material but also ontological.

Fanon’s analysis reveals how the colonized subject is made to feel culpable for the very system that subjugates him. Hence, he writes, “the problem of colonialism includes not only the interrelations of objective historical conditions but also human attitude toward these conditions.”<sup>16</sup> Guilt is not the aftermath of a moral failure; it is a strategy of domination. It disables resistance by internalizing the terms of exclusion. Moreover, as Michael Allan notes, “the problem of appearance returns us to another type of looking...: the possibility of being watched in language.”<sup>17</sup> The colonized experiences a denial of embodied experience that cannot be spoken in the grammar of the colonizer. Thus, Fanon’s racial distribution of guilt must be understood as both a psychological condition and a political structure. It is a way of organizing affect to sustain colonial power.

## Distribution of the Sensible

While Fanon’s account of guilt emphasizes the internalization of colonial violence, Jacques Rancière shifts the focus toward the external structures that determine who can be seen, heard, and recognized within a political order. In *Disagreement*, he argues that politics does not arise from consensus or institutional stability but from disruptive moments when those rendered invisible insist on their equality.<sup>18</sup> As he puts it, “Politics exists when the natural order of domination is interrupted by the institution of a part of those who have no part.”<sup>19</sup> This interruption is not merely symbolic; it marks the emergence of a political subject who contests exclusion by demanding recognition.<sup>20</sup> Politics, therefore, is not a settled domain of governance but an activity of disruption,<sup>21</sup> an intervention that unsettles the given distribution of roles and voices. Rancière names this process

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<sup>13</sup> For the full discussion of “translatability,” and role of language in Fanon’s philosophy, see Lucie K. Mercier, “The Translatability of Experience: On Fanon’s Language Puzzle,” in *Critical Times*, 6:1 (2023), 15-38, <10.1215/26410478-10235923>.

<sup>14</sup> Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 94.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>16</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 62.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Allan, “Fanon and the flesh of language: Towards a material linguistics of colonial subjection,” in *A Graduate Journal of French and Francophone Studies*, 3 (2004): 4.

<sup>18</sup> Rancière, *Disagreement*, 30.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>20</sup> Darlene O. Demadante, “The Political Subject and Its Experiences: An Alternative Reading of Rancière on Political Subjectivity,” (PhD diss., Macquarie University, 2019), 2.

<sup>21</sup> Samuel Chambers, *The Lessons of Rancière*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 38.

“political subjectivization,” a polemical act in which subjects constitute themselves through dissensual practices that verify the axiom of equality.<sup>22</sup> In this light, politics is always an interruption of order, a refusal of silence, and a reconfiguration of what counts as intelligible. This external, structural emphasis complements Fanon’s analysis of internalized colonial violence by showing that emancipation requires both the dismantling of psychic subjugation and the public assertion of equality in the space of collective reason.

Central to this account is Rancière’s notion of the “distribution of the sensible,” his distinctive way of framing the aesthetics of politics and the politics of aesthetics.<sup>23</sup> In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, he defines the “distribution of the sensible” as he writes:

The system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it. A distribution of the sensible therefore establishes at one and the same time something common that is shared and exclusive parts.<sup>24</sup>

From this framework, Rancière theorizes how political subjects emerge and realize their place in the socio-political realm.<sup>25</sup> The phrase “those who have no part”<sup>26</sup> is crucial here. It names the way societies allocate visibility and audibility: who counts as a speaking being, whose words are heard as speech rather than noise, whose suffering is legible, and whose presence matters. For Rancière, the *dèmos* is not a fixed social class or group but the dynamic, fluctuating “part that has no part.” By its very appearance and assertion of fundamental equality, this disruptive force exposes the arbitrariness and exclusions inherent in any given police order, thereby making politics proper possible.

Importantly, the “sensible” in Rancière’s usage is not confined to narrow sensory perception but refers to the entire field of intelligibility. To be excluded from this field is to be politically nonexistent. This distribution is therefore aesthetic as well as political. As Rancière writes in *The Politics of Aesthetics*, “Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time.”<sup>27</sup> Domination, then, is not only enforced through coercion or law but also through the organization of experience that dictates what can appear and what must remain hidden.

Within this context, the poor, the racialized, and the colonized are not simply disenfranchised; they are misperceived, misheard, and misrepresented. Their exclusion is pre-political, occurring at the level of sense itself. Rancière has been criticized for his relative indifference to colonial and racial contexts, as his theory of equality often abstracts from historical specificity.<sup>28</sup> This

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<sup>22</sup> Jessie Joshua Z. Lino, “The Politics of Intellectual Emancipation: An Introduction to Rancière’s Radical Egalitarianism, Aesthetic dispositif, and Dissensus Democracy (Second of Two Parts),” in *Suri*, 12:2 (2024): 175, <[https://suri.pap73.site/files/lino\\_suri\\_october2024.pdf](https://suri.pap73.site/files/lino_suri_october2024.pdf)>.

<sup>23</sup> Darlene O. Demadante, “Aesthetics, Politics, and the Embodied Political Subject,” in *Kritike*, 14:1 (2020): 142, <[https://www.kritike.org/journal/issue\\_26/demandante\\_june2020.pdf](https://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_26/demandante_june2020.pdf)>.

<sup>24</sup> Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 12.

<sup>25</sup> Jessie Joshua Z. Lino, “The Politics of Intellectual Emancipation: An Introduction to Rancière’s Radical Egalitarianism, Aesthetic dispositif, and Dissensus Democracy (First of Two Parts),” in *Suri*, 12:1 (2024): 59, <[https://suri.pap73.site/files/lino\\_suri\\_april2024.pdf](https://suri.pap73.site/files/lino_suri_april2024.pdf)>.

<sup>26</sup> Rancière, *Disagreement*, 9.

<sup>27</sup> Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 13.

<sup>28</sup> Holloway Sparks argued that while Rancière’s notion of democratic dissensus is useful, his work remains marked by a relative indifference to race, gender, sexuality, and colonial histories. She cautions that the celebration of

paper does not deny that limitation. Rather, it argues that when read alongside Fanon's contextualized account of racial guilt, Rancière's framework can be re-situated as a grammar of perceptual exclusion. Fanon supplies the historical and affective depth that Rancière lacks, while Rancière provides the aesthetic-political vocabulary that Fanon anticipates but does not systematize.

Having established Rancière's theoretical grounding in the distribution of the sensible, we can now turn to Fanon's psychoanalytic method. Whereas Rancière maps the external structures of visibility and audibility, Fanon probes the internal psychic life of the colonized subject. Reading them together reveals not only a methodological divergence but also a productive complementarity: domination is sustained both by perceptual regimes that erase subjects from the political field and by affective structures that fracture subjectivity from within.

*Psychoanalysis and Aesthetics: A Methodological Divergence*

Fanon's analysis of colonial domination is grounded in psychoanalysis. His clinical training and practice led him to emphasize the psychic structures through which racism is internalized: guilt, shame, and inferiority. For Fanon, colonialism does not simply impose external constraints; it penetrates the subject's interiority, producing a fractured self that experiences its own identity as a burden. The colonizer arrives to impose his values through racial, economic, and spiritual violence.<sup>29</sup> The colonized subject, then, is compelled to see themselves through the eyes of the colonizer, a process that generates what Fanon calls the "racial epidermal schema." In this sense, Fanon's method is diagnostic: it uncovers the affective and unconscious mechanisms by which domination is reproduced within the psyche.

Rancière, by contrast, explicitly avoids psychoanalytic categories. His concern is not with the unconscious or the interior life of subjects but with the aesthetic-political regimes that determine who can be seen, heard, and recognized as a political actor. For Rancière, exclusion is not primarily a matter of psychic repression but of perceptual distribution: "the phenomenon of recognizability is determined by the institutional order that fixes the distribution of the sensible."<sup>30</sup> Rancière's method is not diagnostic but cartographic: it maps the distribution of the sensible, thereby "placing the problem of recognizability and visibility at the center of his concerns, equating recognizability with visibilization within the sensible and political fields."<sup>31</sup>

Fanon's psychoanalytic method and Rancière's aesthetic-political framework may appear, at first glance, to be incommensurable. Fanon works from the inside out: he begins with the psychic life of the colonized, showing how domination is internalized as guilt, shame, and inferiority. His

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Rancière as a "fresh" theorist risks sidelining feminist, queer, critical race, and postcolonial traditions that have long theorized dissent and disruption. In her view, his abstract account of equality and "democratic quarreling" obscures the lived realities of marginalized groups, reproducing epistemic hierarchies by failing to engage with the scholarship and struggles of those most affected by oppression. For the full discussion, see Holloway Sparks, "Quarreling with Rancière: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Democratic Disruption," in *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 49:4 (2016): 432, <10.5325/phlrrhet.49.4.0420>.

<sup>29</sup> George J. Sefa Dei, "Chapter One: Rereading Fanon for His Pedagogy and Implications for Schooling and Education," in *Counterpoints*, 368 (2010): 5, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/42980664>>.

<sup>30</sup> Danielle Petherbridge, "Recognition, Perception, and the Distribution of the Sensible: Rancière, Honneth, and Butler," in *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*, 27:2 (2019), 64, <10.5195/jffp.2019.894>.

<sup>31</sup> Petherbridge, "Recognition, Perception, and the Distribution of the Sensible," 66-67.

concern is with the affective structures that fracture subjectivity and disable agency. Rancière, by contrast, works from the outside in: he maps the distributions of the sensible that determine who can be seen, heard, and recognized as a political subject. His concern is with the perceptual and institutional arrangements that police identities and regulate belonging.

This divergence is not a weakness but a productive complementarity. Fanon reveals how domination is interiorized—how the colonized come to carry the burden of their own exclusion in the form of guilt. Rancière reveals how domination is exteriorized—how the state and its institutions continually redraw the boundaries of visibility and audibility. Taken together, they show that racial domination is not reducible to either psychic repression or structural policing, but is sustained by the interplay of both.

The significance of this complementarity is twofold. First, it prevents a reductionist reading: Fanon alone might risk psychologizing domination, while Rancière alone might risk abstracting it into structures of perception. When read together, they illuminate how domination operates simultaneously at the level of affect and aesthetics, of interiority and exteriority. Second, this dual perspective provides the conceptual ground for theorizing what I call the affective-aesthetic regime of exclusion, that is, a regime that paralyzes subjectivity through guilt while erasing it from the perceptual field of politics. Far from being an obstacle, the methodological gap between Fanon and Rancière is precisely what enables this synthesis, since it allows us to grasp the full spectrum of racial domination as both psychic and structural, both intimate and institutional. The methodological complementarity between Fanon and Rancière becomes even more pronounced when we consider Rancière's later reflections on racism as a state logic. Having seen how Fanon diagnoses the psychic burden of guilt and how Rancière maps the distribution of the sensible, we can now examine how Rancière extends his framework to theorize racism as a rationalized practice of exclusion.

In his reflections in *The New Racism: A Passion from Above*,<sup>32</sup> Rancière insists that racism today is not primarily a working-class passion but a state logic, a “cold racism” produced by the rationality of institutions. Far from being the irrational residue of the masses, racism is an intellectual construction, legitimated by appeals to universality, equality, and secularism. This insight allows us to bring Rancière closer to Fanon, who likewise understood racism not as a spontaneous prejudice but as a structural and affective regime imposed from above.

### *Rancière's Argument: Cold Racism*

In *The New Racism: A Passion from Above*, Rancière challenges the widespread assumption that racism is primarily a “working-class passion,” an irrational residue of backward or fearful populations.<sup>33</sup> Against this view, he insists that contemporary racism is first and foremost a state logic: a rationalized, institutional practice that produces categories of exclusion under the guise of universality. Far from being a concession to popular prejudice, racism is engineered “from above” through laws, administrative measures, and discursive strategies that continually redraw the boundaries of belonging. Rancière names this process as cold racism: not the heated passion of the

<sup>32</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Uncertain Times*, trans. by Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2024), 3.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

street, but an intellectual and bureaucratic construction that legitimizes itself in the language of equality, secularism, and republican universality.<sup>34</sup>

This “cold racism” operates by creating what Rancière calls floating identities—categories of people who are simultaneously included and excluded, visible and invisible.<sup>35</sup> The Roma, for instance, are European citizens yet treated as if they were not “really” European; similarly, the category of “French of foreign origin” produces a class of citizens who are never fully French. Such measures reveal the paradox of the state’s universalist discourse: on the one hand, all citizens are equal before the law; on the other, distinctions are continually introduced that mark some as suspect, deficient, or precarious. The effect is to maintain a permanent border within citizenship itself, a shifting line that can demote insiders into outsiders at any moment. Racism, in this account, is not a deviation from the rationality of the state but one of its central techniques of governance.

By reframing racism as a police logic—a system that fixes identities, manages visibility, and produces insecurity—Rancière exposes how the state legitimizes exclusion while presenting itself as the guardian of universality. The figure of the “undesirable” is not discovered but manufactured, continually reconstituted through legislation and public discourse. In this sense, racism is not the irrational passion of the masses but the calculated passion of the intelligentsia and the state apparatus itself. This insight complicates the critique that Rancière is indifferent to colonial or racial contexts: while he does not engage them in the same register as Fanon, his analysis of “cold racism” provides a powerful account of how exclusion is rationalized and institutionalized in modern democracies.

Placed alongside Fanon, the convergence becomes clear. If Fanon shows how colonial power implants guilt and shame in the colonized subject, Rancière shows how the state reinforces that inferiority by refusing to acknowledge the colonized as political actors. Guilt disables self-perception; the sensible disables public perception. The colonized is both ashamed and unseen. Together, these insights reveal how domination operates simultaneously at the level of affect and perception, interiority and exteriority.

This convergence also gestures toward the question of pedagogy. For if, as Rancière suggests, equality must be presupposed rather than taught, and if, as Fanon insists, liberation requires the colonized to reject imposed guilt, then the terrain of education and formation becomes central to resistance. I will return to this in the discussion of rupture, where pedagogy will appear alongside violence and dissensus as a practice that reconfigures both affect and aesthetics.

## The Affective-Aesthetic Regime of Exclusion

### *Positioning the Affective-Aesthetic Regime*

Scholars have long noted resonances between Fanon and Rancière, but the precise nature of their convergence remains contested.<sup>36</sup> George Ciccariello-Maher, for instance, cautions against separating Fanon’s dialectical overtures along historical lines, arguing instead that “his decolonized

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>36</sup> See for example, Matthias Pauwels, “Portrait of the Artist as Colonised Subject Fanon, Rancière and the Struggle Toward Decolonisation on the Aesthetic Front,” in *Theoria*, 65:2 (2018): 72-97, <10.3167/th.2018.6515504>.

dialectic is not only present in *The Wretched of the Earth*, but also in *Black Skin, White Masks*.<sup>37</sup> This insight underscores the continuity of Fanon's project, but leaves open the question of how his affective analyses might intersect with Rancière's aesthetic politics.

Recent work has begun to address this gap. Elyse Macleod's study, *Frantz Fanon's Decolonized Dialectics: The Primacy of the Affective Weight of the Past*, emphasizes that Fanon's phenomenology of racialization resists being turned into spectacle. Drawing on Alia Al-Saji, she warns against "the risk of specularization."<sup>38</sup> For Al-Saji, the colonial past exerts an "affective weight" that is "felt more than reflectively known."<sup>39</sup> This affective sedimentation clarifies how racialized guilt operates as a colonial weapon that paralyzes subjectivity from within.

Parallel to this, scholarship on Rancière has highlighted the embodied dimension of dissensus. Demadante's thesis insists that "a subject is an embodied subject, a physical subject made of flesh, bones and blood, who engages in politics by mobilizing bodily experiences and affects."<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Laura Quintana identifies in Rancière's *Proletarian Nights* "the role of corporeality in his [Rancière's] notion of emancipation."<sup>41</sup> These readings reinforce that exclusion in Rancière is not merely symbolic but deeply tied to the lived, bodily dimension of politics.

Taken together, these interventions provide the scaffolding for my argument. While Macleod and Al-Saji illuminate the affective paralysis of racialized subjects, Demadante and Quintana underscore the perceptual erasure that forecloses recognition. My paper advances this conversation by naming their convergence as an affective-aesthetic regime of exclusion. This framework demonstrates how domination sustains itself across registers of feeling and perception: guilt makes the colonized doubt their legitimacy, while perceptual foreclosure ensures their words fail to register as political speech. Together, these readings illuminate how racialized subjects are burdened by affective paralysis and perceptual erasure.

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<sup>37</sup> Ciccariello-Maher challenges readings that divide Fanon's work into an "early" psychological phase and a "late" political space. While Ciccariello-Maher's formulation of Fanon's decolonized dialectic has been widely influential, it has also attracted critical responses. Elyse MacLeod, in her article "Frantz Fanon's Decolonized Dialectics: The Primacy of the Affective Weight of the Past," offers a significant critique, arguing that Ciccariello-Maher's focus on rupture and presentness risks obscuring the affective and ethical dimensions of Fanon's work. Drawing on the critical phenomenology of Alia Al-Saji, Christina Sharpe's notion of "the wake," and Jan Slaby's work on affect, MacLeod contends that Fanon's experience of racialization is deeply affective and temporally complex. The past, as structured by colonialism and slavery, is not a static backdrop but an active force that shapes the present and future possibilities for racialized subjects. MacLeod argues that Fanon's final prayer in *Black Skin, White Masks*, "*O my body, always make me a man who questions!*" should be read as a call for an embodied ethics of questioning, a "disclosive posture" that remains open to the affective weight of the past and its implications for the present. For the full discussion, see Ciccariello-Maher, quoted in Elyse Macleod, "Frantz Fanon's Decolonized Dialectics: The Primacy of the Affective Weight of the Past," in *Ergo*, 8:42 (2021): 504, <<https://doi.org/10.3998/ergo.2243>>.

<sup>38</sup> Alia Al-Saji, quoted in Elyse Macleod, "Frantz Fanon's Decolonized Dialectics," 506.

<sup>39</sup> Alia Al-Saji, "SPEP Co-Director's Address: Hesitation as Philosophical Method—Travel Bans, Colonial Durations, and the Affective Weight of the Past," in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 32:33 (2018): 338, <<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/704667>>.

<sup>40</sup> Demadante, "The Political Subject and Its Experiences," 10.

<sup>41</sup> Laura Quintana, quoted in Demadante, *ibid.*, 6.

*The Affective-Aesthetic Regime of Exclusion*

Bringing Fanon's account of racialized guilt into dialogue with Rancière's theory of the distribution of the sensible reveals a deeper convergence. For Fanon, guilt is not a private emotion but a colonial weapon: it is imposed to render the colonized politically submissive and ontologically unstable. As Alia Al-Saji explains, "the colonial past has uneven affective weight—disregarded, indifferent, or 'ankylosed; from white, Eurocentric or U.S.-centric perspectives, yet intensively structuring the everyday for the occupied, racialized, and 'formerly colonized.'"<sup>42</sup> This affective sedimentation clarifies why Fanon insists that guilt paralyzes subjectivity from within.

For Rancière, exclusion is not simply legal disenfranchisement but a perceptual foreclosure: the sensible order denies certain subjects visibility, speech, and participation in the shared world. Demadante emphasizes that for Rancière, subjects have bodies that feel and suffer, minds that dream and express themselves in material forms of discourse.<sup>43</sup> These feelings, in fact, can be the beginning of politics.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, Laura Quintana identifies Rancière's insistence on corporeality as central to emancipation, noting that the role of corporeality in his notion of emancipation is indispensable to understanding dissensus.<sup>45</sup> Taken together, these insights illuminate a dual structure of domination in which the racialized subject is made to feel undeserving from within and unrecognizable from without. One disfigures affect; the other disfigures perception.

This dual mechanism is what I call the affective-aesthetic regime of exclusion. It does not operate solely by denying rights or enforcing laws. Rather, it manipulates how people feel about themselves and how others see, or fail to see, them. It constructs a world in which the colonized subject feels too ashamed to speak and, even if they do, is heard as noise rather than logos. Fanon's analysis of shame and guilt shows how subjectivity is paralyzed from within; Rancière's framework shows how perception is programmed from without. Together, these mechanisms collaborate to foreclose political agency.

The regime is powerful precisely because it is self-reinforcing. Guilt makes the colonized doubt the legitimacy of their own suffering, while perceptual erasure ensures that even when they speak, their words fail to register as political speech. Macleod warns that racialized experience risks being turned into spectacle, a danger Al-Saji calls "specularization," or "the tendency to take phenomenology to be equivalent to making experience visible."<sup>46</sup> This specularization "converts the experiences of racialized subjects—suffering, enjoyment, reaction, redress, and resistance, even 'the

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<sup>42</sup> Al-Saji writes, "the weight of the past at work (pre-reflectively) behind the back of consciousness – felt more than reflectively known – a past that submerges, bogs us down, or buoys us up. Al-Saji, "SPEP Co-Director's Address," 338.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>45</sup> Quintana writes, "To think of emancipation from the perspective of corporeality, or more precisely, as we shall see, to think of it as the torsion of a body, makes it possible to challenge a) voluntarist readings that interpret intellectual emancipation as the liberation of a subjective will, and offers some elements to begin to problematize (b) dichotomous readings of emancipation that interpret it as a completely excessive moment, entirely outside of police logic and (c) approaches that consider emancipation to be insubstantial [pp.2-3]." For the full discussion of the role of corporeality in emancipation, see Laura Quintana, "Jacques Rancière and the Emancipation of Bodies," in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* (June 2018): 1-27, <10.1177/0191453718780529>.

<sup>46</sup> Alia Al-Saji, quoted in Elyse Macleod, "Frantz Fanon's Decolonized Dialectics," 506.

feeling of nonexistence’—into phenomena available to a racializing and surveilling gaze.”<sup>47</sup> In this sense, the affective-aesthetic regime is not merely an addition of Fanon and Rancière’s insights, but a synthesis that reveals how domination sustains itself across registers of feeling and perception.

Concrete examples from Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* illustrate this dynamic. The Black subject who speaks impeccable French is still treated as inferior, his words unrecognized as legitimate speech. This is not a communicative failure but a political foreclosure: the regime of the sensible cannot accommodate his voice, not because it is unintelligible, but because it is unauthorized. Rancière captures this paradox in his description of “extreme disagreement,” when one party cannot even recognize the other’s utterances as language. Here, Fanon’s “epidermal racial schema” and Rancière’s “distribution of the sensible” converge: visibility is not presence, and audibility is not agency.

The significance of this framework is twofold. First, it explains why racial domination persists even under conditions of formal equality because domination is sustained not only by institutions, but also by affective burdens and perceptual partitions. Second, it clarifies why resistance must target both registers at once. To dismantle the regime requires more than recognition or representation; it requires a reconfiguration of the sensible itself, a new way of organizing perception, emotion, and agency. This is why both Fanon and Rancière emphasize rupture, interruption, and disidentification as the conditions of political emergence.

Finally, this synthesis contests liberal theories of recognition and inclusion. If the problem is not simply that marginalized groups are unheard, but that their speech is not recognized as speech, then more visibility or representation will not suffice. What is needed is a transformation of the very conditions of intelligibility. The affective-aesthetic regime thus names the terrain on which struggles for liberation must be fought: not only against laws and institutions, but against the psychic burdens and perceptual orders that make domination appear natural and resistance appear irrational.

### Resistance as Rupture: Violence, Dissensus, and Pedagogy

If the affective-aesthetic regime of exclusion sustains domination by paralyzing subjects through guilt and erasing them through perceptual policing, then resistance must operate on both registers. It must dismantle the psychic burden of shame while simultaneously reconfiguring the sensible order that renders some voices as noise. Both Fanon and Rancière insist that emancipation does not emerge from gradual inclusion or recognition but from rupture—a break that interrupts the logic of domination.

#### *Fanon: Violence as Cleansing*

For Fanon, the psychic burden of guilt cannot be reasoned away or reformed through appeals to recognition. The colonized subject, trapped in a world that defines them as inferior, cannot simply be taught their worth within the terms of the colonial order.<sup>48</sup> Fanon’s cure of the

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 506.

<sup>48</sup> This is in reference to separate quotes from Fanon. The exact quotes state, (1) “Since the other hesitated to recognize me, there remained only one solution: to make myself known.” See Fanon, *Black Skin*, 87. (2) “The goal of his behavior will be The Other (in the guise of the white man), for The Other alone can give him worth. That is on the

colonized is the cultivation of a decolonial attitude, which is profoundly epistemological as well as ethical, political, and aesthetic.<sup>49</sup> Fanon then insists that liberation requires a radical break, a violent rupture that shatters the internalized structures of shame and the external structures of domination. The transformation of society, together with the superstructure resting on it, will result mainly from the violent confrontation between the oppressor (the colonizer) and the oppressed (the colonized).<sup>50</sup> “Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder. But it cannot come as a result of magical practices, nor of a natural shock, nor of a friendly understanding.”<sup>51</sup>

Violence, in this sense, is not reducible to instrumental force; it is a transformative act that reconstitutes the colonized subject’s relation to themselves, their body, and the world. In *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon writes

The breaking down of colonial structures are the result of one of two causes: either a violent struggle of the people in their own right, or of action on the part of surrounding colonized peoples which acts as a break on the colonial regime in question.<sup>52</sup>

In the terms of the affective-aesthetic regime, violence functions as a refusal of imposed guilt. Violence can also be a form of resistance and a response to the perpetuation of the inferiority complex syndrome.<sup>53</sup> It is a cleansing force not because it purifies in a moral sense, but because it disrupts the affective economy that has rendered the colonized ashamed of their own existence. Fanon writes, “At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect.”<sup>54</sup> This is not a celebration of brutality—to be understood in terms of the Algerian war of independence and not, like in Kedouri’s view, as a lyrical celebration of violence as such<sup>55</sup>—but a recognition that under conditions of total dehumanization, the assertion of one’s being may take the form of physical confrontation. Violence becomes the language through which the colonized reclaims their right to appear, to speak, and to feel without shame.

Moreover, Fanon’s emphasis on violence can be read as a form of embodied dissensus. In a world where the colonized are rendered invisible and inaudible, the act of violent resistance forces a perceptual reordering. It demands recognition not through appeal but through interruption. The colonized body, once marked as docile or criminal, becomes a site of political emergence. In this way, Fanon’s violence is not only affective but aesthetic: it reconfigures the sensible by making

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ethical level: self-esteem.” *Ibid.*, 119. (3) “Now the inferior thinks that he has acquired worth...and the superior is determined to conserve the old hierarchy. “You haven’t changed a bit ...still as stupid as ever.” *Ibid.*, 164. (4) “He who is reluctant to recognize me opposes me.” *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>49</sup> Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Frantz Fanon and the decolonial turn in psychology: from modern/ colonial methods to the decolonial attitude,” in *South African journal of Psychology*, 47:4 (2017): 439, <10.1177/0081246317737918>.

<sup>50</sup> L. Adele Jinadu, “Some Aspects of the Political Philosophy of Frantz Fanon,” in *African Studies Review*, 16:2 (1973): 260, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/523409>>.

<sup>51</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 36.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>53</sup> Sefa Dei, “Rereading Fanon,” 6.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>55</sup> Jinadu, “Some Aspects,” 260.

visible what the colonial order has rendered invisible. It is a rupture that exposes the lie of colonial innocence and asserts the presence of those who have been excluded from the field of political intelligibility.

*Rancière: Dissensus as Redistribution*

While Fanon emphasizes the affective and ontological force of violence, Rancière locates political rupture in the practice of dissensus: the moment when those who have “no part” in the political order assert their equality by disrupting the distribution of the sensible.<sup>56</sup> Dissensus is not a demand for inclusion within the existing framework; it is a reconfiguration of what counts as speech, who counts as a subject, and what counts as a political act. It is the appearance of a subject where none was supposed to be, the transformation of noise into speech, and the reoccupation of space that had been reserved for others.

In the context of the affective-aesthetic regime, dissensus functions as a perceptual rupture. It interrupts the aesthetic order that renders certain bodies invisible or unintelligible. When the excluded speak, not in the language of the dominant, but in their own idiom, they force a crisis in the sensible. Their speech is not merely content; it is form. It alters the coordinates of what can be seen and heard, and in doing so, it exposes the exclusions that structure the political field.

Dissensus also carries an affective charge. It is not a cold assertion of rights but a passionate refusal of misrecognition. The act of speaking out, of occupying space, of refusing to be silent, is itself a form of affective resistance. It cleanses not through violence but through visibility and the insistence that one’s presence is not a disruption of order, but the beginning of politics. In this way, dissensus complements Fanon’s violence: both are ruptures, but where Fanon’s violence purges the internalized shame of the colonized, Rancière’s dissensus reorders the external field of perception that sustains exclusion.

Together, these practices reveal that rupture is not a singular event but a multidimensional process. It must address both the affective and aesthetic dimensions of domination. Dissensus, like violence, is a way of making the world otherwise—of asserting that those who have been rendered guilty and invisible are, in fact, equal and present.

*Pedagogy: Presupposing Equality*

If violence and dissensus represent dramatic ruptures in the affective-aesthetic regime, pedagogy offers a quieter but no less radical form of interruption. For Rancière, education is not the transmission of knowledge from the enlightened to the ignorant, but the presupposition that every subject already possesses the capacity for thought and speech. Explanation presumes inequality. It assumes that the learner is incapable of understanding without the superior insight of the teacher. As Rancière writes, “I explain to him that if I did not explain he would not understand... I explain to him, in short, that he is less intelligent than I am.”<sup>57</sup> Thus, every act of explanation reinforces a

<sup>56</sup> Rancière, *Disagreement*, 9.

<sup>57</sup> Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, trans. by Liz Heron. (London: Verso, 2021), 83.

hierarchy of minds. The principle of explication is the principle of enforced stultification. “There is stultification whenever one intelligence is subordinated to another.”<sup>58</sup> D.J.v.R. Postma, in his analysis of Rancière’s *emancipatory* pedagogy and Freire’s *liberating* pedagogy, emphasized that decolonial pedagogy must therefore begin not by teaching equality, but by presupposing it: “‘ignorant’ educators have a very important role to play in emancipatory education.”<sup>59</sup> To avoid stultification, “the whole project of educating the oppressed soul is to help learners not necessarily to ‘receive’ an education but to reclaim education that is about their past, history, sense of self-worth, and pride.”<sup>60</sup> This inversion directly contests the colonial logic that casts the oppressed as deficient, in need of correction or salvation. Instead, pedagogy becomes a dissensual practice: it interrupts the hierarchy of intelligence and reorders the sensible by treating every subject as already capable.

This emphasis resonates with Fanon’s insistence that liberation requires the colonized to reject imposed guilt and assert themselves as agents of history. Pedagogy, in this sense, is not merely instructional but affective: it dismantles the psychic burden of shame by affirming the colonized as thinkers and speakers in their own right. It is also aesthetic: it reconfigures who can appear as a political subject, shifting voices from the register of “noise” into that of speech. In this way, pedagogy complements violence and dissensus by working at the level of everyday formation, cultivating new modes of perception and relation.

Sergio Calderón Harker underscores this point by describing politics as “a community of interruptions.”<sup>61</sup> Pedagogy is one such interruption: it unsettles the distribution of the sensible by refusing the roles assigned by the police order—teacher and student, knower and ignorant, colonizer and colonized. Rancière’s radically egalitarian thoughts render the ability to emancipate minds towards real political activity and diminish political passivity that diminishes critical consciousness and social awareness.<sup>62</sup> “Equality was not an end to attain, but a point of departure, a supposition to maintain in every circumstance,”<sup>63</sup> from which politics emerges. In this sense, pedagogy is not a supplement to rupture but a form of rupture itself.

Yet the difficulty of this task should not be underestimated. As Saidiya Hartman reminds us, the suffering of the racialized is often “unsceneable,”<sup>64</sup> unable to appear within the available frames of intelligibility. Pedagogy must therefore grapple with the limits of representation: how to affirm equality when the dominant order refuses to recognize certain subjects as capable of speech at all. Here, pedagogy becomes a practice of re-sensing that cultivates new ways of seeing and hearing that can register what the existing order renders invisible or inaudible. It is precisely in the tension between the unsceneable and the presupposition of equality that pedagogy finds its radical force.

<sup>58</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. by Kristine Ross Brown (California: Stanford University Press, 1991), 13.

<sup>59</sup> D.J.v.R. Postma, “Decolonial Pedagogical Practices: Engaging with Rancière and Freire,” in *South African Journal of Higher Education* 33:5 (2019): 9, <10.20853/33-5-3583>.

<sup>60</sup> Sefa Dei, “Rereading Fanon,” 24.

<sup>61</sup> Sergio Calderón Harker, “A Community of Interruptions: Thinking Postcolonial Rancière,” (Master’s thesis, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, 2019), 2.

<sup>62</sup> Lino, “The Politics of Intellectual Emancipation,” 59-60.

<sup>63</sup> Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 138.

<sup>64</sup> Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2022), 20.

Pedagogy, then, alongside violence and dissensus, names a mode of rupture that dismantles guilt and reconfigures the sensible.

Having established the affective-aesthetic regime of exclusion as the convergence of Fanon and Rancière, the task now is to see how this framework illuminates contemporary struggles. Theory, after all, gains its force not only in conceptual clarity but in its capacity to interpret lived realities. To test the portability of this framework, I turn to two case studies: the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States and postcolonial struggles in the Philippines. Both contexts reveal how guilt and invisibility continue to structure exclusion, and both demonstrate how practices of rupture—whether through affective refusal, dissensus in public space, or pedagogical affirmation—can reconfigure the sensible. By examining these cases side by side, we see how the affective-aesthetic regime operates across different histories of racial domination, and how its disruption opens possibilities for political emergence. If BLM dramatizes these ruptures in the United States, the Philippine context reveals how similar dynamics unfold under postcolonial conditions.

### Black Lives Matter and the Rupture of the Affective-Aesthetic Regime

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement<sup>65</sup> offers a powerful illustration of how the affective-aesthetic regime of exclusion operates in the present and how it can be disrupted through practices of rupture. The movement exposes how racial domination persists not only through legal and economic structures but also through the psychic burden of guilt and the perceptual erasure of Black suffering. At the same time, it demonstrates how resistance can dismantle both registers by cleansing affect, redistributing the sensible, and cultivating new pedagogical practices.

One of the most resonant slogans of the movement, *“I can’t breathe,”* captures this dual struggle. On one level, it names the literal suffocation of Black bodies under state violence. On another, it rejects the affective burden that has long been imposed on Black communities which insinuates that they are responsible for their own deaths, poverty, or marginalization. As Ben Okri aptly writes:

“I can’t breathe” suddenly equates racism with the deprivation of air, which is what it always was. Previously we saw racism, if we saw it all, as a diminishment of a person’s humanity. But that was always too vague. “I can’t breathe” goes beyond saying that you are depriving me of freedom, of humanity, of respect. It says: “You are depriving me of the right to air itself.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Black Lives Matter is a phrase, and notably a hashtag, used to highlight racism, discrimination and inequality experienced by black people. Its use grew in the US after high-profile killings by police, but it has also been used in the UK and elsewhere. The slogan was widely used after the death of Trayvon Martin in Florida, in 2012. The unarmed black 17-year-old was shot by neighbourhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman. Support grew following other police killings, including Eric Garner, who died in a chokehold, and Michael Brown, who was killed by an officer who said he acted in self-defence. In the summer of 2020 George Floyd, an unarmed black man, was murdered by a police officer who knelt on his neck. See Adina Campbell, “What Is Black Lives Matter and What Are the Aims?,” June 12, 2021, <<https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-53337780>>.

<sup>66</sup> Ben Okri, “‘I Can’t Breathe’: Why George Floyd’s Words Reverberate Around the World,” *The Guardian*, June 8, 2020, <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jun/08/i-cant-breathe-george-floyds-words-reverberate-oppression>>.

In Fanonian terms, the chant is a refusal of imposed guilt. It transforms shame into solidarity, despair into collective affirmation. Here, affect is cleansed through collective expression, echoing Fanon's insistence that liberation requires the shattering of internalized inferiority.

BLM also enacts Rancièrian dissensus by occupying streets, painting murals, and amplifying voices through chants and digital platforms. What was previously background noise, i.e., Black suffering rendered invisible or illegible, becomes the center of public attention. These acts interrupt the police logic that classifies Black voices as irrational or criminal and insist instead that they are political speech. In this way, BLM redistributes the sensible by altering who can be seen, heard, and recognized as a political subject. The aesthetic dimension of protest, the choreography of marches, the visibility of murals, the rhythm of chants, becomes inseparable from its political force.

Finally, BLM functions pedagogically by presupposing equality. Its decentralized structure, reliance on grassroots organizing, and emphasis on lived experience affirm that every participant already possesses the capacity to speak and act politically. This mirrors Rancière's notion of the "ignorant schoolmaster" and Fanon's call for revolutionary self-assertion. Through teach-ins, community workshops, and digital networks, BLM cultivates new forms of knowledge and solidarity that dismantle the colonial logic of deficiency. Pedagogy here is not instruction from above but the collective reordering of perception and affect.

Taken together, these practices show how BLM ruptures the affective-aesthetic regime. It cleanses the colonized of imposed guilt, disrupts the perceptual order that renders them invisible, and cultivates new forms of recognition and solidarity. The movement demonstrates that resistance is not accommodation but interruption, not inclusion but reconfiguration. In this sense, BLM exemplifies how Fanon's violence, Rancière's dissensus, and their shared pedagogy converge in contemporary struggles for racial justice.

## Postcolonial Struggles in the Philippines

The Philippine context provides a vivid and unsettling example of how the affective-aesthetic regime of exclusion continues to operate in postcolonial societies. The proliferation of extrajudicial killings in the previous government's campaign against illegal drugs is not merely a domestic policy issue confined to questions of law enforcement or public safety; rather, it is a manifestation of the unfinished postcolonial struggle that continues to haunt the nation. Colonial legacies of domination persist in the way state violence disciplines the poor, reproducing hierarchies of guilt, shame, and invisibility that were historically imposed by colonial powers. What appears on the surface as a modern policy initiative is in fact deeply entangled with centuries of colonial governance, where violence was normalized as a means of maintaining order and where the lives of the marginalized were consistently treated as expendable. In this sense, the drug war is not an isolated phenomenon but a continuation of the colonial project, rearticulated in contemporary terms and directed at populations already marked by historical vulnerability.

Extrajudicial killings<sup>67</sup> function as a contemporary iteration of colonial control: they mark certain populations—the urban poor, the marginalized, the socially precarious—as disposable that echoes the colonial logic that treated native lives as expendable for the maintenance of order and the preservation of elite interests. The state’s rhetoric frames these killings as necessary sacrifices for national discipline, but beneath this justification lies a familiar colonial script that divides society into those deemed worthy of protection and those condemned to elimination. Families of victims are often made to feel complicit in the violence, framed as negligent, irresponsible, or morally deficient, as though their poverty or social condition were themselves crimes. This affective burden of guilt mirrors Fanon’s account of psychic domination: the colonized subject is made to bear responsibility for their own dehumanization, internalizing the violence as a reflection of personal failure. The result is paralysis, a discouragement of resistance, and the transformation of grief into a form of shame. By making mourning appear as weakness or failure, the state ensures that grief does not become a site of collective political mobilization but remains privatized, silenced, and depoliticized.

At the same time, victims of extrajudicial killings are rendered invisible in official discourse, their presence acknowledged only in the most reductive and dehumanizing ways. They appear in statistics, in blurred images on television, or in anonymized police reports, but rarely as political subjects with voices, names, and histories. This reflects Rancière’s notion of the distribution of the sensible: their suffering is not recognized as speech but as background noise in the maintenance of order. The poor are hyper-visible as bodies—as corpses, as mugshots, as “suspects”—but politically inaudible as agents capable of speech, thought, or resistance. This paradox of visibility without recognition illustrates how the sensible order forecloses political subjectivity and ensures that the marginalized remain present only as objects of governance rather than participants in the political community. In this way, the drug war perpetuates a continuation of colonial erasure in the postcolonial present, where the poor are simultaneously overexposed and silenced, seen but not heard, counted but not acknowledged.

Yet these exclusions have not gone uncontested. Grassroots memorials, independent journalism, and human rights documentation have enacted dissensus by naming victims, displaying their photographs, and staging vigils in public spaces. These practices reconfigure the sensible by

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<sup>67</sup> Extrajudicial killings, or extrajudicial executions, happen when someone in an official position deliberately kills a person without any legal process. Such arbitrary deprivations of life, which can also be carried out by militias, death squads or other non-State actors, often target political opponents, activists, or marginalized groups. See Our Name is Mud Ltd, “Extrajudicial Killings,” in *OMCT*, April 23, 2025, <<https://www.omct.org/en/what-we-do/extrajudicial-killings>>.

Rodrigo Duterte’s presidency (2016–2022) was marked by the controversial “war on drugs,” a campaign that resulted in tens of thousands of civilian deaths, disproportionately affecting poor, urban men. While authorities often claimed self-defense, human rights groups documented widespread evidence of extrajudicial killings, falsified reports, and planted weapons. International concern culminated in an ICC warrant for Duterte, citing crimes against humanity. Allegations surfaced that police were financially incentivized per killing, though Duterte denied authorizing such payments. Notably, he admitted to running a death squad as mayor and later declared full legal responsibility for the crackdown, despite persistent denials of extrajudicial orders. The campaign exemplifies the tension between state-led security measures and human rights accountability, raising enduring questions about impunity, justice, and the ethics of governance. Rebecca Ratcliffe, “Rodrigo Duterte’s ‘War on Drugs’ in the Philippines – Explained in 30 Seconds,” in *The Guardian*, March 11, 2025, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/nov/04/rodrigo-dutertes-war-on-drugs-in-the-philippines-explained-in-30-seconds-ntwnfb>>.

insisting that the dead and their families be seen and heard as part of the political community. Similarly, community organizations and church-based groups have engaged in pedagogical practices that presuppose equality. Rather than treating the poor as deficient, they affirm their capacity to narrate their own experiences and to organize collectively. Workshops, testimonies, and solidarity networks cultivate new forms of perception and relation and dismantle the affective burden of shame and reconfiguring who can appear as a political subject.

Taken together, these practices show how extrajudicial killings are not an aberration but a facet of the postcolonial struggle: they reproduce colonial hierarchies of guilt and invisibility, while resistance against them enacts rupture and reconfiguration. Guilt and invisibility continue to structure exclusion, but affective refusal, dissensual reappearance, and pedagogical affirmation open spaces for political emergence. As in Black Lives Matter, liberation here is not a matter of inclusion into the existing order but of rupture and of reconfiguring the sensible so that those once unseen and unheard can appear otherwise.

### **Toward a Philosophy of Affective and Aesthetic Liberation**

Having examined Fanon's racial distribution of guilt and Rancière's distribution of the sensible in their respective contexts and synthesis, I now ask: what kind of politics emerges from this conjoined critique? What does it mean to resist not only institutions but the feelings and images that sustain them?

First, we must reframe political exclusion not as a failure of participation, but as the result of a preemptive structuring of perception and emotion. The colonized subject is not merely denied access to institutions of power; they are denied recognition as a speaker and a feeler. Their suffering is illegible, their voice is filtered through racial assumptions, and their affect is misread as disorder. Fanon and Rancière together suggest that any emancipatory project must therefore begin by disrupting both perception and affect. This disruption cannot be purely rational. It must engage the entire sensorium, including the body, the image, and the rhythm of speech. In this sense, both thinkers affirm a kind of aesthetic politics, but one grounded in lived experience rather than abstraction. For Fanon, the colonized must reclaim their body from the gaze that has distorted it. For Rancière, the oppressed must appear in spaces and modes where their presence has been denied. This requires new forms of storytelling, protest, and pedagogy that will undo the existing aesthetic regime.

Consider, for instance, the use of murals, chants, and public grieving in contemporary movements. These are not ornamental additions to political claims, rather, they are the claims. They remake what counts as a public gesture, what grief looks like, and what defiance sounds like. They are dissensual in the strictest Rancièrian sense: they disturb the field of common sense. In pedagogical contexts, this also means rejecting the model of the explicator, the teacher who presumes the ignorance of the student. Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* argues that emancipation begins when we assume the equal intelligence of all.<sup>68</sup> Fanon, too, was a teacher, not just in his

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<sup>68</sup> Rancière's philosophy stands in sharp contrast to Habermas's consensus-driven model as it privileges dissensus, the disruption of established orders of speech and visibility, as the ground of intellectual equality. Drawing on Joseph Jacotot's 19th-century experiment, Rancière argues that "one can teach what one doesn't know," since

psychiatric work, but in his writings, which seek not to explain the world to the oppressed but to arm them with language to name their condition.

Yet the challenge remains: how do we dismantle a regime that has taught people not only what to see but how to feel? The answer, perhaps, lies in the shared emphasis both thinkers place on rupture. Guilt is not overcome by apology or reconciliation but rather broken by a refusal to accept the terms of shame. Invisibility is not remedied by better representation but rather contested by a redistribution of the sensible. This is the philosophical wager of this paper: that Fanon's insights into racialized affect and Rancière's theory of aesthetic exclusion are not only compatible but mutually necessary. One reveals the emotional interior of domination; the other maps its exterior architecture. Together, they could offer a powerful critique of how racial orders are built and sustained and how they might be dismantled.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that the convergence of Fanon's account of racialized guilt and Rancière's theory of the distribution of the sensible can be understood as an affective-aesthetic regime of exclusion. This regime paralyzes subjectivity from within through the imposition of guilt while simultaneously erasing that subject from the perceptual field of politics. By naming this dual structure, I have sought to show how domination sustains itself across registers of feeling and perception, and why resistance must target both at once.

The practices of rupture examined here—Fanon's cleansing violence, Rancière's dissensus, and their shared pedagogical interventions—demonstrate that emancipation does not emerge from gradual inclusion or recognition but from interruption. Violence cleanses the affective burden of guilt, dissensus redistributes the sensible by making the inaudible heard, and pedagogy presupposes equality where the colonial order insists on deficiency. Together, they reveal that liberation requires a transformation of the very conditions of intelligibility.

The case studies of Black Lives Matter and postcolonial struggles in the Philippines illustrate how this framework travels across contexts. In BLM, the refusal of imposed guilt, the occupation of public space, and grassroots education enact ruptures that reconfigure both affect and aesthetics. In the Philippines, the drug war's affective burden of shame and the invisibility of its victims reveal the persistence of the regime, while counter-media, memorials, and community pedagogy enact ruptures that affirm equality and reconfigure the sensible. Both cases show how guilt and invisibility continue to structure exclusion, and how their disruption opens possibilities for political emergence.

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explanation itself presumes inequality and enforces intellectual hierarchies. Jacotot's success in teaching French, piano, and chemistry without expertise illustrates Rancière's principle of the equality of intelligences: all people possess the capacity to think and learn, though at different manifestations and paces. The pedagogical shift lies not in proving equality but in acting upon it, thereby transforming education into emancipation. This radical claim repositions the marginalized not as passive recipients of knowledge but as autonomous thinkers capable of participating in the shared space of meaning. For a more thorough discussion, see Yves Citton, "The ignorant schoolmaster": knowledge and authority" in *Jacques Rancière: Key Concepts*, ed. by Jean-Philippe Deranty (New York: Routledge, 2014), 25-37.

By theorizing the affective-aesthetic regime of exclusion, this paper contests liberal theories of recognition and representation. The problem is not simply that marginalized groups are unheard, but that their speech is not recognized as speech. What is needed is not more visibility within the existing order but a reconfiguration of the sensible itself. Fanon and Rancière, when read together, remind us that politics begins when those who are ashamed and unseen appear otherwise by rupturing the order that renders them guilty and inaudible, and in doing so, make a new world perceptible.

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